

## THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO!

### MOVIE SYNOPSIS PART 3

lee

When last we left off, the Zero-X was piercing through the outer layers of Earth's atmosphere at Mach 3.2, and Scott and Virgil were calling home to ask permission to go with Penelope to the Swinging Star nightclub. As I said at the time, a likely story... Well, whatever the story, that's what they're telling their father, and that's what Alan overhears as he returns to the lounge from *Thunderbird Three's* silo. The news is more than enough to turn Alan's smile upside down, but he bravely attempts to salvage the situation by inviting Tin-Tin to the mainland for a bit of swinging on their own. Jeff nixes the idea immediately, though, the refusal sending Alan off to bed in a huff. And since it seems to be about 2.00pm in the afternoon, that's quite some huff!

At this point the movie enters what appears to be the drug-fuelled inner ramblings of one of those added rock stars from the 1960s. Mick Jagger, maybe, or Malcolm McLaren? Actually...nooooo... it's the sugar-and-light dreamscape of none other than Cliff Richard (Junior), and it goes something like this...

Alan, having gone to bed in a snit, now tosses and turns in his sleep, moaning fitfully as the disembodied voices of Scott and Jeff echo tauntingly inside his head. Harp music signals a transition from Alan's exterior condition (rumpled bedclothes and rumpled hair) to his internal condition (glitter-striped tuxedo and powder-blue top hat), where he waits in a fathomless black void for the arrival of Lady Penelope and Parker – who is resplendent in a pale pink chauffeur suit. Alan hops into the FAB1 in what can only be described as a state of awe at Lady Penelope's, well, awesomeness, and Parker ferries them to the Swinging Star nightclub. Not the same Swinging Star that Virgil and Scott are currently carousing in, but a much better, and sparklier, one. (We assume, therefore, that the other Swinging Star must be a dark and dingy affair, with vomit-stained floors and spittoons decorating every corner...)

Entering said Swinging-Sparkle-Star, Penelope and Alan are welcomed by the guitar ministrations of The Shadows (who are all wearing their own glitter suits) and are seated at the star table (it's actually the star table. With star carpet, and starry sparkly curtains behind it). As Alan fondles the champagne bottle, our friend Cliff Richard (Junior) makes his spangly appearance and begins grooving spastically across the glitter-strewn stage. Cliffie then reveals he has a rocket placed strategically inside his anatomy and takes off on a plume of smoke into the air.

*A shooting star will shoot you  
And Mars will go to war  
The Man in the Moon will jump on you  
If you don't love me no  
Moooooore....*



The song continues in this vein with Cliff alternately igniting said rocket in his you-know-what, sliding around on the moon and dancing atop a giant guitar. Despite the ludicrousness of the song and dance number, the entire sequence seems staged to highlight an unexpectedly flirty playfulness between Alan and Penelope, with Alan making repeated overtures and Penny lightly rebuffing him. The sequence ends with Alan being paged by Jeff and called back to International Rescue. Work must always come before pleasure, and Penny shows her understanding of that by immediately diving into the back of FAB1, which then floats tauntingly out of Alan's reach. Alan has a moment of panic that he won't be able to get back into the car ('Mind the gap, Alan...'), but attempts to do so and ends up crashing back to Earth. In reality though, he has fallen out of bed, with the crash loud enough for Jeff to hear him from the office and come to investigate.

The next day sees Scott and Virgil home from their shenanigans (let's not mention them again, eh?) and keeping up the playboy appearances by busying themselves poolside. Gordon and Tin-Tin romp noisily in the water, with Brains, Scott, Virgil and Jeff studiously ignoring them, not even glancing up when Tin-Tin swallows some water and coughs it up delicately.

Over the sound of the splashing, Jeff and Scott are trying to have a three-way conversation with Brains, who is showing off his smarts by playing chess with Virgil at the same time. Alan is huffily ignoring the lot of them, only lifting his head to grumble when Gordon lobs a beach ball at his face.

Jeff sits back amongst all this merriment to reflect that John is missing all the fun (because lobbing balls at Alan's head is, apparently, fun), and the family pauses briefly in memoriam. But the break lasts only long enough to engage the audience in a scene change to *Thunderbird Five*, and poor John, the only member of International Rescue who is actually doing any work.

So, while the family pauses, we too shall pause... until next time!

## NEW STORIES ON TIC!

WWW.TRACYISLANDCHRONICLES.COM

### CATHRL'S STORY: BAH HUMBUG

*When the radio buzzed, John jumped so hard that his chest hurt. Get a grip, he told himself. It's not even an alarm. He forced his shoulders down, and hit the response switch.*

### PENNYSPY'S STORY: JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS\*

*Scott gripped Virgil's arm like a drowning man, turning over. Without the writhing shapes, Virgil could finally see Scott's face. He said, "Open your eyes, you're OK. We'll get out of this storm and we..." Lightning flashed. Virgil gripped Scott tight, horrified at what it revealed.*

### \*WINNER OF THE 2012 TIWF HALLOWEEN CHALLENGE\*

*Have you read a work of Thunderbirds fanfiction that you think should be included on the Tracy Island Chronicles? Contact our selection panel via email and let us know!*



## TRACY ISLAND WRITERS FORUM



## STORY CHALLENGE 'UNCOVERED'

Authors are asked to uncover a Thunderbirds secret -- it can be anything you like...buried treasure...secrets...even skin! But whatever you uncover, it must be central to the story in some way. There are two stipulations that must be followed:

1. The protagonist(s) of the story must be one or more of the original series cast members. However, OCs are also welcome in addition.

2. The story must take place during the time International Rescue is operational.

If you need more information on the rules of the challenge, contact [ticmobilecontrol1@gmail.com](mailto:ticmobilecontrol1@gmail.com).

**Story deadline is SUNDAY, JANUARY 27, 2013 AT MIDNIGHT, PACIFIC US TIME**

## TRACY ISLAND CHRONICLES



Greetings from the snowy North Pole! Yes. The North Pole. Home of Santa and Rudolph and hundreds of cheery toy-loving elves... although I have to admit I haven't met an elf yet. Nor seen any trace of a reindeer. And I haven't even heard a single ho-ho-ho echoing high above the wind...

Did I mention the wind? It must be blowing at 70 news-knots out here.

In case anyone was wondering, a news-knot is a unit of measurement I've designed just for newsreaders. It's a difficult concept for non-newsreaders to comprehend, but, to put it simply, it measures the force of wind versus the drag coefficient of hair styling gel -- the stronger the gale (and the weaker the gel), the less chance a reporter has of winning a prime-time Emmy.

It would be safe to say then, dear readers, that given the force of the news-knots out here, and the size of the icicles hanging off the end of my nose, you won't see ol' Ned picking up any awards any time soon. But I may yet find Santa. That is, if the map I found in the pocket of Mr Bondson's parka is correct.

What was I doing with my hand in Bondson's parka? Why, looking for hair gel, of course!

From Ned and all the team at the NTBS Newsflash, Merry Christmas!

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# HAPPY HOLIDAYS

FROM THE STAFF OF THE TRACY ISLAND CHRONICLES, THE TRACY ISLAND WRITERS FORUM AND NED COOK'S NTBS NEWSFLASH!

What a year it's been! The Space Shuttle made its last flight, Gangnam Style went viral, Hurricane Sandy devastated New York, and the world ended. Or at least it was supposed to. Somebody didn't get the memo. :-)

And in the middle of all that, the Tracy Island Writers Forum quietly sailed past its ninth birthday. It's amazing to realize, in this world where hardly anything good seems to last, that in October of 2013, TIWF will celebrate an entire decade. And a few months earlier, its sister site, the Tracy Island Chronicles, will turn nine.

And all of this from one simple promise...that the boys in blue would always have a home, as long as we could make it so.

There have been changes this year, of course... TIC co-owner and TIWF List Mom GillyLee went on hiatus to recuperate from a heart attack (she's doing fine now), and TIWF founder and former List Mom Chris (LMC) returned to fill the gap. And there have also been things that stayed the same, for which I'm grateful... List Aunts *par excellence* Pen (quiller) and Marg (mcj) have worked constantly at my side to help run TIWF and our writing challenges, and there is no way we could produce *Ned Cook's NTBS Newsflash* without the awesome work of our layout editor, Lee. My thanks also go to the members of our TIC story selection committee, who must remain anonymous for obvious reasons.

The *Newsflash* continues to flourish, with features like our interview with *Thunderbirds* cross section artist Graham Bleathman, and our ongoing series of the *Thunderbirds* art of *Thunderbirds 2010* filmmaker Chris Thompson. Those two actually converged at one point, with our "Design a New Thunderbird Machine" contest, where the winner received not only a copy of the new *Haynes Thunderbirds Agents Technical Manual* signed and personalized by Graham, but also an artist's rendition of the winning vehicle design by Chris (see the July/August issue of *Ned Cook's NTBS Newsflash*).

And speaking of interviews, check this issue out. We think you'll agree that we're ending the year on a high note indeed!

On the personal front for this year, the little micropublishing company that Ramona Simmons (Molly Webb) and I launched in late 2011, Plotfish Press, won the 2012 Global Ebook Award for Contemporary Fantasy with its first book, *Takers*...which as most of you know was written by Chris Davis, TIWF's own LMC. We're off to a great start! We have since published *Takers II: Family*, and *Takers III: Bloodlines* is due out in the near future. There is much more to come in 2013, including a debut SF/Fantasy novel of my own. (We're also planning on extracting and bottling whatever it is that makes Chris so prolific, but don't tell her that yet! We just know we'll make a fortune with it!)

The only really sad note this year for us was when we heard that Gerry Anderson, who is in many ways the reason we're all here, had been diagnosed with Alzheimers. TIWF member Fran L wore an International Rescue hat and carried a sign with Gerry's name on it when she participated in her local Alzheimers Society Memory Walk in his honor in September (see her write-up of the day in the September/October 2012 issue of *Ned Cook's NTBS Newsflash*).

We wish you all the best, Gerry. Surely after all the miracles you've created for us, there's one in store for you, too. We sure hope so. Hearing good news about you would make it a very merry holiday season indeed.

And finally, thank you, to all of you out there – wherever in the world you're reading this – for being part of our family for another year. Let's make it many more together.

Happy Holidays!

Samantha Winchester  
(aka Jaimi Sovrell)



## EACH ISSUE JOHN ANSWERS QUERIES FROM HIS READERS

Dear John,

When my boys were young they loved playing in the snow. For half a day. Then they'd gripe about the cold, the wet, everything. The worst was when they had to shovel the sidewalk! So we moved to the South Pacific. Everything they could want...sun...sand...surf. And what do they want now? SNOW! What's a Dad to do?

Frustrated Father

Dear Frustrated,

My grandmother always says there are two things that boys never grow too old for: kisses from their grandma, and a good slap upside the head.

Go on. I dare you.

John

Dear John,  
Christmas is coming up, and while I usually look forward to and enjoy the festive season, this time I'm feeling a bit apprehensive.

Firstly, where we live, there's no snow. It hardly feels like Christmas when you're fishing sand out from between your toes.

Then, my father always insists the family get decked out in our tuxedos and trots us out for the guests to admire, after which my brothers and I are expected to carol like a bunch of choirboys -- even though we look and sound more like a collection of deranged penguins. And, to add to the indignity, I'm supposed to accompany this festive debacle on the piano and look like I'm loving it.

Don't these people understand I'm an artist?

Wasted (and not in a good way)

Dear Wasted,

Do you like kisses from your grandma? If so, then boy, have I got a surprise for you!

John

## DO YOU KNOW A THUNDERBIRDS CHARACTER WITH A PROBLEM?

Somebody who maybe isn't getting along well with their father, their girlfriend, or their local third-world dictator? If so, why not write a *Dear John* letter on their behalf? John will provide a personal response to problems in each issue of the **NTBS NEWSFLASH!**.

So what are you waiting for? Somebody has a problem that needs solving!

[ticmobilecontrol1@gmail.com](mailto:ticmobilecontrol1@gmail.com)

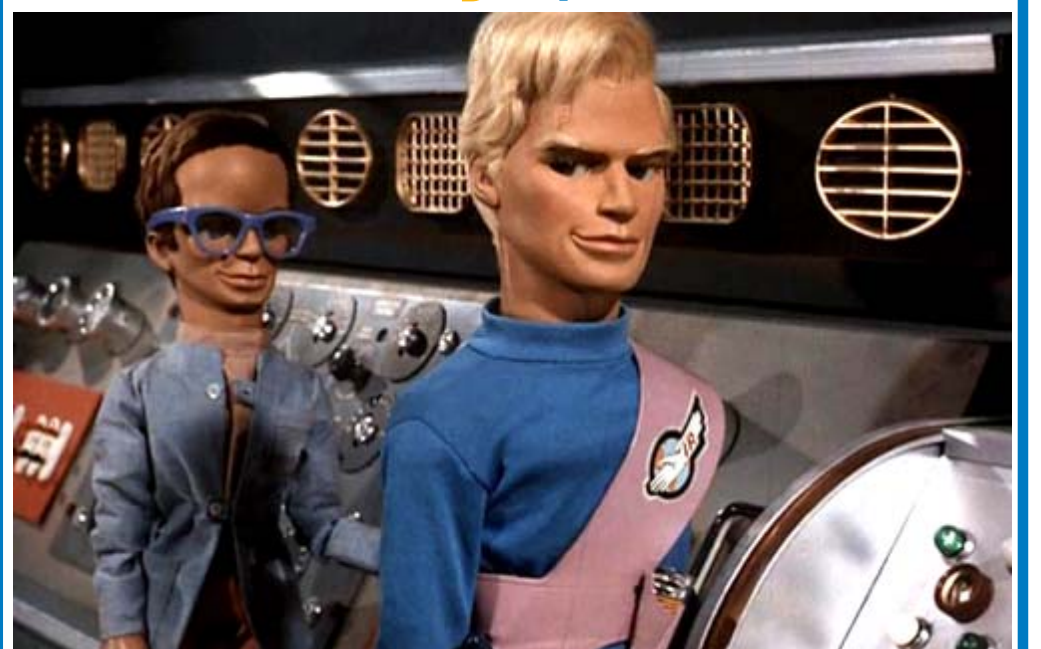
## LOLBIRDS

Think you know who's going to open their mouth next? Send your caption to **TIC Mobile Control** and the winning caption will appear in the next issue of the **NTBS NEWSFLASH!**

[ticmobilecontrol1@gmail.com](mailto:ticmobilecontrol1@gmail.com)



## last month's winning caption by Emma N



Despite his genius, Brains had never quite mastered the game of Hide and Seek.



# PENNYSPY'S THUNDERBIRDS EPISODE GUIDE

## 29: ALIAS MR HACKENBACKER

This episode was a bit of a struggle to get through and review, and later on we'll explore just why that was. At least it starts off promisingly, opening with a very dramatic moment at London airport. As the title card comes up, a police car arrives with its siren wailing and the ever-present London Tower controller, Commander Norman, announces that flight "T103" is landing "on final approach" and instructs all emergency vehicles to "take up crash positions." We're on "red alert" as a nervous-sounding pilot in Flight T103 tells "control" that they suspect a "hydraulic failure" and have performed a "crash drill." As the emergency vehicles pull into position, Commander Norman wishes them luck, and the pilot thinks they "may need it." The plane then lands – very, very badly. It's on fire in seconds, the whole plane goes up, and the emergency vehicles arrive just in time to put out a pile of smoking ashes. Which also explode AGAIN. There's no sound except sirens wailing as they fade to black.

As the camera pulls back, it becomes clear that this was a recording of a previous disaster, being watched by a small group of men in a meeting room. The group is led by a bluff uniformed man named Captain Saville, and seconded by London's Commander Norman. They have watched the footage to illustrate the main danger in "any crash landing" – the "tremendous fire hazard." There are reporters here, and they ask if something called the "Skythrust" has prepared an answer. Captain Saville confirms that the Skythrust is the safest aircraft flying today, which in the terms of this show simply means it hasn't crashed – yet. And is probably going to, given that buildup. Saville refuses to elaborate on why Skythrust is so safe, which seems very odd. He then suggests they all go up to meet "Mr Hackenbacker," who is due to arrive "any minute now."

A convertible with the top down enters London airport, driven by none other than Brains. Or perhaps it's his evil doppelganger? His thick blue spectacles have been filled in so they resemble sunglasses. He radios base, referring to himself as "Hiram K. Hackenbacker" – obviously the "Mr Hackenbacker" of the title. Jeff Tracy sounds a bit stilted as he responds to the name. Brains tells him he's entering London Airport, and Jeff wishes "Brai...Mr Hackenbacker" good luck. This exchange would seem to make it abundantly clear that "Hackenbacker" is an alias and not Brains' real name...which remains a mystery.

Cute music plays as Brains arrives at the airport and meets the journalists, who are all watching the reveal of *Skythrust*. Captain Saville congratulates Bra-Hack (as he shall now be known til it gets annoying). Saville gets the name totally wrong, in a running gag, and Brains corrects him and claims that he "can't take full credit" and that he only designed "some of its experimental features." Some of these features remain a total secret, purely for the purposes of the plot.

There's now a close up on *Skythrust*, and the pilot, Captain Ashton, tells "control" they're good to go. Saville gives him the go-ahead, although he defers to any "further instructions" that Mr "Hackenbrook" (sic) might have. Brains impatiently corrects him again, then says to go ahead, as he and Ashton have been over it "several times already." *Skythrust* begins its launch along the runway, and lifts off. Brains agrees that it "looks good" and the plane soon hits "Mach One" and levels out. Can't help but notice that it sounds exactly like *Thunderbird Two*!

The reporter from before still wants to know why *Skythrust* is so very special, which they "haven't heard about" but Commander Norman steps in to stoop that line of questioning. He adds that although the plane incorporates some "new features," that they "aren't in a position to divulge these at present." Why? The press man presses again, asking when *Skythrust* will come into service. The Commander says that it will be "very soon indeed," and then the press snap a photo of Bra-Hack in his glasses. After this, Bra-Hack tells them he'll head up to the control tower to get the latest updates from the pilot, Captain Ashton.

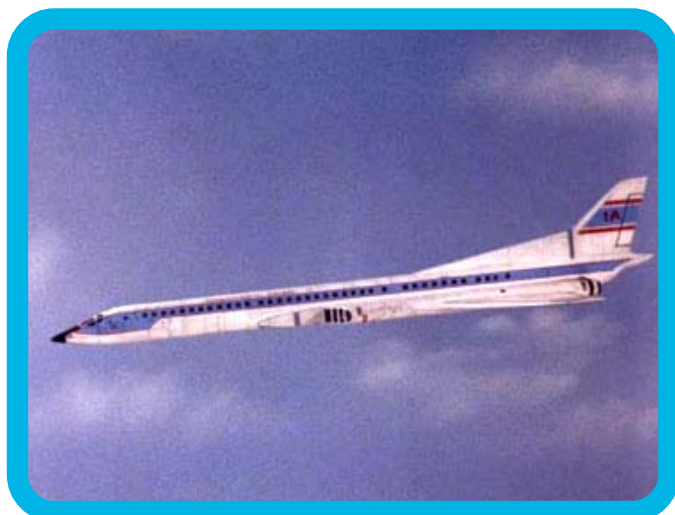
On Tracy Island, things are very relaxed, and in the lounge Scott is reading from the newspaper about *Skythrust* and the mysterious Mr Hackenbacker. Bra'Hack's photo is on the front page! They're touting IR's scientist as "*Skythrust's* secret weapon!" Scott recounts the rumours of the plane's capabilities, including that Brains has been tagged as a "well-known man of mystery," which is rather shagadelic, baby. Virgil wonders when the *Skythrust* will go into service, and Jeff rumbles that it "must be any day now," as Brains is staying on in Europe. It feels like a rift has formed, doesn't it? Who knew that Brains had all these other projects outside of International Rescue? Although it makes sense; the logical conclusion for Brains' involvement here is that prevention is better than having

to go off for a rescue later on. Anyway, Scott reads out that the *Skythrust's* first London-bound flight from Paris is due "very soon," which prompts Tin-Tin to lift up her magazine, too.

Apparently it's 'everyone reads together' morning in the Tracy household, as Tin-Tin (looking very pale for some reason) has been poring over *Chic* magazine and reveals that Lady Penelope is on the bloody cover! Did Jeff OK that? Are millions of thwarted bad guys yet again (see the 'Man from MI5') going to turn up on Penelope's doorstep with hilariously disguised bombs, now they know who she really is? As Jeff examines the cover he purrs, "Say, isn't that something?" and he says it with an expression that really suggests he's thinking 'Get me, I'm dating a supermodel!' Oh, man. Tin-Tin explains that there's a whole feature on Penelope in the magazine, and Gordon remarks that "everyone's in the news this week!" Are we only moments away from following the Tracy Island blog and reading John's Facebook updates? What happened to secrecy at any cost, guys? This all seems very weird.

Fashion is a very strange place to take the world of Thunderbirds, but it doesn't stop there. The point of Tin-Tin reading out the Penelope section seems to be to reveal that Penny will be appearing in a charity fashion show for a famous Paris designer called Francois Lemaire, who is also their favourite designer in the world ever. Tin-Tin has the nerve to chide Alan for not remembering who he is. Like *Skythrust's* designers, Francois is promising something "really sensational" at his show, but won't reveal what it is. Yet again, no press release?

In Paris, we might be about to find out. Now, brace yourselves, this part takes forever. Penelope is visiting Francois Lemaire's fashion house, claiming that as soon as she received his telegram she had Parker book her a flight straight over. Francois is a shamelessly camp fashion designer; either that or they're milking the accent for every camp syllable they can get. He is thrilled that Penelope will do this "great favour" for him, and model at the premiere of his show. (Just wondering when the magazine interview happened, if he's only just asked her...) Penelope replies that she would "adore" to model for him, and that she's always ready to help a good cause. It's never stated what the charity actually is, but the smart money's on 'Donkey Sanctuary.' Also let's take a minute to admire the beautiful set they're in, although who else would





rather see giant alligators tearing apart the Champs Elysee? Anyway, the fashion talk continues, with Penelope asking what his latest “wonderful creations” are. Francois promises her a “sensation” and he really builds it up, claiming that his rivals would give “their right teeth” to know his secret. He is about to spill all when Penelope abruptly stops him. She pulls out a gadget from her handbag, and tells him he’s being “bugged” and that ‘they’ can hear “every word” spoken. She tracks the device to a big bowl of flowers, and after it’s dealt with, Francois tries to tell her again. Once again she stops him, peering through a conveniently placed telescope to a roof opposite the studio window. She closes the shutters and tells the designer that he’s been under “constant surveillance” via a long distance television camera. So, they probably already know, don’t they? Consider that Penelope is only now figuring this out for him. Jeez.

All this espionage has upset Francois greatly, and although Penelope tells him to go ahead now, he’s so freaked that he opts to write the secret with a pen. He begins to write, “I HAVE DISCOVERED A NEW FORM...” but yet again, Penelope is very suspicious and takes the pen from him before he can jot any more. She unscrews it, revealing something mechanical inside. Fortunately, Francois hardly uses that pen, and she thinks that it may not be too late. She tells him to watch as she scribbles a little ‘Eff-U’ type message to those spying on Francois via the pen. She writes: “IT WILL TAKE BETTER MEN THAN YOU TO FIND OUT OUR SECRETS,” and that Morse Code-laced music plays over the scene. Apparently, this device is an “impressor pen,” which transmits whatever’s written with it. Francois is appalled, and she proves the truth of it, printing out the message she just wrote onto a device that she, er, *just so happens* to have in her handbag. Do those pens only have the one frequency, then? Let’s hope no one was spying on nuclear subs or something down the road. That could quickly get confusing.

Francois is finally ready to show Penelope his secret. Gleefully, like a magician pulling a handkerchief out of a sleeve, he plucks a full sized floaty dress from a container the size of a matchbox! He explains that the material is named Penelon after Lady P, and that it can be “made into any kind of costume desired,” whilst it also “never gets crushed” and can “squeeze up into the smallest space.” Penelope is simply thrilled that she could carry her “entire wardrobe” in her handbag. Perhaps they can use it for the Tracy boys’ uniforms? Let’s hope it isn’t too flammable. Furthermore, it’s like an iPod for clothes. It can be “made to look like any other material.” Francois then has his PA girls model more of the collection for him, demonstrating the material masquerading as a “leather ensemble” and several other types of outfits. Penelope thinks it’s all “marvellous” and the scene ends on a spread of fashion drawings before eventually fading to black.

In the next scene, we’re *still* in Paris (you didn’t think we were going to get back to Tracy Island already, did you? Waaay more adventures of Lady Penelope to go, here). Relaxing in the fashion salon, Penelope is cooing over her “civilised” tea, served by the frosty Madeline. She picks up a lump of sugar, remarking that it’s “rather big” and delicately dips it in her tea until yet another transmitter is revealed. It’s obvious by now that Penelope came first in her class at international spy finishing school for spotting oversized sugar lumps! Although that’s not really the smartest of hiding places for a bug, unless there are a few more stuffed in the sugar bowl. At this latest intrusion, Francois literally throws up his hands and declares he is “at the end” of his “wits” and feels he is surrounded by enemies. Penelope firmly tells him that the venue for the show must now be changed as they “dare not” hold it at his salon because the “risk” is too great. He wonders, a bit sarcastically, if she means for him to hold it “at ze top of the Eiffel Tower?” Penelope remarks that that would “at least be safer” but very quickly decides on a “just the place,” which she will reveal once she has contacted “a friend.” Hmm, I think two worlds are about to collide.

Back at London Airport, Captain Saville is overjoyed with *Skythrust*’s performance – it’s now ready to go and he congratulates Brains profusely, even though he seems to have forgotten the name Brains’ is using completely. At that point, Saville’s memory is rescued by his assistant, who announces that there’s a call for “Mr Hackenbacker” on the line. It’s Lady P, and Brains takes it outside in the reception area – or he does once *he* remembers the alias he’s travelling under! Stand clear of the running gag, people. Observing Brains’ initial confusion, Captain Saville blusters to a long-suffering assistant that he’s “always said...people with good intellect often have no head for names.” So, *that’s* his excuse. Out in the reception area, Brains is delighted to receive the call from Lady P, who asks “Hiram” if he can grant her “a big favour.”

This favour appears to be arranging a late night meeting at the infamous Café Atalante (last seen in ‘The Perils of Penelope’) where once again, Parker waits in FAB 1 while Penelope downs a Pernod with a handsome stranger. In this case, she’s with Captain Ashton. He’s puzzled how she knows “Hackenbacker” and she evades the answer by saying “allow a Lady a few secrets” and “let’s just say we’re associates.” Instead of saying, ‘but seriously, how do you know him?’ Ashton seems to accept it and calls Hiram “quite a dark horse,” adding, “what brains that fellow has.” This prompts a ‘hilarious’ double-take from Penelope, who swiftly agrees that he has “a lot of talent.” However, the Captain thinks her plan seems like “a lot of trouble...just for a fashion show.” She tuts that that response is “just like a man,” which is when the coffee arrives, delivered by a stereotypically dodgy-looking waiter. To be fair, the Café Atalante doesn’t appear to

hire any waiters who *aren’t* really evil agents spying on Lady Penelope. Instead of poisoning her Pernod, this one has just planted yet another bugging device in the lid of the coffee pot. Parker has a machine that picks up on this and warns her, and of course the sinister waiter runs away as soon as he realises. Seriously, think it’s time to pick a new hang-out, Penny.

Ashton is appalled that they were being spied on, and wants to catch up with the fake waiter, but Penelope believes this is pointless. However, the bugged coffee pot has helped her to prove to Aston just “how important this fashion show is” and now he agrees that they “must switch the location of the preview.” So, to recap the crux of the episode – Lady Penelope wants to put a top secret material that everyone wants aboard a brand new plane with a secret everyone wants. Hold on tight, everyone.

Back to the airport... At last, the *Skythrust* is getting ready to take off. Ashton and his co-pilot are in the cockpit, and receive some telegrams delivered by a guy who’s suspiciously similar to the waiter at the café. The main telegram is from ‘Hackenbacker’ who says he’ll be “waiting with the Champagne” at “the other end.” This maiden flight is going from Paris to London, and the co-pilot wishes that Hackenbacker could have joined them, but Ashton thinks that the flight will already be “special enough.”

As the ‘garage’ loading bay on *Skythrust* is opened up, the fashion set are on their way. Madeline drives Francois in their open top car, which seems very jarring without seatbelts. Francois is angsty over the preparations for the show and whines that his tummy butterflies have become “an ‘erd of buffalo.” Madeline frostily tells him that after the show he will be “the toast of ze fashion world.” He doesn’t appreciate her practicality, accusing her of verging on the “cold blooded,” and then he checks with Dierdre (an English girl who sounds like a much younger Tin-Tin) if the costumes are “all right.” She says that they’re fine, although the way that the tiny matchboxed Penelon clothes are tossed all over the back seat seems unnecessarily risky. Wasn’t there a single spare shoebox to keep them all in one place? You could lose a Penelon gown down the back of the car seat, or an avaricious magpie could make off with the whole collection!

As they drive into *Skythrust*’s rear, Lady Penelope is also on her way. Riding in FAB 1, she asks if Parker will be able to “find things to do” in Paris until she gets back. He assures her he’ll be fine, which seems to suggest that the French police should quickly padlock the Eiffel Tower, just to be on the safe side. Although I reckon Lady P would definitely make him give it back again. FAB 1 drives up to *Skythrust* and parks badly within it. Captain Ashton notes that Penelope has arrived and goes off to greet her. Penelope is already with Francois in the luxurious cocktail bar. Awesome. She asks him if everything is ready, as he won’t







want to “keep the buyers waiting.” Francois is quite impressed by the “conversion job” the airline people have done to facilitate the show, and reveals the fashion runway; which is a sort of grotto painted red, with a curvy raised platform surrounded by chairs for the press and the ‘buyers.’ It’s decorated with flowers and looks very cute. Penelope seems impressed, and calls it “charming.” A few minutes later, everyone is strapped into their seats, and *Skythrust* finally takes off. During ascension, Francois reminds Penny that she must “go and get changed” as soon as they have “levelled out” and then starts to panic about the “music.” Dierdre reassures him that “Mason the steward” is “taking care” of that and that although he’s new to the airline (ready your alarm bells) she has explained to him “how the cues will go.”

In London, Tin-Tin and Brains are arriving at *Skythrust*’s destination airport. Brains is still in his ugly shaded blue specs, which he’s kept on whilst driving through a tunnel, so let’s just hope they’re also X-Ray and infra-red specs as well. He thinks that *Skythrust* will have taken off, but all Tin-Tin gives a toss about is seeing “the dress show.” D’oh. Brains says that they’ll go up to the control “tower” to pay their “respects,” and then they will go back down to “wait for the plane.” Tin-Tin asks if he’s excited about it all, calling him, teasingly, “Mr Hackenbacker.” He just gives her a look.

Hurrah, it’s time for the Penelon fashion show. It’s in full swing, and whimsical music plays as Penelope models dress ‘Number 17 – Autumn Crocus.’ Yes, it looks just how it sounds, and she looks not a little like a daffodil. Her hair is in a ponytail that sweeps down over one ear – dangling from the other is a large metallic earring that reflects enough light to blind the audience. Francois proudly points out the “swirling pleats” of the dress, as well as lots of other details. He emphasises the use of the Penelon in its creation, and an over-excited reporter declares that it’s “the biggest thing in fabric development since the cotton mill.”

As *Skythrust* flies on, the show continues with a “Scottish Soiree” outfit, which looks exactly the way it sounds, although the model wasn’t actually concealing a set of bagpipes behind her back. Next, perhaps in a nod to a certain famous episode, there’s an “Alligator Attack” outfit, which is strictly for wearing “after dark,” heh. Gold alligator skin peeks out through strategic cutouts in the front of this item. There’s also a burst of very familiar desert music when Penelope models a safari print outfit while wielding a spear. Perhaps to repel any “Uninvited” guests? At the very, very end of the show, Penelope models a bridal outfit, complete with a very unflattering head wrap that makes her look like she’s got an elegant toothache, and her expression as she looks at Francois seems to match that impression, although it’s probably a coincidence. She’s flanked by the two other models, garbed in even more hideous bridesmaids’ dresses.

Now that the show is nearly over, the *Skythrust* is getting ready to land at London airport and Tin-Tin and Brains have reached the control tower. We are now 30 minutes into the episode, folks. The London controller, who is astonishingly *not* Commander Norman (probably because Norman’s in the foreground looking out with field glasses), tells the *Skythrust* pilots that Hackenbacker is there in the tower and “escorting the cutest little number,” along with the largest bottle of Champagne “you’ve ever seen.” This must be one of those stage-show “aside” routines, because despite the fact that Brains is standing next to him, he doesn’t react...nor does Tin-Tin poke him in the eye, or whack him with the Champagne bottle, although she’s sitting well within hearing range. Ah, the Sixties.

The co-pilot reports that the “show and the inaugural flight” were “both a success” (jinx! This is as bad as Jeff Tracy saying “what can possibly go wrong?”) In the back of the plane, Francois preens at the praise from the press; one reporter raves on, saying he can’t wait to tell the “women of the world” about “Penelon.” As they draw closer to London, Penelope wishes to get changed, as it “wouldn’t do” to arrive in London still dressed as a bride! It is sort of hard to take your eyes off how enormous her eyes look with that head wrap flattening her hair...it’s actually quite creepy. Dierdre wonders where the frosty Madeline has gone. Francois seems disinterested, but says he hasn’t seen her “since the show.” In fact, Madeline is busy making some new friends up in the flight deck.

Sneaking into the cockpit by using her ‘being an attractive girl and just wanting to thank the big strong pilots for such a smooth flight’ powers, she promptly pulls a gun and hi-jacks the flight! Of course she’s evil – just check out those massive earrings! She’s already cool about the whole thing, but her mood is hardly improved when the co-pilot says he thinks she’d better give him the gun. He probably feels fairly safe since Captain Ashton’s between him and the business end of the barrel. Madeleine sneers at him not to do “anything stupid” as she knows “how to use this,” and Captain Ashton’s definitely feeling less safe than his co-pilot, because he immediately interjects that she seems to mean it. and informs them both that the “plans have changed.” The flight is not going to London anymore! (Cue dramatic music underscore.) Madeleine passes them directions to their “new destination,” in the middle of the Sahara Desert! As *Skythrust* changes course, Ashton says that she can’t have fooled herself into believing she will get away with this on her own. She snarks, “Who said I was alone?”

Now, it would have been truly hilarious, and brilliant, if earnest little Dierdre was the other hi-jacker. But of course it’s the sinister new steward, and erstwhile bug-planting Cafe Atalante employee, Mason! He aims a gun at the fashion crew, including Penelope and Francois, and snarls that no one will “get hurt” if they’re “sensible” and that

there’s just been a “slight change in plans.” They want the Penelon dresses boxed back up, *tout suite*. Penelope immediately realises that they plan to steal the “entire collection.” So, no one is interested in the secrets of this new aircraft, then? No one? Did the Hood miss the flight? Is he lurking in disguise somewhere, mentally kicking himself for forgetting to set his alarm clock? Anyway, in the cabin, Madeline warns the pilots as they stare longingly at the radio, telling them that “There isn’t a person in this world who can help you now!” Which prompts the segue of the week.

A very relaxed scene unfolds on Tracy Island. Jeff is, remarkably, catching 40 winks on a recliner in the sunlight beside the balcony windows. Scott and Gordon play and intense board game, while Virgil reads something on a sofa by the wall. All are oblivious to the threat that some dresses might get stolen! But right then, Lady Penelope carefully twists the stone of her cocktail ring. This sets the eyes flashing in her portrait in the Tracy lounge and Scott points it out excitedly (he was probably losing the game). Jeff had “thought it was a little too peaceful around here.” Jeez, any quieter and they’d need to start a fight club or something. Virgil also leaps up, declaring, “What’re we waiting for?” and Jeff sends out Scott, and then Virgil immediately afterwards, before they have the slightest clue what the matter is. What if Virg needed to pack the Mole instead of his anti-hijacking kit? During the launches, Scott perkily announces he’s “Ready for the blast off, Father!” which, even without the cross-eyed look, sounds not a little bit dopey. Jeff acknowledges, to which Scott says even more briskly, “Yes, sir!” He must have bet a sizeable amount on that game to be this excited about missing it... *Thunderbirds One* and *Two* take off, and only then does Jeff say that he’s going to contact Brains in London to see if he has “any idea what’s gone wrong.” Seems a little late...after all, what if Penelope had set off the alarm by mistake, or someone had nicked the ring?

In *Skythrust*, Penelope quietly informs Francois that help is on its way, and then loudly declares to Mason that the aircraft will “soon be tracked down.” He tells her that she’s wrong, and that they can’t be tracked as “we’re handling all radio calls now.” Apparently he’s never heard of radar. However, Scott is in hot pursuit and now has a “bearing” on *Skythrust*, presumably through Penelope’s signal. He thinks he will reach the ship in 18 minutes. Jeff and Gordon are mapping this and when Virgil tells him his bearing as well, Jeff is able to figure out that *Skythrust* is now heading for the Sahara. He wonders why on earth anyone would hi-jack a plane and “take it there.”

Good question. Beneath the blazing Saharan sun, two grumpy crooks are, predictably, bitching about the sand. If they looked like the two explorers from ‘The Uninvited,’ this episode would gain two extra stars. They’re lurking beside a rickety metal building, suggesting that this is probably an airfield. The crook named Ross tries to call



*Skythrust*, but his buddy, who we later learn is named Collins, tersely reminds him that their radio has a “limited range.” Wow, just what you want in the middle of the desert, a radio that can barely reach the next sand dune....however, Collins is sure that “they’ll be here.” And *Skythrust* must be getting close, because Madeline finally lets the pilots switch on the radio. The airwaves immediately fill with Scott’s clipped tones insisting that the *Skythrust* responds to the call. Madeline stops them from answering, until Ashton points out that the IR boys “never give up.” At this, Madeline relents and lets him reply, but orders him to “watch” what he says. Like what, given that IR have actually *found* them? Ashton replies “loud and clear” to Scott, who requests that they return *Skythrust* to London. Ashton regrets that he can’t do that, although Scott “must insist” that they do! At this, Madeline grabs the radio and demands, “if we don’t? What then?” Not appearing at all surprised by who he’s now speaking to, Scott tells her that they’ll have to “take action” to force them to comply. Madeline is pretty sure he’s full of it, snarking, “Who are you trying to kid?” and it’s worth noting she’s the only one who points out that IR’s job is to “save lives, not to risk them” and she orders him to leave them alone.

Put in his place, Scott radios base and updates them that *Skythrust*’s hijackers are “not going to give in without a fight!” Bear in mind, this is still over stealing some dresses, and they’ve already been tracked down. However, Jeff tells Scott that Brains has a plan, intending to bluff the hijackers for a bit, which he’s telling Virgil about right now. Aww, man, Scott’s seriously out of the loop in this episode, despite his supposed “first responder” function in a rescue. In London, Brains and Tin-Tin are parked right beside the runway, and Brains instructs Virgil that what he wants him to do will “sound crazy” but that he has “a hunch” that it will work. That’s very scientific sounding. It’s also what he says every time he improbably wants them to blow the crap out of the problem, in order to solve it. Guess what the plan is? Brains wants Virgil to line up a “low velocity, non-explosive missile” and then to “take a pot shot at *Skythrust*’s undercart.” Yes, Brains is the Michael Bay of rescue strategies. He promises a rather reluctant Virgil that it will be “all right” and to just “trust Mr Hackenbacker.” Virgil doubtfully responds, “OK...Hiram.”

The *Skythrust* is eight minutes from the Saharan touchdown. The pilots try a last ditch bluff that the runway is too short for their size of plane, but Madeline isn’t fooled for a second. She radios the two crooks in the sand, and cackles – sort of – that “no one” is going to stop them now, “not even International Rescue.” This final comment causes Ross considerable concern, and he wonders what the hell she meant by that! Also, what is their genius plan once they’ve got the dresses? Drive out of the Sahara without being caught? Criminals really don’t think very far ahead on this show.

On *Skythrust*, the pilots spot *Thunderbird Two* swooping a bit close for comfort, with the intention of intimidation. It backfires, merely pissing off Madeline, who radios the “crazy fools” and threatens to give Ashton “a bullet through the brain” unless they’re out of sight in the next thirty seconds. She adds “believe me, I’ll do it” and pointedly shoves the gun barrel against Ashton’s temple. Think she means it, Virg! In the back, Mason is still watching over Penny and Francois, who asks her if she saw “the Thunderbird” and Penelope reckons that the machine has “got them worried.” Yes, that’s exactly what you want – worried gun-toting hi-jackers in a highly compressed atmosphere. Mason warns them not to get their hopes up, believing that “mighty International Rescue are giving up.” If only he knew that they never do that...

*Thunderbird Two* is obeying instructions and ‘leaving the area,’ while actually making a turn that would have turned Alan and Virgil’s brains into jelly. They now realise that they’ll have to use Brains’ plan after all, although that idea is hardly any stupider than what they were just attempting. Somehow, Virgil manoeuvres *Thunderbird Two*’s big green rear into *Skythrust*’s “blind spot below their tail” whilst a missile launcher pops up through the top of *Two*’s fuselage. Alan is in position in *Thunderbird Two*’s cannon area, seated behind something that looks very *Star Wars*. Make that *pre Star Wars*. Alan carefully lines up the sights – it seems odd that the family sharpshooter (and official backup pilot of *Thunderbird Two*) Gordon, isn’t here to do this. He counts down the range and it’s “missile away!”

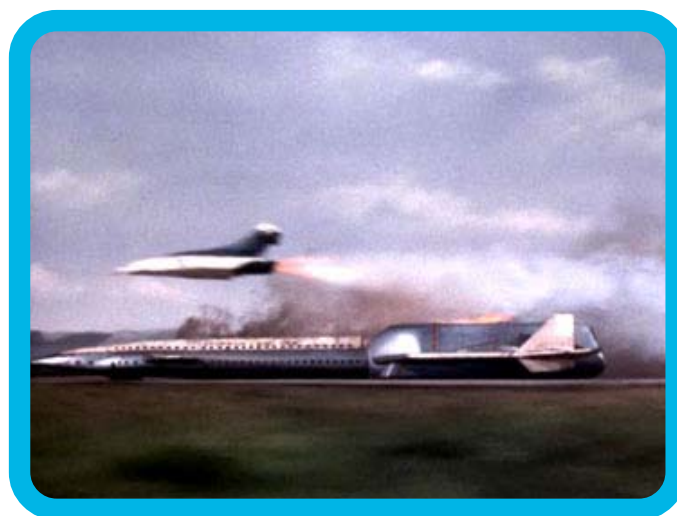
The sound of *Skythrust* getting hit alerts Madeline that something’s the matter. Luckily, she doesn’t immediately follow through on her promise to shoot Ashton. The two pilots see a red light flashing and realise that the “wheel housing” is locked and can’t free itself. Madeline believes that it’s a trick, but the co-pilot strongly insists that “it’s not.” Ashton swiftly points out the impossibility of a safe landing in the Sahara with “an undercarriage malfunction” and she spits at him not to “blind” her with “science.” They tell her to get hold of Mason to prove they have a problem, since she has said that he “knows about these things.” She begrudgingly leaves to do so. While she’s out of the cockpit, the pilots don’t even try to lock her out, but the co-pilot worries that they “might not fool Mason” if he knows about the (pointlessly secret) “Hackenbacker device.” Ashton bets that Mason doesn’t have a clue.

When Mason arrives in the cockpit and demands to know why they can’t “land in the desert,” Ashton subtly tries to learn what he knows about *Skythrust*, and then points out the danger of landing in the desert, miles from anywhere, “without wheels.” They’re now four minutes from the rendezvous and things are getting tense, as Ashton lays the scaremongering on thick. He reminds Mason that there’s still nearly 5,000 gallons of fuel aboard

and that when it goes up, “they won’t even find the fillings” in his teeth. Mason is quickly coming round to the idea of giving up, but wonders if they’ll even be able to land “at London.” Ashton points out that London is “fully equipped for emergency landings” and that there “at least we’ll have a chance.” Mason agrees to the plan to return, and shouts down Madeline’s protests. He’s terrified, as he’s seen what can happen when a plane goes up and doesn’t want it to happen to him! So, Bra-Hack’s plan has worked, and *Skythrust* changes course. Jeff Tracy thinks that this is “wonderful” as he reports to Virgil and Alan that he’s had words with “Interpol” and learned that the hi-jackers were meeting two bad guys named “Ross and Collins” who both have “records as long as our arm” for “murder, amongst other things.” Yuck. Wait, so Interpol knew all along? Wait a second...! Then Jeff rather creepily suggests that Virgil and Alan “pay them a call, I’m sure they’ll appreciate it.” Alan heartily responds, “Will do.” Um, didn’t he say these two crooks were wanted for murder? What is he suggesting that the boys *do*, anyway? Is this really part of the International Rescue service..?

Back at London Airport, Tin-Tin frets over “all those fire trucks” which have lined up waiting for *Skythrust*’s return. We all know how good they are at putting out piles of flaming ash, after all. However, Brains continues to look insufferably smug, saying, “they won’t need” the trucks. Flummoxed, Tin-Tin asks him what’s “so special” about *Skythrust*, and he smirks, “wait and see.” *Skythrust* is starting its descent, and reducing power. Somehow, it’s still nowhere near as tense as when the *Fireflash* was coming down in “Trapped in the Sky.” As they near the airport, Mason is appalled that they still have “over half” a fuel tank left, and asks if they couldn’t “jettison” some? Madeline coldly tells him to pull himself together, but immediately asks the same question. Short answer – no, they can’t. Ashton recommends that they go back to “the rear” which is now apparently the “safest pace.” Mason and Madeline hi-tail it out of the cockpit.

Alone at last, the co-pilot comments that “the proof of the pudding’s in the eating” and that they’re “in Hackenbacker’s hands now.” *Skythrust* begins a bumpy touchdown, hitting the tarmac in skidding slides. Will the fuel go up this time? As soon as it lands, the upper part of *Skythrust*’s tail section detaches and rockets skyward. In the tower, Commander Norman is following it with his field glasses. He orders it taken up to forty thousand feet, where they detonate it. Bye, bye excess fuel, no longer able to turn *Skythrust* into smoking ashes. The big plane scrapes painfully along the runway, and fire trucks race after it. It’s still a bit on fire, but it looks like it’ll remain in one piece. Everyone is safe. Commander Norman summarises the success, saying that Hackenbacker’s “ejectable fuel pod...will revolutionise flying safety.” Yes, it worked, but it also seems pointless to have kept this device a secret until it had to be used. During the trials,





sure, to prevent industrial spies from stealing the concept. But on its first *commercial* flight? Keeping it quiet could only be used to advantage exactly *one time*. Luckily for Penelope.

Inside *Skythrust*, the passengers seem fine and Francois asks Penelope if she is all right. She remarks that it was “no worse than one or two conventional landings” she’s experienced (despite the fact that nobody was wearing a seat restraint, apparently!), and soon turns a gun on Madeline and Mason, who are cowering behind a table. When the hell did she get hold of a gun? Wouldn’t that have come in handy a little earlier..? Penelope warns them to “lie still and wait for the police.” Francois is wondering about their “accomplices” but Penelope thinks that “they’ll be well taken care of.”

She’s right. The two crooks are still waiting out in the Sahara and mistake the arrival of *Thunderbird Two* for *Skythrust*. Virgil brings her overhead, baffling the two bad guys, who ooh and aah over the “new design.” Alan eagerly tells Virgil to “take her round again!” Virgil actually reminds Alan to “use a live missile this time.”

Whaaaat?

Let’s take that in. Virgil has just told Alan to fire on another living human being with a live missile. Yes, they’re crooks, but this is downright cold blooded. Surely Interpol would come and get them at some point. This isn’t like letting the aggressive Zombites blow themselves up, or the Hood drive himself off the cliff, or even Scott shooting at the two guys that tried to blow up his little brother until they drove off the road and crashed. This is kind of a whole new moral path we’re carving, aren’t we? It doesn’t bother Alan, though. He responds with a cheery, “FAB!” *Thunderbird Two* zooms back over the crooks and Alan opens fire even as the two crooks wave and cheer, still believing that this is the *Skythrust*. Their base is immediately blown to smithereens. Wokka-wokka music plays over their ash-spattered amazement. No, they aren’t dead, not yet, but they’re stranded out in the middle of the desert now, surely. Unless the cops really going to pick them up later on? We need to know! On Tracy Island, Jeff congratulates Virgil and Alan on their destruction with a “well done” and thinks that that about wraps it all up. Jeff thinks that “all the boys deserve a pat on the back and I guess Brains most of all...” This is a very weird episode.

In London Tower, with everyone now safe, Brains gives the running gag its last gasp by forgetting his alias one more time, only to suggest they all head down to the bar and “have a bite to eat” as he’s “starving.” Penelope is just pleased they still have a big bottle of Champagne to open, “Vintage 1993, the best year for Champagne” (although apparently, not so much with hindsight – 1993 turned out not to be a good year for Champagne at all!). Francois follows the Champagne, and says he’d also follow Penelope “to ze ends of ze Earth!” We can all safely assume that Madeline and Mason are being shipped off to Guantanamo Bay right now, or at least its fashion-based equivalent. Alone together, Brains sidles up to Tin-Tin and asks “Miss Kyrano” if he can “escort” her to the “Starlight Room”? That’s the name of the bar they’re off to, not a clumsy euphemism. Tin-Tin responds with a flirty, “I’d be delighted to, Mr ‘Hackenbacker’” and Brains flirts right back with “You know, you can call me, ‘Hiram,’” and everyone throws up in their mouth a little. OK, OK, it’s sweet. A tiny bit *too* sweet. That sound you hear is Alan sharpening his Brains-offing axe, for when he finally returns. Given the size of that Champagne bottle, which is snatched up by Brains in the final seconds of the episode, it may be quite a while before they make it home to Tracy Island.

A strange one, this episode...as well as the next, “Lord Parker’s ‘Oliday.” They are the clearest examples of the way the show began veering away from the premise of

gritty rescues and fantastical technology. Even here, the Tracy boys are not much more than machine drivers who respond ‘yes’ and ‘no,’ and hardly even come under risk at all. Only Lady Penelope and Brains get to show off their resourcefulness, and in the smuggest way possible. It’s also telling that the family’s sharpshooter, Gordon, has been ousted by Alan when he takes out the landing gear. At least during “Attack of the Alligators” they were both manning the guns.

Despite the danger to *Skythrust*, the threat posed by the hijacking isn’t especially high. Yes, there are the lives of the *Skythrust* passengers to consider. But the secret of Penelon isn’t exactly worth trading a bunch of lives for, is it? If the secret formula for it gets out...guess what? More people will be able to pack way more clothes, far more easily! And probably at a tenth of the price of Francois’s fashion house monopoly! Unless Francois forgot to look into patenting his invention, it seems likely he’ll do just fine. And in any case, the thieves, having stolen the secret in such a hugely public way, could hardly show up in Paris in a couple of months and have their own “look what we invented” unveiling for the press. Who are they going to sell it to...North Korea, so they can pack their military uniforms in camouflage-colored matchboxes?

Also, Francois needs to start background-checking his staff. So while fashion is a nice thing to have around a Thunderbirds episode, making it front and centre is not really gripping material. Besides, it really wasn’t necessary for Madeleine to hijack the aircraft – she had already successfully infiltrated Francois’ fashion house, why not just copy the formula with one of those little microfilm cameras, or abscond with the boxes themselves in a shopping bag one night? Even the Hood would have been smart enough to do that...wouldn’t he..?

No, it seems painfully obvious that the reason for using *Skythrust* to host the fashion show was to create the whole drama of the hijack situation so the boys could be brought in to save the day. It would even have worked better if the writers had led us down the path of believing the hijackers might actually be after *Skythrust*’s secret...but they never attempt to do that.

And what was the reason to keep the Hackenbacker device secret, anyway, past the aircraft’s initial trials? When were they planning on letting everyone know? After its maiden flight, or just the next time a plane got hijacked?

It seems vaguely silly, of course, to overthink the plots of the series...it’s easier to put the cover back over the logic button and enjoy. There are things that don’t make sense, here, though...although perhaps I notice it more because I’m a fan of the original series setup of Scott, Virgil and mad but engaging space age fantasies. Scott, the field commander, disappeared from the screen very quickly during the action of this rescue, despite apparently still being in the air the whole time while Virgil and Alan were doing their part. He was also absent during the strangely out of place attack on the crooks left in the Sahara, although he is supposedly the only one of the three with an actual military background. You’d think this would have come in handy for shooting missiles at things. But there I go being all logical again.

There is definitely a noticeable shift in tone and emphasis in season two of the series. This unhappy shift will become even more apparent in the films, *Thunderbirds Are Go* and *Thunderbird 6*.

When it comes right down to it, the “Alias Mr Hackenbacker” plot about a new type of fashion fabric just really doesn’t measure up to a collapsing Empire State Building, or Gordon facing off against the Hood in a lake, or International Rescue risking their lives to protect a couple of trapped scientists from giant alligators!

## CHECK FOR:

> **Reused stock footage of a launch:** Looks like the launch sections were cleaned up or reshot, but Scott’s perky, slightly cross-eyed “ready for the blast off” bit is a really unwelcome tweak.

> **Hitting on Tin-Tin:** ‘Hiram’ eh? Eh, Tin-Tin? Eh? Off to the Starlight Room, are we? Oo-er. That’s what happens when you call a plane ‘Skythrust,’ eh?

> **Tin-Tin and Alan snuggle:** I’m sure Brains has nothing to worry about. We all know how chilled out and understanding Alan is when it comes anyone but him flirting with the only girl on the whole Island...anyone else just get visions of Alan hiding out with a cross bow for Brains’ return....?

> **Tin-Tin snuggles someone else:** Apart from Brains? Ahem. No, it’s Jeff and Penny all the way, with the usual hints of innuendo between Penny and Parker as well...

> **Each bro’s appearance:** There wasn’t room to fit in much about the Tracy brothers, what with Lady Penelope taking up about a quarter of the episode’s runtime locating microphones in sugar cubes, pens and coffee pots, and planning fashion shows at French bars. It’s like Ab-Fab came to Thunderbirds. Not even any John this time as everyone contacts Jeff directly. Poor John. And poor Scott, who’s cut out of the rescue soon after the beginning and then never seen or heard from again.

> **IR’s fantastic-but-unreliable equipment!:** Nope, it turns out that *Thunderbird Two*’s missiles work just fine. Missiles, guys. Missiles - shakes head.

> **I’m SURE all the photo evidence got destroyed:** Actually just realised that *Thunderbird Two* is roaring around outside the *Skythrust* while it’s full of unscrupulous fashion press men. So you’d think at least someone would have snapped a few undetectable photos while they had the chance? Then again, everyone’s being held at gunpoint, so perhaps not so much.

> **Alan-teasing:** Well, Brains doesn’t seem the type to gloat about his ‘date’ with Tin-Tin. Or is he?

> **Rescuing one of their own:** Pretty much the entirety of the episode, once the action finally starts.

> **Vehicles used:** The main vehicles only, TB1 and 2.

> **Surprisingly dextrous puppet hands:** Lots of gun waving here, and also a lot of ‘real hand’ use for all sorts of delicate bits, like turning rings into emergency signals, and soaking the sugar cube off of hidden microphones.

> **Brains actually at a rescue:** Not exactly. His clever Hackenbacker device does prevent anything worse happening, though. And he was around to hand out the Champagne at the end!

> **CRASH ZOOM drinking game:** Lots of these on the new frocks in Francois’ collection, and especially on Penelope in her bridal dress!

> **‘Biggest Jerk of the episode’ award:** Difficult one, this. So many to pick from. Jeff is in the lead, though. While it makes sense for the Thunderbird machines to be able to defend themselves, it’s incredible that the International Rescue guys are so gleeful about using their weapons on the two bad guys, especially as they were bad guys that none of the good guys in the episode even came into direct contact with. I mean, Jeff effectively said, “Blow the crap out of them and I’ll look the other way.” However, the hijackers are the worst, not least because they went after the clothes instead of, say, the aircraft...or something interesting...

> **It was the 60s!:** The entire episode hinges on a fashion show, and that’s why the brand new *Skythrust* is being hijacked. Who else really misses the Hood?

> **The Jeff jinx!:** Not so much, for once. However, Penelope’s bright idea of hosting a top secret fashion show on a brand new plane, which ALSO contained a top-secret new device, was just asking for trouble. Talk about setting up a ‘perfect storm’...Oh, and then the co-pilot compounds it by calling the whole shebang a “success” right before they set down in London. Oops.

> **Unanswered Questions:** So, did Interpol, or *anyone*, go and arrest ‘Ross and Collins’ after Alan blew their base to hell? Or was everyone just going to assume they’ll die a horrible, lengthy death in the desert? Yes, apparently those guys are also murderers, and worse, but it’d be nice to know either way. See also - every time the Hood blows himself up in previous episodes. Also, it’s a bit suspicious that Penelope brought along ALL her bugging material, unless that’s another reason she came to visit Francois. If she was trying to protect him she left it a bit late, and background checks on staff might be a good idea, M. Francois.

> **Best Second Series hair:** Lady Penelope by a long shot. The Tracy boys seem to have found some hair relaxer which saves them this time.

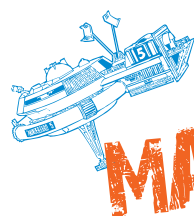
> **Most Overused Phrase:** ‘Everything’s going to be fine, Francois’ and variations thereof. Also, take a big drink every time a spying device is discovered, it will make getting to the end of the episode immeasurably easier... Oh and the long-running gag about getting Brains’ alias wrong goes on and on. It just. Won’t. Die!

A TERRIBLY TEDIOUS  
2/10

Next time:  
**LORD PARKER’S ‘OLIDAY**  
(Sorry for the shrieks of horror..aaaaaaah)



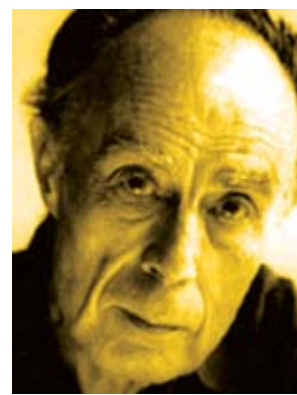




LIVE FROM THUNDERBIRD FIVE:

MATT ZIMMERMAN

# INTERVIEWS DAVID GRAHAM



As anyone who reads the NTBS Newsflash regularly will have noticed, Ned Cook never seems to be around when we need him. We never really know what quirk of fate has befallen him...did he give himself the bends again while snorkeling in the Caribbean? Did he accidentally fold himself up in his yurt while on location in Mongolia? Or did Johann, jet-setting stylist to the stars, finally have an opening, and Ned's off having his hair waxed and buffed? It's no good asking at the NTBS Newsroom. Trust me, we've tried. Trixie always has the same answer, spoken with a glacial stare that says, don't ask. "Not available." And we leave, wisely, before she picks up that infamous stapler.

So, thought your intrepid Newsflash editor Samantha Winchester, who better to invite to stand in for Ned than someone who's given voice to him before...the man we also all know and love as the voice of Alan Tracy, Matt Zimmerman!

Bondson's intelligence report told us that Matt was going to be at the 'Flights of Fantasy' Gerry Anderson event at RAF Cosford in November. What a coincidence...the intended subject of this issue's interview was going to be there too...fellow 'Thunderbirds' voice-over artist David Graham. David is well known to 'Thunderbirds' fans as the voices of Gordon Tracy, Brains, Parker, Kyrano and many others during the series – including Captain 'Crash' Hanson of the ill-fated *Fireflash*, sleazy film producer Bletcher from 'Martian Invasion' and Olsen, the up-to-no-good manager of the Cass Carnaby Five in 'The Cham-Cham,' to mention just a few. But there's a whole lot more to this talented performer than just his work for 'Thunderbirds,' and our enquiring minds want to hear about it! So Sam sent a secret, coded message to Matt, asking him to help us out by stepping into the Nedster's shoes one more time and interviewing David for this issue. He was gracious enough to accept the challenge.

Matt and David rendezvoused at an undisclosed location near Cosford the night before the 'Flights of Fantasy' event. The hidden camera Bondson loaned us failed, sadly...we guess we should have anticipated trouble when we saw 'Made in Bereznik' stamped on the back. But Matt passed the audio to Newsflash contributor Pen Turner the next day at Checkpoint Cosford (although we don't know for sure if either of them were wearing trench coats). What follows is the transcript...



David Graham [far right] and Shane Rimmer >>

**MATT ZIMMERMAN:** I'm sitting opposite David Graham, a legend in his own lifetime: actor, voice artist, been around for a long time. We've worked together for many years and it's been wonderful. And we'd like to know more about you, David, basically.

**DAVID GRAHAM:** I'll try and help you out.

**MZ:** I'm sure you will, you're a very helpful person, I know that. [Laughs] Now first of all, earlier on in the evening when we were talking about what you were doing with the RAF, what exactly was it that you were doing?

**DG:** Well, I served in the RAF for a while in the war as a radar mechanic. I'm not mechanically minded at all, in fact I can't solder two wires together, but I understood the theory quite well. I was actually stationed where we have this 'Thunderbirds' celebration tomorrow at Cosford. There's a story there, because I was originally training in London and it was when the doodlebugs, the flying bombs, were coming over, and they bombed the area and hit one of the adjacent buildings and so they evacuated us to Cosford. So that's my association with Cosford. It's the first time since 1944 that I will have been there.

**MZ:** That's wonderful, they should do something special tomorrow about that. How did that lead into the world of showbusiness? Is showbiz in your family at all?

**DG:** No; well, I had an uncle who ran away.

**MZ:** And joined the circus?

**DG:** [Laughs] No, he joined the Victoria Repertory Company; this was a long time ago, the beginning of the last century. But then he gave it up and then went to America, and then when I was training in New York at the Neighborhood Playhouse many, many years ago I used to go and see him and he used to recite Shakespeare to me. It was rather sad because it was all about what *might* have been. So I always wanted to be an actor, but I grew up in a very religious household, a Jewish Orthodox household where you can't work on Fridays and Saturdays so I had a big battle, and it was difficult to wrench myself out, but I finally did and I became an actor.

**MZ:** You said some magic words a minute ago – the Neighborhood Playhouse? You actually studied there?

**DG:** Yes, with Sanford Meisner.

**MZ:** Oh, wonderful! How long were you there?

**DG:** About 18 months. My sister was over there at the time [*David's sister married an American GI and went to the US as a war bride – Ed*]. He [*Sanford 'Sandy' Meisner*] was a charismatic man; difficult but charismatic. He was in the original Group Theatre in the thirties with Harold Clurman and Elia Kazan and all those people.

**MZ:** Joseph Cotten...

**DG:** Yes, that's right.

**MZ:** And Clifford Odets.

**DG:** Yes, he was the house playwright at the Group Theatre.

**MZ:** Oh, I think that being involved with the Neighborhood Playhouse, it's a wonderful thing.

**DG:** It was amazing.



[left to right] Shane Rimmer, Matt Zimmerman, David Graham

**MZ:** Do you find it still helps you?

**DG:** Well I'm basically an instinctive actor, and you learn technique as you go along. The Neighbourhood Playhouse and the Actors' Studio were kind of too introspective in a way, they worked out every little moment, and you can't – you have to dive in, get a line on a part and use your talent and instinct to play the part. I think the Americans are too technical.

**MZ:** They're afraid to live on the edge.

**DG:** Yes; you get a blazing talent like Brando who's beyond that, or Paul Newman, great actors; but on a lower level they think that if you work out this technique you will be good, but you've got to be good to start with, no matter how much technique you have.

**MZ:** What was your first big show?

**DG:** I came back and I worked in repertory. My big break, if you can call it that, was when I was at Nottingham Playhouse and I was in 'Arturo Ui' with the great Leonard Rossiter, and I played Givola and Michael Blakemore directed it. A great friend of mine, Christopher Benjamin, recommended me and I got the part and was very successful. Later on we transferred to the Shaftesbury Theatre, which is now a duplex cinema, and we ran for six months there. And then they were doing 'The Front Page' at the National Theatre; there was a part called Diamond Louis, a lovely flashy gangster and Michael suggested me for that part, so I auditioned for [Sir Lawrence] Olivier, and he said [adopts Olivier's clipped tones] 'Are you doing anything at the moment? Are you likely to be gobbled up by anybody else?' Of course, I'd been out of work for months so I said 'No, no'. [Olivier voice again] 'We'd love to have you in the company'. So I did that and got to understudy in the Scottish play, which we're not supposed to mention by name, but I will for the purposes of this interview: [whispers] 'Macbeth'. And then I was in 'Saturday, Sunday, Monday' with [Franco] Zeffirelli and understudied in 'Jumpers'. It was a wonderful time in my career. And then Olivier retired and another gentleman took over and that was the end of my career in the National.

**MZ:** Is it true that you originated the voice of the Daleks in 'Doctor Who'?

**DG:** Yes, it was, with a lovely actor friend of mine called Peter Hawkins. I was doing voice-overs at the time. I don't particularly know how it happened, but

Peter was a genius; he did 'The Flowerpot Men', a very famous children's series. We went along to Lime Grove, the studios that are now closed, and we started playing with this stylish voice, and then they played it through a synthesizer: [imitates Dalek voice] WE ARE THE DALEKS... and so it became quite famous. This is almost before I started working with Gerry Anderson.

**MZ:** Of course you worked with Gerry an awful lot, even before 'Thunderbirds'.

**DG:** Yes, a long time before 'Thunderbirds'. I did a television film with him called 'Martin Kane' and it was one of those cops & robbers series, not very good. Gerry said [adopts Gerry Anderson's voice] 'Y'know, it's not a very good script, David; what I want you to do is run like hell all over the lot'.



**MZ:** [Laughs] You sound just like him!

**DG:** Then we got talking between takes and he said [Gerry's voice again] 'What are you doing after this? I'm thinking of going into making puppet films' and I said 'I'm pretty good at accents', so he said, 'Let me have your number'. And he phoned me up, and I started in a series called 'Four Feather Falls', which was a fifteen minute, black & white series with Nicholas Parsons and Denise Bryer in which I played Gramps, and I think I based his voice on Walter Huston [adopts drawl] *y'know, a guy who talks like that, he was always an ornery critter* and then me and another guy did Fernando and Pedro, a couple of Mexican bandits, and it was charming. And then it went on to 'Supercar' and then I did 'Fireball' and 'Stingray', and then the big one.

**MZ:** Thunderbirds?

**DG:** Yes, in which I worked with you. I was lucky to get these two wonderful characters of Parker and Brains, and the rest is *'istory*, as they say.

**MZ:** You've got to tell the readers the story of how Parker's voice came about.

**DG:** Yes, I will, I always do.

**MZ:** It's a wonderful story and I know it's true.

**DG:** The studio was near Cookham, the famous place where Stanley Spencer, the great painter, had a studio. We went to lunch and Gerry said [Gerry's voice] 'I'm going to call the wine waiter and I just want you to listen to his voice, you might find it useful'. And the wine waiter came over and he said [Parker's voice] 'Would you like to see the wine list, sir? We've got all sorts of wine, we've got "Borgellis", "Champaigner" and the "Merlott" - and that was the birth of Parker. [Of course, those wine choices the waiter was verbally mangling should have been "Beaujolais", "Champagne" and "Merlot" - Ed]

Curiously enough, in the first episode, when Lady Penelope rang the bell, he came in and said [Parker's voice] 'You called, m'lady?' But we didn't think it sounded quite right, so we made it [Parker's voice] 'You rang, m'lady?' and that was it.

So I did five series, and not only was it great fun - we didn't make a lot of money in those days but the repeats afterwards were great - but it was a lifesaver at the time, because you know what the business is like.

**MZ:** Oh my God, yes.

**DG:** I mean, I was doing the odd telly and I'd been at the National for a couple of years, but it almost gave me security, and of course later on it gave me pensions! Thanks to Equity.

**MZ:** I'm with you on that! Now you've played several major roles in 'Thunderbirds', but one that we remember is Brains.

**DG:** Yes, and Parker, and I did Gordon, which was a small role, he rather circled around, and Kyrano. And Ray Barrett, he and I did quite a lot of the character voices.

**MZ:** Did you ever find yourself talking to yourself?

**DG:** Oh, frequently! I could have a page with three characters on it. And Gerry said [Gerry's voice] 'Take your time, David, pause between the lines'.

**MZ:** [Laughs] Do you have any stories about how you created any of the 'Thunderbirds' voices? Well, you just told us the one about how you got Nosey Parker...

**DG:** I think Brains, with very brilliantly talented people, sometimes the ideas come out so fast that they stutter a bit. I had no intention of taking the mickey or satirising people with a speech defect and I didn't overdo it. [In Brains' speech pattern] 'Y'know, I-I-I think I-I-I got a great i-idea, and that was it. Most of the other characters I used my imagination. You go through life and you hear a myriad accents, and actors do file them away in their subconscious and then you find the right moment appears when you can use them.

**MZ:** I always thought Brains was lovely because he never stuttered like p-p-p, he was looking for the word. That's a different thing.

**DG:** You're right, that's a different thing. And he had this nice sort of antagonistic relationship with Parker, who thought he was too clever by half. He thought he ran the place, Parker. He was the [Parker's voice] 'lynch pin'.

**MZ:** (Laughs) Is there any role in Thunderbirds you would have liked to have played?

**DG:** No, I was lucky and very happy to do what I did. I can't thank Gerry enough. It was a great team and we all had a wonderful time in the parts.

**MZ:** Yes, it was great. Apparently, you're known for telling retirement stories about Parker, and I've got down here, this question says, 'Is the rumour true that he's driving for Meals on Wheels?'

**DG:** [Parker's voice] Well, I don't like to talk about that, you see, but I do visit the old 'ostelry and there are some very nice ladies and I've become very close friends with some of them. I mean, not too close, because I'm not the marrying kind, but I like to give back to society what I've taken out. And believe you me, I've taken out a lot. You know, in cash, from banks, in my time, before Lady Penelope put me on the straight and narrow.

**MZ:** Yes, before she reformed you.

**DG:** [Parker's voice] Oh, she reformed me, yes, yes.

**MZ:** What's it like going from voice-over to acting in front of the camera and back again? Does that feel strange?

**DG:** No; you're an actor, I'm an actor. You have different techniques for different mediums. If you're in front of the camera, you forget it. I've always had - patting myself on the back - a very strong, versatile - especially on the accent front - voice, so in the theatre I can project, because we all know that sometimes you go to the theatre and you 'overhear' rather than hear the actors. I've never had any trouble matching my technique to the medium I'm doing; if it's miked, up close... I was in the BBC Radio Drama Company for 18 months so I had a lot of experience in radio acting. I do have a website...should I mention that?

**MZ:** Oh, yes, please!

**DG:** It's [davidgraham.co](http://davidgraham.co) and all my work is on it in all the various media. One of the great things...there's a clip of me playing Einstein for BBC2, which is something I'm very proud of. They could have gone for anybody, any big name, and they chose me. I did one episode and then they decided to write another one, so that was very, very nice.

**MZ:** And you had a nice success playing Elgar.

**DG:** Oh, yes, I toured all over England playing Elgar with a quintet of players, playing the marvellous Elgar music. I did a lot of research and read everything about Elgar, a great man and a great composer. I recently went to a concert at Kings Place near Kings Cross and heard some of his work. Perhaps my favourite of Elgar's, apart from the Enigma Variations, is the Quintet, the Piano Quintet, an absolute masterpiece; it's almost as good as the Schubert Quintet. Wonderful man.

**MZ:** You've worked in so many different media - film, television, radio, live theatre, voice-overs; do you have a favourite, and why?

**DG:** As regards my favourite of all the media I have worked in, the Theatre must come top. Especially as I was lucky enough to be a member of Laurence Olivier's National Theatre Company. The Theatre is the severest test for an actor both vocally and in terms of technique.

**MZ:** If you had any advice to give a young actor of today about voice or technique, what would that advice be?

**DG:** Oh, well...

**MZ:** I'm putting you on the spot here.

**DG:** [Laughs] Well...people might say, this puppet work...it's a giggle. But you have to approach every play, every episode, no matter how silly it is, with total conviction and reality. Don't ever 'play down'. I think one of the great things about 'Thunderbirds' is that all the characters are so rounded and believable. And if you don't play them with total commitment, people won't believe you.

I'm currently doing two series which are quite well known in animation at the moment. One is called 'Peppa Pig', which has become quite famous with very young children, and another is called 'Ben and Holly'; so, in my eighties, I'm very fortunate to be still working. And I think my voice has stayed. I am an old man, but I've managed to keep it. You know, I've taken care of myself, and I've enjoyed every minute of it (except when I'm out of work!).

**MZ:** Do you think it helped that when we recorded 'Thunderbirds', it was done like a radio play?

**DG:** That's it! That was one of the great strengths. If they had made it before and we'd had to dub it afterwards, it would have become artificial. That was a brilliant idea to pre-record it.

**MZ:** The only time I remember getting very hysterical was the time Ray Barrett played the Countess [sic] because Christine Finn, or no-one else could do the voice and he said 'I'll do it'. And he did it.

**DG:** Is Ray still with us?

**MZ:** I don't think he is.

**DG:** Well, he lived...he enjoyed a jug.

**MZ:** He did, he did.

**DG:** I remember once I was sitting in the flat, because I lived next door to him in Hampstead. The phone rang and a voice said, 'This is the police station. I've got a Mr Barrett here; he tells me you're his solicitor'.

**MZ:** (Laughs)

**DG:** Well, I said, 'No, I'm an acting colleague'. And there was a pause and the policeman said 'Oh, I see. I apologise for troubling you, sir'. So obviously Ray had come off the 19<sup>th</sup> hole at the golf course [Golfer's euphemism for the bar - Ed] well cut, and was obviously had up for drunk driving or something.

**MZ:** Wonderful. That's a lovely story. David, thank you very much - continued success in everything you do!

**DG:** Well, as long as you keep asking for me, I will survive.

**MZ:** We'll both survive!

**DG:** I've enjoyed this meeting. Thank you.

**MZ:** Thank you! And by the way, I didn't tell you, but you owe my presence here today to the absence of Ned Cook, who was supposed to do this interview.

**DG:** Ned Cook? Who's that?

**MZ:** (Laughs) Don't worry, David. I'll tell them not to print that.



NTBS's newest star reporter, Matt Zimmerman!





# THUNDERBIRDS ART FROM FILMMAKER CHRIS THOMPSON

Part Three of our continuing series on Chris Thompson's Thunderbirds artwork

Artwork © Chris Thompson.

## SUNPROBE [above]

*Sunprobe* gets a little bit too close to the sun.

Another of my early images. I like it for the solar flares, but the Sunprobe model needs a bit of work. I think this made it into TV21.

Made with: A Multi-Trillion-Pound Rocket, The Sun, A Camera, Lightly touched up on: Vue 6, Simply 3d.

## SEA OF FIRE (*THUNDERBIRD 4*) [below]

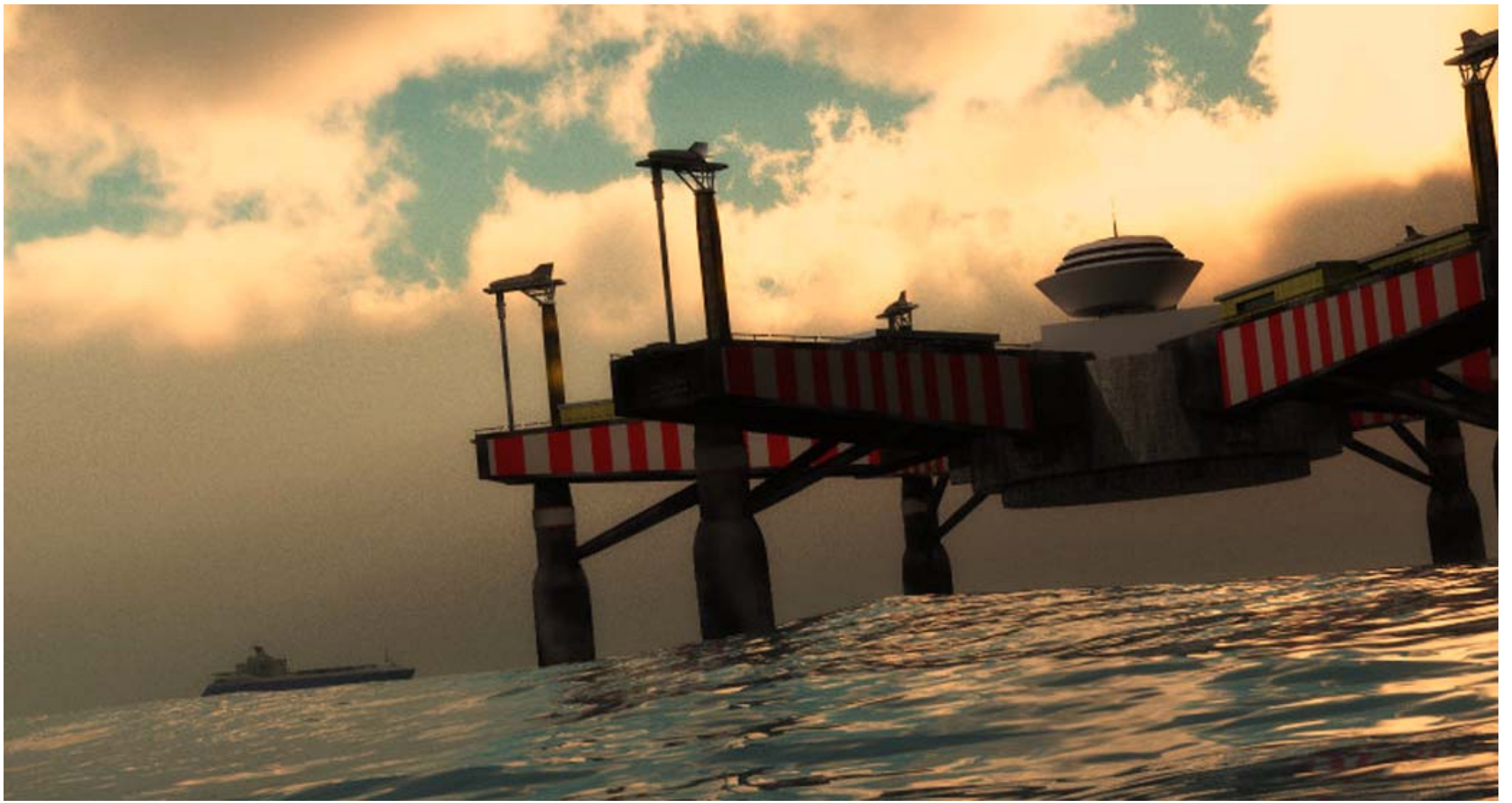
The *Ocean Pioneer III* has crashed into rocks during an oil leak in a storm, the oil has ignited. Gordon goes below the surface in order to plug the gap.

A scene from the unmade sequel to Thunderbirds 2010, it would have picked up where the film left off with IR rescuing the Ocean Pioneer III. This is my redesigned Thunderbird 4, more streamlined and a little bigger. Made on the day of the Royal Wedding. :)

Made with: Vue 8, Simply 3d, Photoshop Particle Illusion.







## SEASCAPE [above]

**The newly completed *Seascope* platform goes online having just passed its safety trials. After-all, what could possibly go wrong?**

This was one of the 20-something images I did for the TV21 convention back in 2010. While I like some of these, I think you can tell that they were done in a hurry, the lighting's exceedingly *meh* and the scale isn't that brilliant. I'd just got an upgrade that allowed me to do water though, which was great. :D

Made with: Vue 8, Simply 3d, Google SketchUp, Lack of haste...

## CENTER SEAT (*THUNDERBIRD 2*) [below]

**The gas rig *Seascope* has been decimated by an underground gas explosion. Two men are trapped below the surface in a damaged bathyscape.**

I did this image while doing the HAYNES THUNDERBIRDS AGENTS TECHNICAL MANUAL I wanted to use the Thunderbird 2 set I had created in some artwork so I simply put the camera to one side and added one of the series 2 metal chairs from the unused Thunderbird 3 cockpit. Looking at it, this is actually pretty much the same shot as in the book, just off to one side.

Made with: Vue 10, Google SketchUp., Photoshop, Research, lots of research, long nights of endless reruns of that one shot from "Ricochet..."

*more of Chris Thompson's artwork will be featured next issue...*





# He's Classy About the CLASSICS...

The NTBS Newsflash interviews classic film and television merchandising expert **PETER GREENWOOD** about *Thunderbirds* voice overs, his love for restoring the icons of classic television, and why it's so important to *get it right*.

Well, Ned's still MIA, folks. We don't know where he is, although there are rumors that Jeff Tracy had something to do with his disappearance. Good luck proving that! We're on Ned's trail, though...Raoul is monitoring any unusual uptick in the demand for Snapple. That should give him away.

In the meantime, your editor Samantha Winchester has filled in for Ned (again!) to bring you an interview with actor and licensing design consultant Peter Greenwood, whose voice you might not immediately recognize unless you remember a certain series of Kit Kat Commercials featuring Thunderbirds...

Peter counts 'actor' as only one of the many hats he's worn in his career in entertainment. Currently, he's actively involved in licensing design and consulting for classic series, making sure that those wonderful classic rereleases on DVD and the collectibles we treasure from our favorite shows are produced to an exactingly high standard of accuracy. For which we thank him most sincerely!

**SAMANTHA WINCHESTER:** Peter, welcome to Ned Cook's NTBS Newsflash!

You've had quite a varied career! Originally from Sydney, Australia, you've been a cel painter at Hanna Barbera, worked in special effects, and now you're a licensing designer and media consultant. You've worked in and consulted on merchandising design for *Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Clash of the Titans* and *Star Trek*, to name just a few high profile projects. You've been an actor on screen and in voice over, for clients as diverse as Kit Kat commercials featuring *Thunderbirds* and the Victorinox Swiss Army Knife (for which you were nominated for an Australian Cleo Award), and you operated the Energizer Bunny for three years! You've even designed a commemorative plaque for *Seinfeld* that still hangs on their old sound stage at CBS Studio Center. That's quite a background!

**PETER GREENWOOD:** Well, I have worked on a lot of fun stuff, most of it driven by my personal interests. The *Seinfeld* soundstage marker came about because of my interest in television history and my personal feelings that The *Seinfeld* program would become a true classic with time.

At the same studio I also designed a marker for all the classic television westerns that were filmed there. The history and art of television is something that I see as very unique.

Unlike a motion picture, television is a totally different field that requires a mindset for getting it out and with flair and quality under pressure. I admire that, and in my own productions also have the mindset to get it all done on time and under budget.

**SW:** It's obvious from your resume that you have a great love for film and television...especially classic

television. Which includes *Thunderbirds*, of course! When did you first see the show?

**PG:** *Thunderbirds* played every morning, five days a week, on television in Sydney, Australia. It turns out that Lew Grade/ITC, when they sold *Thunderbirds* to the Nine Network in Australia, did it in perpetuity.

The network owner, Frank Packer, was a fan of the show! So he bought those rights forever, and as a result, we had an unlimited run of the show in Australia.

So there was never a time when *Thunderbirds* was not around. How great is that?

**SW:** What is your favorite episode? Your favorite Thunderbird machine?

**PG:** "The Duchess Assignment" is very dear to me, having had voice actor Ray Barrett perform the voice for me several times. He was a riot doing that voice. "A portrait of a gazelle" never failed to crack me up. Mind you, Charles Tingwell, another voice actor for *Thunderbirds* and later also for *Captain Scarlet*, loved to do his Spanish waiter line as well – from "Lord Parker's 'Oliday'" – "It will be a great disaster!" And gales of laughter would follow.

As for the craft themselves, *Thunderbird One* and *Two*. I also had a real love for *Four*...perhaps because I had the Lincoln model of it with the wonderful Brains' instruction sheet.

**SW:** Which Tracy did you want to be...and why?

**PG:** Well the truth is, John Tracy is up there, because Ray Barrett spent the time to teach me the voice. So that character is very special to me for that reason, as is the Hood, who Ray also gave me pointers on.

**SW:** Do you have any other favorite Gerry Anderson series?

**PG:** All of them up to *Space: 1999*. I have a soft spot for them all for different reasons.

**SW:** How did you get involved with doing *Thunderbirds* voice overs? What projects did you work on?

**PG:** It was at a time when Ray Barrett was embroiled in a legal battle with ITV, so he had no interest in voicing any of his characters. So I asked him for permission to do so for a bunch of Australian Kit Kat commercials.

Also I consulted on some merchandising that sadly never panned out, and some possible special



Peter Greenwood's famous Kit Kat commercial

features for an early VHS that also didn't happen, since they cheaped out on the whole project.

**SW:** Tell us about your memories of Ray Barrett. We've heard a little about him from Shane Rimmer, Matt Zimmerman and David Graham, so we know he was a colorful person!

**PG:** Ray Barrett was one of Australia's great actors, he was wonderful and had a wicked sense of humor. He was very proud of *Thunderbirds* and only later in life did he realise the show had a vast following, which he was thrilled with. He was very close to Nick Tate (Eagle pilot Alan Carter of *Space: 1999*) and his father, John Tate, who also worked on *Thunderbirds*. So much so that Ray left his estate to Nick, which was a wonderful gesture of friendship on his part.

**SW:** Have you worked with any other voice over artists who did work for Gerry Anderson's series?

**PG:** I have known a bunch of them in my voice over work.

John Bluthal from *Fireball XL5* was a good friend. It took very little prompting to get a visit from Professor Matt Matic. I have great memories of diving around Sydney in John's convertible with him doing full dialogue from the show.

I used to see Robert Easton, the voice of Phones and X from *Stingray*, all the time at a local bookstore. I had first met him and his wife in Australia and been a tour guide for them, and of course I would beg for some Phones from him...who wouldn't?

Robert told me that an English fan had come to interview him about the show and he was very touched by that...mind you, he was also a tad pissed off about never getting paid for the TV21 mini albums back in the day...



from left to right: John Bluthal; Charles Tingwell; Ray Barrett; Robert Easton





Peter Greenwood in the King of QUEENS

**PG:** I had worked with Lucasfilm on *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* merchandising so that was the first visit. The second was to follow up on some friendships from that, and I fell into working with Art Clokey on the new *Gumby* animated shows.

From there I went to Disney and *The Rescuers Down Under*, and more...

**SW:** Tell us about what you're working on now.

**PG:** I have been working on *My Favorite Martian*, the sixties TV show, for six years, doing toys, DVD releases, books and more. Also the

I also worked with Charles Tingwell, who was another Anderson voice (mainly *Thunderbirds* and *Captain Scarlet*). He regretted not running off with one of the prop models while he had the chance. He visited the stages and was fascinated by the effects work. He bought his kids all the Dinky toys – he was very impressed with the design work on these shows.

Some of the technical guys from *Thunderbirds* also ended up in Australia. I met a Supermarionation control panel operator named Michael, whose last name I don't remember...he is pictured in an article on the making of *Thunderbirds*. He controlled the gain knobs for the marionettes' mouth movements, which was no mean feat. He told me the hardest mouth to control was the stuttering Brains – it required a very light touch to get it right.

**SW:** How did you wind up in the US?

company's lost science fiction comedy show from 1964 called *My Living Doll*, with *Batman's* Julie Newmar. At the same time I have been working on a 1958 western show called *The Rifleman* (perhaps the inspiration for Gerry Anderson's *Four Feather Falls*) and some other classic shows that I can't discuss quite yet.

I have also been doing some consulting for a toy company on reissuing some early sixties TV and film related toys.

Next year I hope to be back directing again on a couple of projects as well. I honestly love classic sixties television.

**SW:** What qualities do you bring to your work in researching and licensing classic series?

**PG:** When I produce a DVD or book or toy I have a very intense sense of needing to get it right. If you



above: the Seinfeld plaque

have a show that has been around for over forty years and is beloved by many, then you should never take short cuts. Stay true to the elements of the show, respect the fans and the original crew who gave us all these special series.

**SW:** What are your thoughts on possible future remakes of *Thunderbirds*, or any of the other Gerry Anderson series?

**PG:** The Anderson shows are a wonderful part of my childhood, and clearly I am a huge fan of them and their art direction and voice work. I still fear remakes of any of these great series, unless the people responsible respect the originals as I do.

**SW:** Speaking of remakes and respecting the originals...I see in Ned's notes that he heard through the International Rescue Agent grapevine that you tried to talk to Jonathan Frakes in advance of his departure for England to direct the critically and commercially panned 2004 live action movie *Thunderbirds*.

**PG:** Yes. Before the film went into production I was working with the Roddenberry estate doing retro merchandising design (this was at the time of "*Star Trek: Enterprise*"). When it was announced that Jonathan Frakes was to direct, I had the contact info for his business office and like the concerned *Thunderbirds* fan I remain, I tried to arrange a meeting before he left for filming.

I was scared — as it turned out, rightly so — that he would not "get" the huge amount of history and lore that surrounded *Thunderbirds* and go in a direction contrary to the best interests of the franchise.

I had seen that done to another childhood favorite and I wanted to try to use any cache of power I had at the time to give him a lifelong fan's professional perspective on the characters and ethics of the show. I must have tried seven or eight times to reach out, offering my credentials in the field...but the arrogant non-reply told me that we were in for a bumpy ride on this project. I wanted to be wrong for certain, but the end result bore out my worst fears.

For me, perhaps the worst line in that pathetic blunderfest was "I want to be a Thunderbird!" That's sort of like, in *Star Trek* terms, having a character say "I want to be a starship!" Honestly, for an actor like Frakes, who was surrounded by fans who were passionate about detail...he was phoning that one in.

A year later I was consulting on another science fiction franchise...and they had a short list of directors. One of whom was Frakes, who was campaigning for the gig. Well, needless to say I strongly advised against this, on the grounds of what had happened to *Thunderbirds* and the strange direction it took. Did my advice lose him that job? Perhaps not — but when he didn't get it, it felt like some small vindication for the horrible treatment *Thunderbirds* suffered at his hands.

*Thunderbirds* has stood the test of time, even surviving a poor anime version and an ill-conceived attempt at live action bumper packaging...you can damage it for a year or two but the quality of the show will allow it to bounce back a few more times, I think!

**SW:** Thanks so much for your time, Peter. It's been fun! One last question...our boss, Ned Cook, was wondering when his long-rumored action figure was going to be available in stores?

**PG:** I'm sorry...who?

**SW:** Ah, he gets that a lot. Don't worry, we won't tell him you said that.

For the first time ever, Figures Toy Company presents:

# MY FAVORITE MARTIAN

Retro action figures featuring Ray Walston as "Uncle Martin"

"MY FAVORITE MARTIAN" enacts the running adventures of a Martian professor who is marooned on Earth until he can repair his little spaceship. He is living with Tim O'Hara, a young reporter, he poses as Tim's Uncle Martin who is something of an inventor. Tim is going to help Uncle Martin get the things he needs to repair his ship, and in return, Uncle Martin will help Tim. And he can be very helpful to a young reporter, because he has the Martian ability to read minds, project his thoughts, move objects by concentration of his mental energies, and... when he raises his antennae, which are the only outward difference between him and us ordinary humans... he can become invisible.

Uncle Martin is a professor of Anthropology, specializing in our backward planet - and he knows a great deal of our history because he has visited here many times, especially in the last two or three hundred years.

Uncle Martin speaks all the major languages of his planet, including those of all animals. And when the dogs of the neighborhood find out they can tell him their troubles, he's constantly involved in their problems.

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# THUNDERBIRDS

## IN THE TV CENTURY 21 COMICS

Norm de Plume

TV CENTURY 21 #110 - 117 (25 February 2067 - 15 April 2067)

### Thunderbirds: "The Bereznik Zoo Rescues," aka "The Trapped Spy"

Written by Alan Fennell (?); Illustrated by Frank Bellamy

#### TV21 #110

U.S.S. Agent 39 breaks in to the Bereznik Zoo, which he knows is really a front for "Bereznik's most secret experimental research station," and steals some papers from a safe. On his escape, he is discovered and shot at whilst stealing a ground vehicle.

Now, I have not told you he used a jet pack to fly up several floors of the building in the zoo (?), and uses it to land again after the job, but then...I think you can see where I'm going with this. He is chased and holes up in a cave, only to be trapped when a shot from the enemy sends the cave entrance crashing, trapping the spy, sorry, agent. Meanwhile, we must note that when the Bereznik soldiers fired at him, some shots smashed into the administration building and "the main defense mechanism is triggered... a steel shield slides upwards." We won't know the significance of this until later.

The agent calls home and the next thing we see is Commander Shore (from *Stingray*) and what looks to be Commander Zero (from *Fireball XL5*), and others on the World Security Council in Washington [below] discussing the "one organization that can rescue before the Bereznik troops reach him." Admiral Dante calls International Rescue and assures Jeff that the World Air Force will provide cover, but Jeff Tracy states firmly "IR is an organization sworn to neutrality, under no circumstances can it become involved in political problems. Your request for help is refused!"

For those who are new to these reviews, there was a code at the bottom of a lot of pages of TV21, and this week's *Thunderbird* page code translates to "ALL PICTURES [sic] OF U.S.S. AGENTS ARE ARTIST'S IMPRESSIONS ONLY". If I was a U.S.S. agent, I would be worried leaving my safety in the hands of the code makers!

#### TV21 #111

Now, when I said I wouldn't trust myself to the U.S.S., this issue highlights what a nasty bunch they could be. Strangely the seating order of the World Security Council changes in Bellamy's first panel. Between Shore and Zero is, we learn in the next few panels, the U.S.S. Chief. Perhaps Bellamy didn't feel he needed to take a Polaroid of this last episode for that purpose. It's known that, in common with many artists of that era, Bellamy would take snapshots of his art in case it got lost *en route* to the publisher, and to ensure he had some evidence, presumably for his portfolio, and to reference for week by week episodes. Imagine if he had *Thunderbird One* crashing in the last panel, and then the following week showed it hale and hearty!

Back to the story, Katania, the daughter of the Bereznik dictator, is going to be visiting the very site from which our agent grabbed the documents! And the plan is to force International Rescue's hand into rescuing the dictator's daughter, because, believe it or not, two agents have parachuted into Bereznik to plant, wait for this, "poison gas time bombs," and U.S.S. will arrange for the sheath covering the building to be jammed up and the bombs will be set off.

Now, why they couldn't just rescue their agent, as they are so clever, I don't know! The gas bombs are placed, the steel sheath controls are jammed (by whom?), and the dictator's daughter is trapped in the building at exactly the right time. The plan goes ahead and John in *Thunderbird Five*

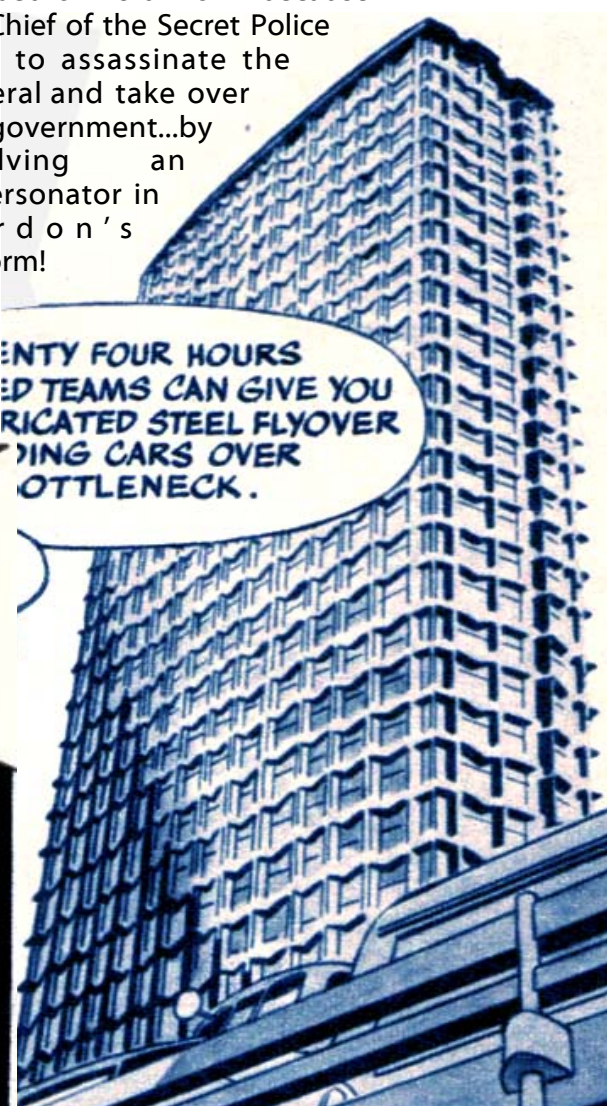
informs his dad that Bereznik are calling for assistance and the U.S.S. are warning that, if their agent is not recovered, they will shoot down anyone crossing the border!

World Air Force jets are scrambled (looking very like those drawn previously by Bellamy), and Jeff sends Virgil to take Gordon to "the Baltic," and then Virgil will return and take the Mole (guess what that's for?) and "Pod 3," and then head for the Bereznik-Russian border – thus placing the dictator's country fairly clearly in Eastern Europe. Code: THUNDERBIRD FOUR HEADING FOR BEREZNIK COASTLINE (another clue to its likely location)

#### TV21 #112

We see various shots of the building in this episode and it resembles, interestingly, 1960s tower blocks and the Bellamy-illustrated Centrepont (New Oxford Street, London) in the Sunday Times in 1970 [below].

Things are hotting up now as *Thunderbird Two* is followed by World Air Force jets, and Virgil tells his father he'd be happier if "you informed the U.S.S. we are going to rescue their man." But Jeff explains he can't as General Berenora, the Bereznik dictator, would allow his daughter to die if Gordon didn't get a chance to explain Jeff's plan to him! If that was not complex enough for my little 10 year old mind, Gordon arrives and is promptly locked up and stripped of his uniform because the Chief of the Secret Police aims to assassinate the General and take over the government...by involving an impersonator in Gordon's uniform!





Now things get silly. Gordon, in a prison coverall, communicates with his Dad (where did he hide the communicator? He needs to be careful in prison doing things like that!), and Jeff tells Scott to start the rescue of Katania and tell the President their plan. Doesn't Jeff realise Gordon couldn't achieve this aim? Why does he think Scott will? Scott calls the President and gets no reply! Meanwhile, we see the assassin creeping up behind the President in his newly acquired IR uniform and.... you'll have to wait till next week to find out!

Interestingly this week's code is non-existent [below]. The Editor obviously sacked the codemaker for all his (more likely than 'her' in the Sixties) gaffs, and published the advert for the current TV21 Spring Extra instead. That featured art by Don Harley, Brian Lewis and others in *Thunderbirds* stories – but as I'm concentrating on Frank Bellamy's run of stories I'm saying no more!

The cover page of issue 112 features a 'press release' about Gordon and states at the end "It seems that International Rescue have become involved in the political wrangles that have plagued the World Government-Bereznik relations over the past ten years. TV21 hopes that the rescue organisation will successfully escape being 'used' by either government."

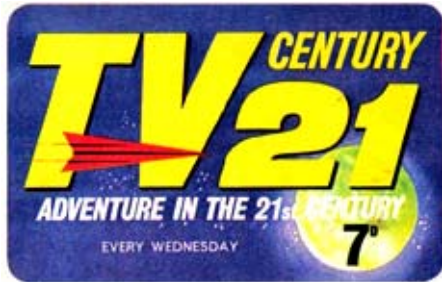
Serious political commentary here for a children's comic. Interestingly, in the world of 1967 on March 6<sup>th</sup>, Stalin's daughter, Svetlana, requested political asylum in the United States, so dictators' daughters were in the news in 2067 and 1967!

TV21#113

The first three panels give a resumé of the complex story, and we learn the name of the Bereznik Chief of Secret Police – Colonel Tobolsk, whose assassin approaches the dictator. That is until *Thunderbird One* manages to get the latter directly on the phone! Why couldn't Gordon have tried and saved getting caught, etc? Scott's warning is perfectly timed, and he asks the head of state if perhaps he'll trust IR to free the agent without endangering Bereznik security.

Now, if I was the big boss of Bereznik, my daughter would be the thing I wanted to hear about, not the U.S.S. agent. Virgil can hear these conversations (still with WAF planes following him) and lands. If you haven't fallen asleep yet, you might be wondering why the planes didn't fire on *Thunderbird Two*? Perhaps in the gutter between the comic panels someone explained to the World Air Force that they were rescuing both the agent and the daughter? And what on Earth was Jeff's plan that he was so secretive about? Maybe we'll find out in the next four episodes, because I hope it wasn't "we're going to rescue your daughter and the agent," as I don't think Bereznik's leader is that dumb.

*Thunderbird Two* releases the Mole to do its work, whilst Scott comes in to land in a lovely typical Bellamy shot where we see the craft outlined with reflected light and the background is obscured, as it would be, due to the blinding flash of *Thunderbird One* landing. Scott hears the General explain that the metal sheath over the building can't be accessed underground, as the trench it sits in is steel lined (anyone notice the Mole cuts through metal in other episodes?). Scott looks at the hydraulic arms and the General commands his scientists to look at disabling them. Meanwhile, Brains explains two hydraulic jacks could create a bend for Scott to slip into. So off Scott goes and asks the General for six jacks and his lackeys arrive with two! The last panel shows the jack slipping after having successfully wedged an opening for Scott.



UNIVERSE EDITION 116 DATELINE: April 8, 2067



STOP PRESS  
Jump Skates  
to be won!  
SEE GREAT  
COMPETITION  
PAGE 19



THUNDERBIRDS BLAST  
BEREZNIK PRISON

IN the most fantastic rescue of the century, *Thunderbird 1* today smashed aside the defences at the dreaded Bereznik state prison and rescued TB4's aquanaut, Gordon Tracy from certain death.

According to agency reports it was late afternoon in Bereznik's capital city as *Thunderbird 1* swooped from a clear blue sky and attacked the prison.

Almost immediately the International Rescue craft came under heavy small-arms fire, but, ignoring the bullets, TB1's pilot swung his sleek craft into the prison yard, blasted aside the walls to Gordon's cell and pulled the captured aquanaut to safety.

In the ensuing battle, Colonel Tobolsk, head of the Bereznik Secret Police was killed.

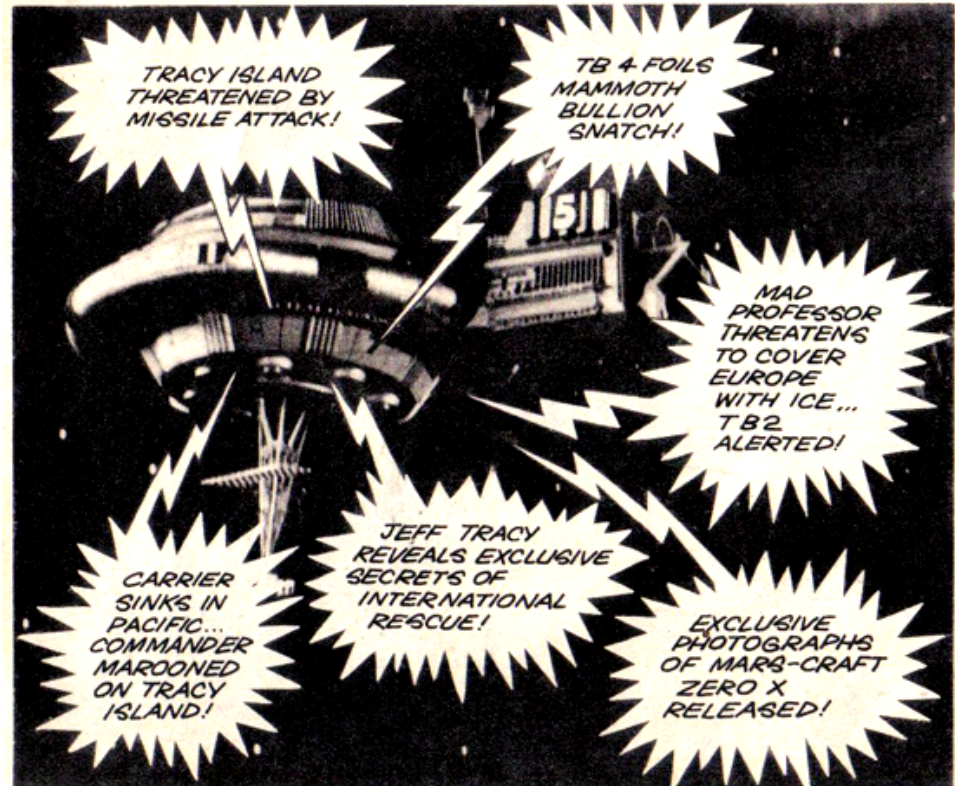
Press agency sources claim that *Thunderbird 1*, 2 and 4 are now heading for the Bereznik-Russian border.

(See pages 10/11 for full report.)

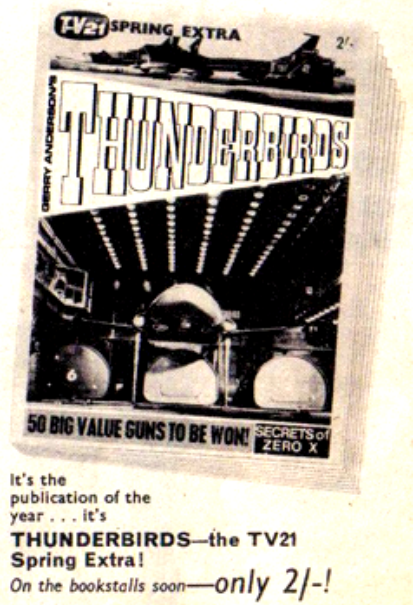
CORGI MODEL  
CLUB NEWS  
EVERY WEEK  
PAGE 19



ATTENTION ALL THUNDERBIRDS FANS!



Read these terrific, action-packed picture stories and features! Get the real truth about the conquest of space! Laugh with the Munsters and My Favourite Martian! 48 pages—12 of them in **FULL COLOUR!**



It's the publication of the year... It's **THUNDERBIRDS—the TV21 Spring Extra!**  
On the bookstalls soon—only 2/-!

TV21#114

The two guards help Scott prepare to enter the crack, and we see the slipping jack finally spring out of the crack and hit a parked tank. The steel sheath springs back into position, cutting Scott's lifeline. He manages to grab one of the hydraulic arms and lets the General above know he is going to fix the explosives, giving Scott five minutes to get clear. He climbs the gap by pressing his back to one side and shuffling upwards, and the guards have subsequently replaced the jacks, which in a long shot have multiplied to three. Scott is whipped out of the gap by a vehicle and the explosion happens in true Bellamy colour.

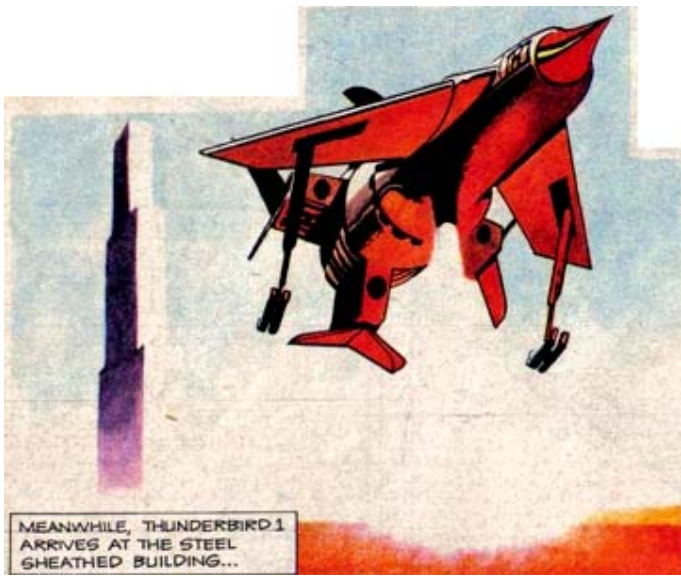
Bereznik helijets move in quickly to save the Generals' daughter in a great panel by Bellamy, showing a worm's-eye view. Scott is thanked by Katania, and he explains International Rescue will rescue all people, even enemies of the state. Katania looks like the spitting image of Nancy Bellamy, Frank's wife. We then see *Thunderbird Two* and the Mole with dented blades.

The code states ALL HOPE OF RESCUING U.S.S. AGENT SEEMS LOST. Did you ever give a second thought to how TV21 news got their information? Obviously we are told every week that "Pictures are relayed by International Rescue Authority from TB5", but that doesn't explain the editorial "all hope lost".

TV21#115

This double page spread is one of those that looks great in the comic...but fantastic in the original! The colours sing! Take a look at the desert sky in the opening panel; the perspective of the Research Building with Scott 'in shot'; the under glow on *Thunderbird One's* exterior; the out of focus background (a neat trick that Bellamy, and many others, use by not delineating anything but the foreground object, in this case, *Thunderbird One*); the figures shooting at *Thunderbird One*, and the beautiful images of a worm's-eye view of *Thunderbird One*. The only criticism I have is what a shame the Chief of the Secret Police looks so similar to the Hood – enough to confuse a young reader...but not me, of course! Finally have a look at the fact there are only six 'narration' panels (those things at the top of a panel which are not speech), and the dialogue is kept to a minimum towards the end. Very unusual





Back to the plot: As the Mole has been dented, Brains pulls out the underground charts and discovers (just now?) that the site of the agent's cave is in mountains riddled with underground streams...therefore..."We need Gordon and *Thunderbird Four*", says Jeff, speaking the blindingly obvious. Scott needs to find in which cell, and where, his younger brother is held, and the assassin is very helpful – under threat of death. At this point I suggest you look at the pictures, because if Alan Fennell, editor of TV21, didn't think speech balloons were needed, I don't think Ned will mind me being quiet

#### TV21#116

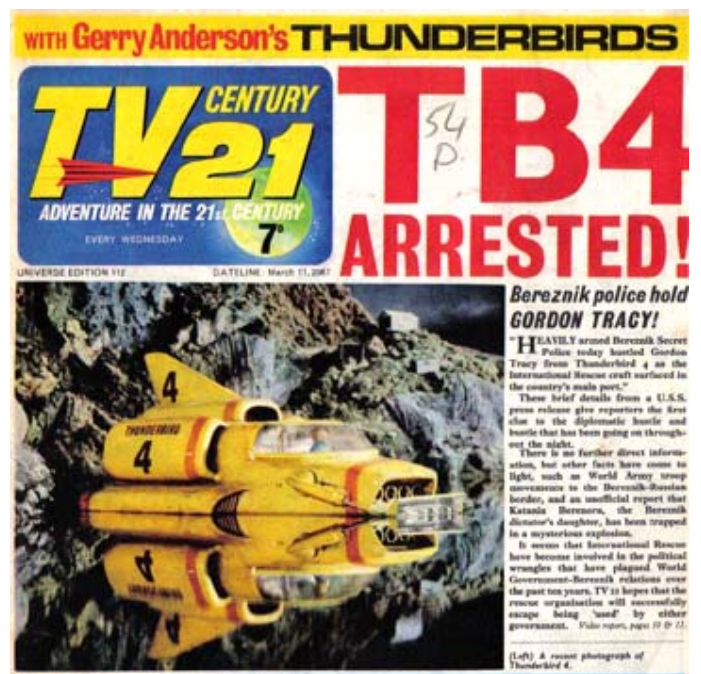
Gordon is quickly winched aboard and Scott decides "to give them something to think about," and we see people obviously dying or very hurt as a result of him firing at the prison block. The comic strip doesn't tell you this, but the newsflash on TV21's cover states: "Jeff Tracy has made it clear [...] *Thunderbird 1* has been ordered to carry out the mission regardless of risk". I thought Jeff said something about "IR is an organization sworn to neutrality, under no circumstances can it become involved in political problems."

I would imagine this has guaranteed the General will stay in power a bit longer, as what looks to be his most high-ranking nemesis is out of action. And if you doubt the Colonel is dead, read the cover of TV21#116 which states: "In the ensuing battle, Colonel Tobolsk, head of the Bereznik Secret Police was killed." And Scott does it again, admittedly not lethally (as far as we can see), firing rockets to scare off the gunboats. Soon Scott is aboard *Thunderbird Four*. *Thunderbird One* and *Thunderbird Two* appear near the trapped agent's location, and next we see *Thunderbird Four* leave the pod and someone says "Okay boys, we're on our way." The next panel sees us looking at Virgil in the backseat of *Thunderbird Four* with Scott and Gordon in the foreground, giving the impression Scott might be in control. The boys get out via an underground cave and set 'neutron charges'; and the explosion causes such a rush of water that *Thunderbird Four* is grounded!

#### TV21#117

The action hots up as Gordon stays with *Thunderbird Four* whilst Virgil and Scott start digging for the agent. They recover him just in time, as the cave starts to crumble under the pressure of the water. They run, but before getting to *Thunderbird Four*, they have to hold their breath and swim with the flood. Safely outside, the men and *Thunderbird Four* encounter a "unit of World Government troops" who enquire after the Bereznik papers. Scott, I presume has carried out Jeff's secret plan and destroyed them. Again I question Jeff's commitment to staying neutral, but these moral dilemmas never were my strong point. But does Jeff's plan make any sense? If he decided that Scott should destroy the papers and let the dictator know, then surely he wouldn't be happy. And if he told the security forces, then they wouldn't then be asking for the papers. Am I missing something?

Mission accomplished, the Thunderbird craft fly off into the sky. The code: A NEW THUNDERBIRDS ADVENTURE BEGINS NEXT WEEK.





# NEVER GIVE UP...

## International Rescue's Motto Pays Off for *Thunderbirds* Author Joan Marie Verba



*Most of you know that the motto of International Rescue is "Never Give Up, No Matter What the Cost." In this issue, Ned Cook's NTBS Newsflash brings you an interview with author and publisher Joan Marie Verba, who had to take those words pretty seriously while in pursuit of a license to publish officially sanctioned, original young adult novels based on Thunderbirds. Her efforts paid off: her company, FTL Publications, now has seven Thunderbirds novels currently in print and we've asked her to tell us all about it!*

**NCNTBSNF:** Joan, welcome to Ned Cook's NTBS Newsflash! Thank you for agreeing to be a part of our Christmas 2012 edition.

You studied physics at the University of Minnesota and attended the graduate school of astronomy at Indiana University. You've also been a computer programmer. How did you get from there to being a writer and owner of your own publishing company, FTL Publications? Was that something you saw coming or did it happen completely by accident?

**JMV:** When I was in school, I did well in writing classes. One of my English teachers even enrolled me in a national writing contest for high school students (I didn't get an award, however). I was writing for my own amusement even in elementary school.

However, I knew that most writers didn't make a living wage from writing. I've been interested in science (in general) and astronomy (in particular) since second grade, so that is what I majored in for college and graduate school. Jobs for scientists were difficult to get at the time I graduated, so I took computer programming classes and got a job as a programmer.

In the 1970s, I joined an amateur press association and was one of the most prolific contributors (nonfiction writing). My first published short story was in a fanzine in 1973. I sold my first professional magazine article and my first professional short story in 1984.

I self-published my first book in 1996 ("Boldly Writing") when no other publisher would take it. After that, I started publishing additional books, either by contracting with other authors or by publishing my own works.

**NCNTBSNF:** What was your first writing project?

**JMV:** I remember writing a short story for a class project in fifth grade, and another short story as a class project as a senior in high school.

**NCNTBSNF:** You've written fiction and nonfiction. Which is more challenging for you? Do you have a preference?

**JMV:** Nonfiction is based on fact, and therefore once the facts are gathered, it's just a matter of writing them in a readable format. With fiction, the characters, plot, situations, and settings have to be made up. I don't have a preference; I enjoy writing whatever I'm interested in.

**NCNTBSNF:** When did you first see *Thunderbirds*? What were your first impressions of the show?

**JMV:** I first saw *Thunderbirds* in the 1960s. However, it was shown in my area as a "fill-in" after sports events, so I don't recall ever seeing a complete episode. It was always "joined in progress." I found it memorable enough to purchase the boxed set in 2003 so that I could see all episodes in their entirety.

**NCNTBSNF:** Do you have a favorite character in the show? A favorite Thunderbird machine? Why?

**JMV:** Jeff Tracy is my favorite character since he's about my age. I find *Thunderbird 2* to be the most memorable of the vehicles, probably because of its design and its versatility.

**NCNTBSNF:** Do you have any other favorite Anderson series?

**JMV:** I love *Supercar*. I watched all episodes in the 1960s and purchased the boxed set in the early 2000s so that I could watch them again.

**NCNTBSNF:** *Thunderbirds* has been an international icon for almost five decades, and every time it's rereleased it gains new fans. Why do you think the show and its characters have such lasting appeal?

**JMV:** There's a depth to it. Gerry and Sylvia Anderson report that it was meant for both adults and children to watch, and that they inserted details in the show

that would appeal to both audiences. I also find the concept appealing. It has an altruistic viewpoint: making personal sacrifices in order to help people in trouble.

**NCNTBSNF:** Let's talk about your *Thunderbirds* novels. You managed to get the rights owners to grant you a license to produce original novels based on the series for the American market. How did that come about? Can you tell us what that process was like?

**JMV:** After I watched the DVDs in 2003, I thought I might attempt to get a license to publish novels based on the series. I called Carlton in early 2004, but they said they were in the process of being acquired by Granada Ventures and to wait six months and call Granada Ventures. I began calling Granada Ventures in autumn 2004. It took me until December to find the appropriate party in licensing to discuss a contract with. These discussions went on for a period of three years before my license became final on November 30, 2007.

**NCNTBSNF:** You've published six *Thunderbirds* novels so far that you've written yourself, and one by another author. Tell us a little about them and where we can find them.

**JMV:** Each novel has a primary viewpoint character: *Countdown to Action* is Jeff Tracy's novel. It's about the origins of International Rescue and takes the reader from when Jeff Tracy met his wife to the events just prior to "Trapped in the Sky." I felt the origin story needed to concentrate on the tremendous effort needed to set up an organization such as International Rescue and the sacrifices each member of the team had to make in order to participate.

*Action Alert* is Scott Tracy's novel. I see Scott as a highly motivated, high-intensity character and during the course of the novel, Scott drives himself almost to his limits so that near the end of the novel, he starts making less-than-optimum choices. (In the end, Jeff concludes that he needs to give the IR team members more rest between rescues, whenever possible.) There's also a subplot where Kyrano enters the World Chef contest.

*Deadly Danger* is Virgil Tracy's novel. International Rescue encounters a technical expert who is trying to make his own high-tech machines and put together a team similar to International Rescue. Unfortunately, this character also has no qualms about lying, cheating, and stealing to meet his goals. The expert makes a lot of blunders that International Rescue has to clean up, and obligates the IR team to put a stop to him. Throughout the novel, between rescues, Virgil continues to work on his paintings and his music. I also show Virgil as a body-builder and the physically strongest member of the team.

*Situation: Critical* is John Tracy's novel. The novel starts out with John discovering an extrasolar planet, and he finds, as a result, that Earth is about to be showered with meteors, including two large enough to cause a planetary catastrophe. At the same time, there's also a world financial crisis in which banks are being tampered with. Here I show John's expertise in the areas of astronomy and finance.

*Extreme Hazard* is Gordon Tracy's novel. I show Gordon as not only an aquatics expert, but also as a weapons expert and practical joker (he plays at least one practical joke in every novel I wrote). There are deadly weapons being made and distributed by illicit arms dealers, which pose a potential threat to International Rescue. Jeff relies primarily on Gordon's expertise to stop them.

*Danger Zone* is Alan Tracy's novel. Tin-Tin is also featured. This story is centered on a discovery that the International Rescue team makes while in the





process of searching for a lost air ambulance. They find a mysterious aircraft in the desert. Alan, Tin-Tin, and Brains spend much of the novel (between Alan's auto racing competitions and the usual number of rescues) analyzing the aircraft despite Jeff's objections that they're wasting their time.

**Arctic Adventure**, Anthony Taylor's novel, is about Brains. Brains teams up with a British aviation company in order to test a stealth prototype on its experimental plane. The plane is shot down on its first test flight by a hostile power that wants to confiscate the plane and the stealth system. Brains and the test pilot are trapped in the wreckage and it's a competition to see whether International Rescue or the hostile power can get to Brains first.

The novels can be found at:

FTL Publications <http://www.ftlpublications.com> (shopping cart) <http://shop.ftlpublications.com/>; Amazon.com; FabGear USA: <http://fabgearusa.com/>; Star Trader: [http://new.startrader.co.uk/acatalog/Star\\_Trader\\_Novels\\_322.html](http://new.startrader.co.uk/acatalog/Star_Trader_Novels_322.html)

**NCNTBSNF:** Your *Thunderbirds* novels all have covers illustrated by Steve Kyte, who worked on several issues of "Thunderbirds: The Comic" during the 1990s with editor (and former *Thunderbirds* original series and TV21 Comics writer) Alan Fennell. Steve is also well known to *Thunderbirds* fans as the illustrator of the Hamilton *Thunderbirds* Collectible Plates. How did you come to work with Steve on your project?

**JMV:** Steve was my first choice to work on the covers. Once I got my license, I started asking around and the first person I contacted had Steve's email address. When I asked him if he would be willing to do the covers, he responded with an enthusiastic yes, he would be happy to do ALL of them!

With each cover, I told Steve which character I wanted on the cover. Sometimes Steve had the cover ready before I wrote the story, in which case I tried to write a scene that matched the cover (this happened with "Action Alert," for example). Other times I had the story and told Steve about items in the story that I wanted on the cover (this happened with "Danger Zone," for instance).

**NCNTBSNF:** Does your background in physics, astronomy and computers help with some of your storylines?

**JMV:** Yes, because science and technology have always been important to the International Rescue operation. Astronomy was central to 'Situation: Critical' in particular, and I had an astronomer at Kitt Peak National Observatory check the story for scientific credibility. I also updated International Rescue for the novels—all the characters have laptops and the entire organization is even more dependent on computer technology than the original series showed.

**NCNTBSNF:** You have also written and published original works...tell us a little about those, too.

**JMV:** *Voyager: Exploring the Outer Planets* was my first nonfiction book. It is about the Voyager space probes and explains the discoveries scientists made using its sensors. It is currently available only as an ebook.

**Boldly Writing** is a *Star Trek* fan history, detailing the fan efforts to revive *Star Trek* after the original series was canceled, and also giving the development of *Star Trek* fan fiction. It's been cited in academic papers and I have had people tell me or email me that they used "Boldly Writing" as a reference in their Ph.D. dissertations.

*Sword of Queens* is a fantasy novel that I've just published this year (though I've been working on it for at least 15 years). It's an epic fantasy where a young woman finds a magical sword to use to defeat an evil overlord.

**NCNTBSNF:** What's your next project?

**JMV:** I have other novels written in manuscript. "The Coming War" and "Act of Succession" are post-apocalyptic novels. I have another fantasy novel in which a sorceress and her bodyguard set out to defeat an evil pretender. Those I hope to publish eventually.

**NCNTBSNF:** Joan, thank you for your time today. We have one more question, which we can't avoid because he's our boss. Ned Cook wonders when you will do a *Thunderbirds* novel with him as the viewpoint character?

**JMV:** Um...Ned Cook...? Hmm...that name does sound *vaguely* familiar, I think... \*Wink.\* Let me get back to you on that.

**NCNTBSNF:** FAB. \*Wink.\*

# Sam's POOLSIDE POINTERS

Samantha Winchester

Ned's taken off again.

I know, big surprise, huh? Sometimes I wonder how he ever got to be a famous globetrotting reporter. I mean, he trots, sure – especially after Burrito Thursdays at his favourite Mexican restaurant – and sometimes that trotting is global...but the closest thing I've seen him do to "reporting" is when he appears on the NTBS anchor desk, and even then his scripts are ghostwritten. And every time there's a big interview, Ned seems to vanish. Sure, sometimes we suspect the intervention of the Management (you know, those women in high heels on the 42<sup>nd</sup> floor), who might have something more important they need him to do – although it's more likely he's used up all his frequent flyer miles again and they don't want to spring for first class to Tokyo for the fifth time this year. But then there are the times when he just goes...*missing*, and we get mysterious diary entries scratched on rolled up seaweed, packed in empty bean cans.

Hmmm. I wonder if it means anything that these strange absences seem to be happening much more frequently since Bondson came on board..?

Naah. That's just silly.

Anyway, all Trixie knows is that Ned told her he was on the trail of his biggest scoop ever. And she doesn't think he was referring to the quart of Chunky Monkey he keeps in the Newsroom refrigerator. At least, not this time – not after she found a bunch of receipts in his desk drawer for things like fur lined parkas, those vacuum bags you can suck the air out of so your clothes stay dry on camping trips, and snow shoes. I didn't even know Ralph Lauren made snow shoes.

Oh, well, I suppose we'll find out where he's gone eventually. But in the meantime, while I'm enjoying the Ned Free Zone that is currently the pool on Tracy Island, let's have a little fun with the English language. Nobody wants to work hard this close to the holidays, so I've assembled a selection of some of the language slips and stumbles I've come across in stories over the past few months.

## Ho Ho Ho!

### Holiday Homophones and Merry Misspellings!

A "homophone" is a word that sounds the same as another word, but doesn't mean the same thing at all. All of these writers in the examples below could have saved themselves some embarrassment by simply taking a couple of minutes to look up the words they were unfamiliar with. Spellcheck won't catch a word that is spelled right, even if the word itself doesn't mean what you intended it to!

*Gordon's job this Thanksgiving, which he was sure his brothers wanted him to do so it would get him off the island and so out of trouble, was to take Grandma to the mainland to buy a new turkey friar.*

**Homophone.** Now, I've heard of a number of Catholic orders that have friars, but this is a new one! And although they accept donations, I'm not sure you could actually buy one... The word here should have been *fryer*, as in an aluminium or stainless steel pot that a turkey can be fried in, traditionally outside, with the help of a propane burner. (Let's hope they have fire extinguishers standing by!)

*"You're going to be all right, John," the doctor told him. "We had to give you some stitches but there shouldn't be any scarring."*

**Misspelling.** Let's hope the wound wasn't that frightening for poor John! Of course the writer meant *scarring*, as in leaving a visible mark on the skin after healing.

*"So, Virgil, you want to stop by the Thai Palace before we go? I know it's not very Christmassy, but you like their jazz men rice..."*

**Homophone.** When I first read this sentence I thought perhaps the writer was saying that the restaurant featured live music, specifically jazz. Or maybe the restaurant was owned by musicians... Then it dawned on me that she actually meant *jasmine* rice, which is commonly found on the menu at Thai eateries. This is a clear case of hearing a word and not knowing how it's spelled, and instead of looking it up, guessing. Guessing wrong, in this case!

*"On my way, Father!" Scott stood up and went to the wall scones that were the controls for his secret entrance to*

*Thunderbird 1's hanger.*

**Homophone and Misspelling.** This one's a two-fer! I was so busy giggling at the mental picture of the Tracy Island lounge having "scones" stuck to the walls that I completely missed the homophone later in the sentence at first. "Scones," as most of us know, are a kind of bready cake that you traditionally eat in England with tea. What the writer meant here was *sconces*, which are light fixtures.

And the homophone? This one produced even funnier mental pictures of Thunderbird 1 suspended from the ceiling by a great big wire hook – a "hanger." The word should have been *hangar*, which is a large structure usually built to house aircraft or space vehicles.

I've seen the same problem in reverse when people erroneously refer to a "cliffhanger" as a "cliffhangar," which radically changes the meaning! The first is an exciting conclusion to a chapter in a story – or sometimes a book in a series – designed to make you want to read on to find out what happens. The second, well...I'm not sure what that would look like, but my mind conjures up visions of a large concrete building suspended over the edge of a cliff...

*"Watch your step, Scott," Virgil warned him. Scott looked down and saw that the floor was covered in tangled electrical chords.*

**Homophone.** This one is oddly fitting, given Virgil's love of music, but the writer didn't intend us to think that the floor was covered with harmonic sets of notes like C major or A minor. What she really meant to say was electrical *cords*.

*"Your father is Jeff Tracy, right?" the woman asked. "The famous astronaut who's now an ex-patriot?"*

**Homophone.** Well, let's hope he's not an "ex-patriot," because that would mean he used to believe in and support his home country, but doesn't any more! I am willing to bet that the word the writer meant to use here is *expatriate*, often shortened colloquially to *expat*, meaning someone who now lives in another country than the one they were born in. It's often used to describe someone who maintains the citizenship of their former country, but not always.

*I knew help was on its way at last. I could hear the sound of Thunderbird 2's turbans in the distance.*

**Homophone.** I was very glad I wasn't drinking anything when I read this sentence, because it wouldn't have been good for my keyboard! I had an instant mental picture of Thunderbird 2 being manually powered by a large number of bearded Sikhs. Of course the writer didn't mean "turbans," which are a kind of headgear made from winding cloth. She meant *turbines*, as in the kind of engines used in most jet aircraft.

One last one...and I've saved the best for last...

*"I don't want to take all these wet clothes with us," Alan said. "Isn't there a laundry mat near here?"*

**Homophone.** Like the writer above who wrote "jazz men rice" instead of *jasmine* rice, this one obviously heard the word "*laundromat*," which (in the US, Canada and Australia at least) is a self-service laundry where you can use coin-operated washers and dryers, but didn't look it up to find out how it was spelled. So she guessed...once again, incorrectly.

As an aside, this particular word substitution wouldn't have been made by writers in the UK...because there, the word for a self-service laundry is "laundrette."

The North Pole?

Excuse me, I've just received a rather disturbing text on my iPhone 17. It's from Raoul in the NTBS Newsroom, and he says they've just gotten word from Ned. Or "Senor Kook," as he pronounces it...and I'm not always sure the pronunciation isn't deliberate. But anyway, Raoul says Ned is in the arctic, and he's heading for the North Pole to interview...*Santa*? The phone call was apparently a bit garbled, but Ned said something about having found a map in Bondson's pocket.

Hmm. Perhaps my sudden thought that Bondson has some connection with this wasn't so far out of line after all...

I must go and talk to Jeff and the boys about my suspicions. In the meantime, have a great holiday season, and do something nice for the writers among your family and friends...buy them a dictionary!



# you *CAN* get there from here ...but you need a plan!

Samantha Winchester

In all my years of editing and beta reading other writers' stories, as well as writing my own, the most common problem I've run into is the story that just "dries up."

This situation happens most often with longer works, especially those that are approaching novella or book length. The story starts with great promise, the writer really enthusiastic about their idea and having a lot of fun as the narrative unfolds before them like the track in front of a speeding train. Then, without warning, the roadblock arrives. It's as if the writer was happily following the red line in the MapQuest program of their imagination...and then all of a sudden there's nothing there in front of them but a blank, echoing white space. Confused and frustrated, the writer comes to a screeching halt, unable to figure out where to go from there.

Many of us know exactly what this feels like. And a great deal of us, sadly, will never complete the story that got derailed. It just sits there on our hard drive, mocking us - evidence, we're sure, that our muse just up and abandoned us in the middle of the job. *Slacker*.

The question I've learned to ask at this point is, "What was your original plan for the story?" Nine times out of ten, the answer is something like, "Oh, I didn't have one, I was just writing it as it came to me."

And right there is the cause of the problem. They didn't realize that what they had was an idea, not a story. They didn't have a beginning, middle and end...a plan. The story can't continue because it honestly doesn't know where it's going. It's as if instead of figuring out where she wanted to go that day, the writer just set out in her car and drove around. It might be interesting at first, but eventually she realizes that she's not going anywhere...or worse, she's now completely lost and doesn't know how to find the highway again.

When I bring up the idea of planning a story, I often get cries of, "No! I can't plan ahead, it ruins the story for me!" I counter by asking, "But are you always getting stuck, running out of steam in the middle? Then although you don't *want* to plan, you *need* to." Spontaneity is great, but it really only works for that small percentage of writers out there who have the ability to sit down and write a whole book just by following the inspiration that comes to them, working steadily forward on it every day. But they aren't the ones who wind up stuck in the middle of a promising story and can't figure out how to go on.

There is a way forward from here for those of us who keep getting stuck...if we are willing to develop a little discipline and stick with it. First, we must ask ourselves some questions. We must know what our story is about, and we must know if it is still at the idea stage or has developed into a complete narrative. How do we know which one we have? If we try to summarize the story in one sentence, which of these will it most closely resemble?

1. "Tin-Tin is secretly afraid of snakes."

2. "Tin-Tin, who is secretly afraid of snakes, must summon the courage to get past her fear to rescue Alan from a pit full of vipers before he dies of his wounds."

The first example is an idea, the second is a plan for a story. In the first example, all we know is that Tin-Tin is afraid of snakes. We don't have a setting to put that idea in, a way to present it to the readers, so at this point it's simply an observation about the character, something that we could mention in passing in another story. The second example is a very simple story outline. We know here what point we're making: love can conquer any fear, no matter how strong. We know the framework we're presenting the idea in: Tin-Tin must grow past her fear in order to save the man she loves. We know what the setting is: a pit full of vipers. We know what's happened to precipitate Tin-Tin's crisis: Alan has fallen into the pit. Now most of us will know right away what our ending is going to be: Tin-Tin will overcome her fear and find a way to save Alan. At this juncture we have pretty much all we need to start fleshing out our outline with more detail.

You'll notice I led that list above with knowing what point we're making with this story. I feel that's very important, because it gives our writing a universal theme, something all readers can identify with. They might not be Tin-Tin, or ever encountering a loved one falling into a pit of vipers, but they can identify with the central core of the story, which is love conquering fear. Ask yourself some questions before we start writing. What point am I making here? What question am I using these characters to answer? What problem will they have to solve, what test will I put them through? And how will they grow from the situation they encounter?

As you can see from the example above, when we have all that clear in our minds, we often know immediately what the ending of our story must be, because it's the natural outcome of the scenario we're dropping the character into. (Now we just have to ensure that our protagonist's way of dealing with the situation makes sense with what we already know of his character...but that's another article entirely!) Depending on the type of story we're writing, we might not have quite as clear a scenario as the example here with Tin-Tin and Alan. We might not know exactly what happens, or even where it happens, or how...but we must know the *concept* of how we want it to finish - the *kind* of scenario we want to write. When that's in place, we simply have to backtrack and fill in the blanks.

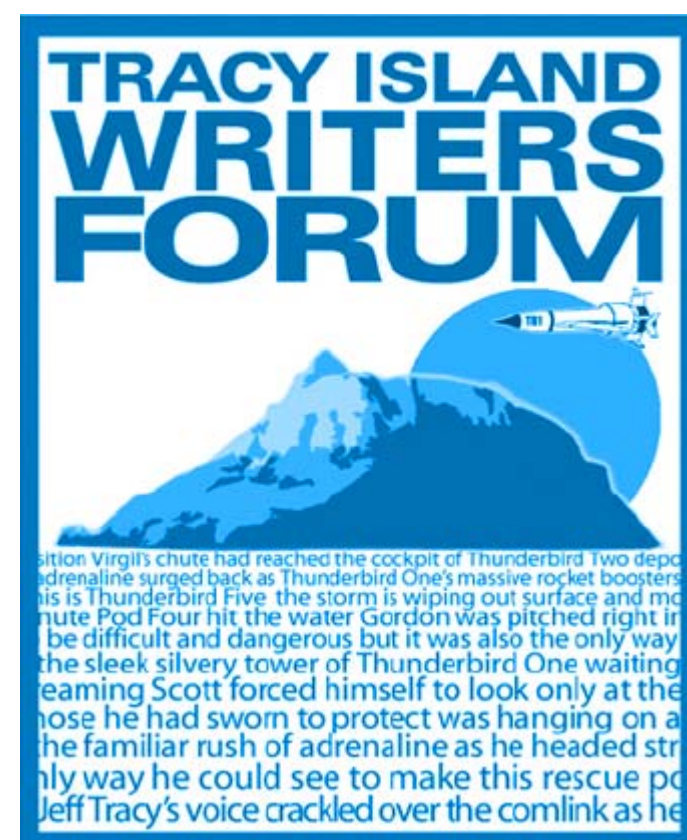
The outline can be as simple as a series of major plot points, moments in the action that guide us along, like pegs on a clothesline. Some people find that all they need to do is write a paragraph about the story, a sort of very loose synopsis that gives the beginning, the middle and the end. But remember that just as clothesline needs to be fastened to something at both ends to be useful, and a paragraph needs to begin with a capital letter and end with a period (full stop),

your story must start somewhere and end somewhere, and you must know with reasonable certainty where both of those points are.

It isn't necessary to include a huge amount of detail in your plan. In fact it's often a mistake to do that, because if you spend an exhaustive amount of time fleshing out every last little plot point, the danger is that you really do wind up feeling like you've already written the story. And that can kill your enthusiasm and ruin the whole experience. Keeping the outline loose also allows room for inspiration to strike. Often as we write, ideas come to us that might be better than the ones we wrote down on our plan to begin with. However, a warning here...we need to be aware of those times when our imagination pulls us off track, trying to get us to pursue a course of narrative that either doesn't work at all for the current story or is downright illogical. Now, we should never reject what the muse gives us, of course. We don't know that this sudden inspiration might not be useful down the road, so unless we're on a really tight deadline we can afford to keep writing and see where it goes. But when we're done with the detour, we should take a look back at our outline and see whether it really fits the story or not. If it doesn't, we can set it to one side and continue on toward our original destination. Sometimes our subconscious minds are just messing with us and trying to derail us from our purpose.

So here's the challenge. Open one of those stories that you got stuck on and never finished. Read it through, and as you do, try to look past the surface of the story to answer the questions I've posed in this article. Very much like one of those 3-D stereograms, where you have to look at it in just the right way to see the picture that's hidden under the surface, the true purpose of your story is waiting there for you to discover it. And when you do, write a summary that includes the beginning, middle and end, and then start work on your outline.

You might just find that you can finish that story after all.







# mr bondson opens his briefcase

Q&A WITH *THUNDERBIRDS* FANFIC AUTHOR **CATHRL**  
DECODED AND TRANSMITTED BY MCJ

*It's been a tough eight weeks for our stealthy little cookie, Bondson. Not only has he been skulking behind oak trees hot on the heels of a brand new lead for this month's author interview, he's also recovering from throwing himself out of a pink Rolls Royce, after the crazy blonde behind the wheel pulled over and "convinced" him to take a ride. Despite his hair-raising adventures this month, Bondson managed to zero in on another wonderful TIWF writer, the lovely Cathrl - who also lives in England and only short thirty miles from fellow writer, Jules.*

*Bondson finally caught up with Cathrl at the local Oxford ice rink.*

**Bondson:** Tell us all about yourself Cathrl and walk us through your typical day as such a busy person.

**CathRL:** Well, I'm a computer programmer with a husband and two teenage children, so a typical day involves work until about 4 (complete with sitting through traffic jams around Oxford), then when I get home I have to do online technical support for one of our products for about an hour if I'm unlucky, and then generally some sort of child-transporting to activities in the evening. Unless it's a weekend, at which point you'll generally find me on a rifle range somewhere coaching either Scouts or the national junior squad. I write in the gaps.

**Bondson:** What got you into writing and how did it extend to include *Battle of the Planets* and *Thunderbirds*?

**CathRL:** Apart from when I was very (very very) small, it's always included *Battle of the Planets*. I've been writing fanfic for it since I was eight. I didn't get involved in *Thunderbirds* until much later, when I was looking for something else to read. I tried Googling some of my favourite fanfic authors' names, and one of them was Samantha Winchester and the search pulled up "Secrets and Lies." I knew *Thunderbirds*, of course - I think everyone in England does - and the plot elephant sat firmly on my head and told me to get involved.

**Bondson:** Are you still writing in both fandoms and do you have a preference?

**CathRL:** Yes...and I'm afraid *Battle* is still my first love. But the Tracys exist in my *Battle* AU, so hopefully that's OK.

**Bondson:** As your friendly resident super-spy Bondson is paid to know everything so naturally he has uncovered that you have written a couple of crossovers. Did you find these hard to write successfully and would you mind sharing some tips for those of us keen to start?

**CathRL:** Crossovers are tricky anyway, but I started out writing mine knowing that my entire target audience (i.e. people active in both fandoms) consisted of Sam, Cricket and Ste. So I decided to try to write it such that people who knew only one of the fandoms could still enjoy it. I think that worked better from the *TB* side, because it's a standard *TB* plot for IR to go rescue people who aren't regular characters. The main problem was that there are just so many characters to juggle. Grandma and Kyrano missed out, I'm afraid.

One specific problem with these two fandoms was the different age groups of the characters. Alan, the "kid" of IR, is three years older than the senior members of G-Force. I felt that had to be addressed, not just ignored.

Crossovers in general? You need an excuse for them to happen at all. Mine was a line I'd written years earlier in a *Battle* fanfic, long before I got involved in *TB*. It was about how the first attempt to form G-Force involved crack USAF pilots. It failed simply because they were too old to adapt to the implanted technology required. At the time, that was a throwaway line in a fic...but when I got into *TB*, the first germ of an idea for my crossovers was a little voice in my head saying "one of those USAF pilots was Scott Tracy."

**Bondson:** I recently read a story of yours which was written for a TIWF Challenge entitled "Kiss a Brother." The name of the story was "Dinner Date". Can you tell us about how you crafted that story?

**CathRL:** I really don't do romance, so as soon as I saw "Kiss a Brother" I was thinking of ways to do it without it being a girlfriend for one of the boys. I honestly don't remember where the plot itself came from.

**Bondson:** Do you have a favourite character that you love to write?

**CathRL:** In *TB*, it's either John or Gordon. I like that they're both slightly outside of the main focus of the operation - John because he almost never gets to go on a rescue and Gordon because his speciality doesn't involve flying.

**Bondson:** What about a character you don't like to write? Do you have any suggestions on how you try to make that easier?

**CathRL:** In *TB*, it's either Kyrano or Grandma. To be honest, I make it easier by ignoring their existence as much as possible. I'll allude to their presence, but you won't be seeing a story written from their POV any time soon.

In *Battle*, it's Keyop, who is the "annoying kid" member of the team. If I was starting my story arc again, I'd do things differently. I'm painfully aware that, despite my retconning, it's still really very implausible that he'd be on the team. I should have made him the superpowered mathematician rather than Jason. As it is, again I tend not to feature him. He's there, but he's rarely the focus of a story.

**Bondson:** Which character, other than Jeff, do you think influences/impacts the most on the outcome of a rescue?

**CathRL:** Probably John. He's the filter for the information on which Jeff bases his decisions. If he gets it wrong, there may not be a rescue at all.

**Bondson:** What do you enjoy about the Tracy Island Writer's Forum and how can you see it growing further as it nears its 10th year of existence?

**CathRL:** I like having a place where people think the same way I do. Not exactly the same, of course, but it's one of very few places I've found online where writing is taken seriously but fanfic isn't sneered at.

I'm not sure about it growing. Maybe it's selfish, but I rather like that it's small enough to get to know everyone who posts.

**Bondson:** And now the part I know you've been waiting for - Bondson's little writing challenge and a subject very close to your heart. The POV is Jeff Tracy's and it's around 750 words. The subject is:-

**"I don't care what the situation is, Scott, Penny will never get me on skates again."**

**Cath's response:-**

He knew it was too sharp the moment the words left his mouth. Scott, IR field commander and a master of interpreting things people weren't saying, would never miss that one. None of the others hesitated in their conversations for a moment. Scott gave him a look which was just a fraction longer than casual, then headed for the drinks trolley. He returned with two double whiskies - Glenfiddich, Jeff's favourite - and handed one over.

"So, have you decided what to do about the X-17 test flight results? I'll take her up myself if you want, see if I can duplicate it."

And just like that, the topic was dropped. At least publicly.

\*\*\*

The party dragged on at least an hour after Jeff had had enough, just as they always did, but finally the last guest said their farewells and headed for the elevator, leaving the top floor entertainment suite of Tracy Industries to the Tracys.

"Thank goodness that's done for another year," said Gordon. "Dad, did you ever consider inviting someone new? I've heard all the jokes that your current top clients tell. Over and over again."

"See 'top clients'," said Virgil. "It's not that easy to build a business relationship with firms that size."

"He's just complaining that they're all aircraft manufacturers." That was Alan, over at the buffet counter making sure none of the canapés went to waste. Not that there was much food left. There were occasions when you didn't stint on quality, and entertaining a dozen or so of the most powerful and wealthiest men in the aerospace world was one of them.

"Hey!" Gordon complained, and the conversation turned to good-natured bantering, which they'd had a hundred times before.

Jeff left them to it and headed out onto the balcony. It was a warm summer's night and the city lights lay spread out far below them. To the east, the hills were silhouetted against the stars. To the west, the ocean was dark and still, just a couple of glittering light clusters out towards the horizon which must be cruise ships heading for harbour.

"On skates again?"

He almost dropped his glass. "Dammit, Scott, don't creep up on people!"

"Sorry." His eldest son didn't sound sorry. "You said 'on skates again'. I was thinking you didn't want to go back to a rink after last time, and I guess that's why Penny was trying to push it. But you were never on skates then. When did you last go skating? When did you ever go skating?"

"I..."

"Dad, if you're not comfortable -"

He laughed out loud. "Nothing like that, Scott. Just...it was something I shouldn't have done, and even now it could be embarrassing if it got out."

Scott gestured to a chair and pulled one up for himself. "It won't get out."

"When I joined NASA I left a real close group of colleagues. You know some of them - Tim Casey, Adam Crane. We were all moving on and up, and we said we'd get together every six months. We've done it, too. We take it in turns to arrange. Dinner and an activity."

These days the activity was more often a weekend of relaxation somewhere luxurious. Back then it had mostly been bowling.

"We never know what the activity will be, but we know one another, it's always fun. Anyway, about five years after we started, Tim was arranging it. As it happened, it was about a week after I'd been called into the NASA selection committee's office and told in confidence that I was on the shortlist for the moon. They had a good long list of activities I wasn't allowed to do without special authorisation. Contact sports. Scuba diving. Motor racing. Volunteering at hospitals which treat certain infectious conditions. Anything which made it more likely that the money they'd be spending training me would be wasted, basically."

"Ice skating?" asked Scott, sipping at his drink. "Tim's activity?"

"Yes and yes. And heck, what was I supposed to do? I couldn't not go on the ice without it being damn obvious something was going on. I couldn't tell them - no matter how much I trusted them sober, those evenings tended to end up..."

Scott had been an Air Force pilot. Scott nodded.

"I put the skates on, I tiptoed round that rink like my life depended on not falling over, I chatted up every pretty girl who was hanging onto the barrier that I could find and hoped your mother wouldn't find out before I could explain, and I hated every minute of it. And I got away with it. But if the gutter press found out, even now, that I broke my NASA contract almost before the ink was dry on it..."

Scott was the heir to Tracy Industries, too. He nodded a second time.

"I swore I'd never put skates on again. And I never have."

**Bondson:** It looks like there's a story in there somewhere for our resident reporter Ned Cook! Thanks for the interview CathRL.

**CathRL:** You're very welcome, Bondson. Stay away from that blonde in the Rolls Royce next time!

**If you would like to read more of CathRL's work, visit Thunderbird Two's Hanger at the Tracy Island Chronicles:**

<http://www.tracyislandchronicles.com/tb2/cathrl/cathrl.html>



## from the desk of Mrs Dirtydollar



Dear Mrs Dirtydollar

*Dear Mrs Dirtydollar - This year's winning TIWF Halloween challenge produced a story that not only inspired my imagination; it incorporated a mysterious and darker side of Thunderbirds. This is something that we rarely see. Could you please ask the author of the story to share what it took to write this piece?*

Pennyspy says :-

Thank you for your question, Mrs Dirtydollar. I'm extremely flattered that someone has been inspired by my work, and I'll do my best to explain how and why I write in this direction. In return, please explain how you feel it has influenced you, too!

To start, let's say that I like the Tracys to be written realistically, as grown men with foibles and drives and real physicality, and to be based in a believable universe - or at least a hyper-real one. Then, mix in my personal interest in the bizarre, and in horror movies, books and art, and everything at the darker end of the science fiction and fantasy spectrum. I first saw Thunderbirds at an impressionable age, and its odd blend of high technological fantasy, handsome heroes, and creepy bald guys whose eyes glowed when overexcited, drew me in completely.

The darkness within Thunderbirds was very quickly shaded in. The very first episode opens with a bizarre voodoo mind control ritual. We all remember Kyrano's tortured screams, leering evil idols, and sinister music. The Hood's monstrous fantasy abilities were slammed up hard against the highly polished gleam of a triumphant space race and the optimistic applications of atomic power. In contrast with Mr Ultimate Bad Guy, the Tracy brothers exuded only goodness and positivity. They're selfless, clean cut astronauts, zooming from their gorgeous island to save the day, risking their lives without hesitation. They're also a close family who bicker, but clearly love each other, and there's a maniac after their secrets, which could be used for sheer evil. Frankly, out of that mixture, it's impossible not to wonder 'how far can it all go?'

Sadly, the show itself tended to veer away from going too dark. Even the episode with a stowaway turned out to be a little kid! They very quickly turned the Hood into a comedy villain and the potential for actual threat to the Tracys was kept at a strictly PG level. Well, it was the 1960s, and much was left to the audience's imagination. Fortunately I had plenty of that to work with. And then, gloriously, I found the comics. I came to the reprints in the early 1990s, while dying of thirst for more Thunderbirds, and there was plenty there to excite the imagination. Frank Bellamy's epic artwork is more than enough to turn one's head, and his muscular male figures are nearly always writhing in agony, or fighting for their lives against a terrifying threat. Bellamy's artwork suggested a real harshness about the Thunderbirds' comic strip universe. It didn't hurt either that every single week, the Hood or some other maniac was murdering Brains (he got better!), hunting Virgil with giant robotic polar bears, or trying to sacrifice Scott on a cursed isle. The story about a giant eye monster from Venus, which could fossilise victims with a single touch, was my particular favourite. However outlandish it got,

and whatever year it was or wasn't actually set in, the TV21 strips were the best fodder in the world for someone who wanted to put the Tracy brothers in situations other than straightforward rescues and showing naughty kids around their secret base.

To me there were also a thousand unanswered questions in the show, especially when the Hood manipulated Kyrano - and I always, very badly, wanted to know what would happen if the Hood actually decided to use his powers on the brothers. That he never ever did was a constant source of annoyance. During the chase at the end of 'Cry Wolf' I fully expected the Hood to turn round and zap Scott unconscious, instead of just running over a cliff and crashing like an idiot. The same disappointment came with 'Desperate Intruder!' But the show's era and writing weren't quite up to going that far, or that's how it seems today. After all, it was also crazy that the Tracys never bothered to check if the Hood was dead or not. It just never got explored at all. With things like that left frustratingly unresolved the show left some huge gaps for fans to fill with their own interpretations.

So, I started wondering, probably too much, about how the Tracys would deal with such strangeness. Discovering fan fiction by accident, I spent a long time writing up daydreams about what would happen if the Tracys ever found out about Kyrano's dangerous weakness, or if the Hood got his hands on one of them. Now, a lot of these are scribbled in ancient notebooks, never to be shown to decent folks! But the core of those exploratory ideas have stuck around. They've been warped, improved, discarded, given heft, suffered a few million rewrites and many other influences, but the Tracys and my own interests seem to be merging with increasingly successful results. Although I really appreciate that not everyone wants to read horror and Thunderbirds, it's the task of keeping it within the realms of possibility and character that I find interesting, and I could go on even longer about how important it is not to undermine who the Tracys are, even if you're trying to break them in the course of the story. That's the really hard part.

For my last two Halloween Challenge entries, I've brought the boys up against the uncanny creations of H P Lovecraft and shamelessly brought in a lot of the elements that he and the writers he influenced have used. The Dreamlands and the monsters within are heavily borrowed from Lovecraft, although I want to emphasise that Lovecraft himself would probably have approved...he encouraged 'fan fiction' even back in the 1920s, during many letters of correspondence with other writers. However, the only way to make it actually work with Thunderbirds, to keep it about the Tracys above all, is to make sure that the characters react to extreme events in a logical way. Yes, it needs to be kept 'real' because if the Tracys don't believe in the weirdness, then neither will the reader. Also, it's fun to have the Thunderbird machines going up against giant monsters. 'Attack of the Alligators,' anyone?

As well as having the machines go up against the crazy, I do enjoy having Scott and Virgil as the focus for my stories when messing with the Thunderbirds universe. Partly because of their close relationship, and also because they were the main authority figures in the show besides Jeff. Playing with how far they will go for each other, and for their family, is very interesting to me. Sacrifices and sadness, adventure and its high cost, are great themes to throw at them. They can take it! But the most exciting part is helping them to survive through hell and, hopefully, to see how they rebuild themselves afterwards. This is why I threw zombies at them in 'Isolation' while mixing in some Reanimator fluid, along with a big dose of Romero zombies. And because they're awesome. Everything from the Alien movies to Ghostbusters, and all the fantasy and science fiction I soaked up in between, has had an effect on how I'd like to shape the Thunderbirds universe, at least some of the time.

So, really, my Halloween stories come from that longing to blend all these influences growing up with the Tracys and their world, the way they would deal with it. Doing this while writing well ensures that it steers away from hokiness and, ultimately, becomes a ripping yarn that everyone can enjoy. At least, that's the idea.

Admittedly this tends to mean that each Halloween story - and perhaps every Thunderbirds story I write - operates within its own separate timeline and is hardly going to end up as canon. I find this very freeing, because it does mean that anything can happen, and not everyone will escape the stories unscathed! The reset button stays locked away, and nearly anything goes. But without the sheer brightness of the show, and the goodness of all the brothers to work with, I don't think the scary, fantastical aspects of these stories would work nearly so well.

A small selection of Halloween story Influences

- The setting of 'Interzone' comes from Naked Lunch by William Burroughs (mature content) and also the David Cronenberg film that attempted to adapt it.

- Everything is affected by the works of HP Lovecraft, particularly stories like 'Dagon,' 'Shadow Over Innsmouth,' 'Azathoth,' 'Dreamquest of the Unknown Kadath,' 'The Thing on the Doorstep.' (read them all for free at dagonbytes.com)

- The goddess in the wall was inspired by art by H R Giger - The designer of the movie Alien, and his book called Necronomicon. Also his picture 'Li' influenced me for years.

- Alan Moore is a fabulous comic book writer (Watchmen) who borrows fantasy and science fiction from other stories, including H P Lovecraft, and frequently puts them in his own work. This is clearest in the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen books, which are set in a fantastical Victorian era but have come all the way through to 2009. The 'Black Dossier' and 1960s era set sections are a particular treat for sharp eyed Gerry Anderson fans!

**You can check out Pennyspy's two great Halloween pieces, both of which were Halloween Challenge winners, on The Tracy Island Chronicles: [www.tracyislandchronicles.com](http://www.tracyislandchronicles.com).**



from the desk of Mrs Dirtydollar

Mrs Dirtydollar's fingers are itching! Do you have a burning question you'd like to ask one of the authors on the Tracy Island Chronicles? Email it to [ticmobilecontrol1@gmail.com](mailto:ticmobilecontrol1@gmail.com) and Mrs Dirtydollar promises to use any means necessary to find out the answer!

## TRACY ISLAND WRITERS FORUM

...position Virgil's chute had reached the cockpit of Thunderbird Two deposited adrenaline surged back as Thunderbird One's massive rocket boosters this is Thunderbird Five the storm is wiping out surface and minutes Pod Four hit the water Gordon was pitched right in it would be difficult and dangerous but it was also the only way the sleek silvery tower of Thunderbird One waiting teaming Scott forced himself to look only at the nose he had sworn to protect was hanging on a the familiar rush of adrenaline as he headed straight the only way he could see to make this rescue possible Jeff Tracy's voice crackled over the comlink as he





# BRAINSCAN

lee  
ON YOUR BIKE!

Hover Bikes.

I saw them first on *Thunderbirds*, and I thought they were silly.

Then I saw them on *Return of the Jedi*, I thought they were even sillier.

I mean, really, think about it. A bike than can fly. A bike. That can FLY????

Could there be anything sillier?

Apparently not. Apparently it is *me* who is being silly, because Aerofex, a Californian company, has decided to make one.

They haven't called it a Hover Bike. They haven't really called it anything at all. Currently it's known as a 'hover vehicle,' and it's been modified from a design from the... you guessed it... 1960s!

The original 1960s design had problems with stability, a problem Aerofex have solved by



creating a mechanism that allows better control by the pilot. Instead of wheels, the hover vehicle has ducted rotors, and the design is so simple that you can literally hop on one without any form of pilot training whatsoever.

Easier to buy, easier to fly... and easier to steal, would be my guess.

But Aerofex don't see the 'hover vehicle' as being something pitched only towards people – though they don't deny it would certainly have its uses. They have primarily designed the 'hover vehicle' as a drone, a robotic work horse that can deliver supplies over all terrains.

Which would probably make it a hover dolly.

Which I first saw on *Thunderbirds*.

And then on *Star Trek*.

And I didn't think it was silly.



The Aerofex 'Hover Vehicle'

## MADAM GILLYLEE'S EPI-SCOPE

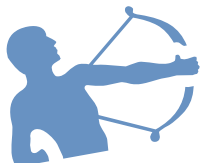
Can you guess which *Thunderbirds* character and episode this horoscope relates to? You'll find the answer somewhere in the [NEWSFLASH!](#)



### SCORPIO

It is not difficult to sit at home and contemplate your navel.

But why do that when there are so many exciting things waiting for you beyond your front door? Expand your horizons, learn a few new tricks and be open to exotic strangers. November Scorpions need to get out and about to explore a few new watering holes. Who knows where adventure may hide? You may be surprised at how deeply you get involved in it...



### CAPRICORN

Well-to-do December Capricorns always have places to go and people to see. Whether it's taking in the art scene at a gallery opening in London or christening the newest multi-billion-pound seagoing vessel, there's plenty of fun to be had. Just make sure that your detective instincts don't lead to more danger than you can handle, though, or you might find yourself all tied up in a potentially explosive situation...

*the roaming cone*  
'Go on, Scott,' Alan encouraged. 'Why don't you take a bite?'



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**NTBS NEWSFLASH!**

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## TRACY ISLAND CHRONICLES

You may be wondering... why did we create this newsletter, *The Tracy Island Chronicles* and its brother sites *The Tracy Island Writers Forum*?

The point was, first and foremost, to preserve the beloved 60s television show *Thunderbirds* that we all know and love. We showcase the best of the best fanfic on TIC, we have lots of pictures, we have sound bytes, and we have information on the voice actors behind the marionettes. Not only that, you'll find useful links, games and trivia...and eventually we will also have information in Brains' Lab that outlines all gathered evidence for the two different timelines you might be aware of (2026 vs. 2065).

TIA also archives excellent TB fan fiction, and the TIWF Yahoo! group exists for us to have a place to talk about writing and *Thunderbirds*... but not just that. It's to become part of a community of caring people, a quasi-family, if you will, where we can come together from all different parts of the world under the umbrella of a show that has endured for 47 years.

This newsletter exists to make sure all of you know everything that's new in our family of sites. We hope you find it informative and fun and that you look forward to receiving it every two months! (At least... we try to get it out every two months -- you know how 'real life' is!!!)

So that's why we do this. We love fan fiction. We love writing. We love *Thunderbirds* (some of us are a little hung up on certain Tracys!) and we care about those of you who also share these loves.

Thank you for your support throughout these last few years and stick around... because in the grammatically incorrect words of many who have gone before, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!!!"

### HOW TO RECOMMEND STORIES FOR TIC

The *Tracy Island Chronicles* does not accept submissions directly. Original Series-based (non-Frakes-movie-verse *Thunderbirds*) fan fiction is invited to TIC by our committee, but we depend on YOU to recommend really good *Thunderbirds* fan fiction. So if you find a story that you think is "the best of the best," drop Mobile Control [ticmobilecontrol1@gmail.com] a line and let us know!

### HOW TO JOIN THE TRACY ISLAND WRITERS FORUM

TIWF's credo is:

We exist for the sole purpose of discussing creative writing. The point is to better ourselves as writers through advice, constructive criticism and conversations regarding writing well. A lot of the discussions may revolve around Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds*, but we by no means wish to limit ourselves to the writing of fan fiction in any genre. If you care about your writing, this is the place to be!

So if you like to read TB fanfic, write TB fanfic, beta TB fanfic, like to write, want to write or are just interested in joining a fantastic group of people, go to the *Tracy Island Writers Forum* [[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Tracy\\_Island\\_WF/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Tracy_Island_WF/)] and join today! Remember, we also do special update announcements as special notices on TIWF, so sign up to make sure you know what's going on!

### WANT TO GIVE NED COOK A HAND?

So, you read this newsletter and think, "Hey, I have something I'd like to write for that!" Well, here's your chance to become a contributor.

What do you have in mind? Send it in either MS Word document format or plain text format as an attachment to [ticmobilecontrol1@gmail.com](mailto:ticmobilecontrol1@gmail.com) and our contributing editors will let you know what they think.

We do ask that before you submit anything, you please ensure grammar and spelling have been checked. Ned gets annoyed if he can't understand what he's reading! [Oh, and Ned reserves the right to edit any submissions he receives. It's just how he is.]

### HOW TO UNSUBSCRIBE FROM THIS NEWSLETTER

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**www.tracyislandchronicles.com**



# JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS

Pennyspy

This story is the sequel to "The Approaching Darkness," which appeared in the 2009 TIWF Halloween Challenge Contest and is archived on the Tracy Island Chronicles: [http://www.tracyislandchronicles.com/tb2/pennyspy/pennyspy\\_approachingdarkness.html](http://www.tracyislandchronicles.com/tb2/pennyspy/pennyspy_approachingdarkness.html)

## FROM THE END OF "THE APPROACHING DARKNESS"...

It had been a whole year and it was already Halloween again. Scott was looking forward to a simple family barbeque. The appeal of celebrating ghosts, ghouls and monsters had fallen away this year, for all of them. It had taken this long for the little looks to stop, for the rest of them to relax again in his – this body's – presence. But things were slowly improving. His father had assigned Scott an escort for the first two months, but by now they were almost all satisfied that there was no danger of Grendel's return. Scott was finally getting more than an hour's sleep at a time each night. The nightmares were easing off. Tracy Island had been rebuilt.

Tin-Tin was the lone holdout. She could barely stand being in the same room as him. She'd admitted she didn't blame Scott, but the memories had proved just too painful. She talked even of transferring off the island. Scott had no idea how to fix that. So he'd spent his time fixing everything else.

Scott finished his shower and looked in the mirror. The white streak of hair above each ear still hadn't turned dark again. According to Bear, that was the least-worst thing about the stupid – but necessary – thing he'd done to save them all. Most of his nightmares centred on the Mad God's forbidden symbol. Around something he'd seen when he'd used it. It would be surreal, and laughable, except he knew it had happened, and had left its foul mark on everyone he loved.

He dried off. As he did, he felt the tingling in the scars left from having most of the tattoos removed. Not all of them had been full tattoos, but enough to add to their many stresses once they all returned to the island. He scribbled at the fogged up mirror to clear it. The symbol on his back began to burn more painfully now, he rubbed at it, wondering if Kyrano had something to take the sting off. He glanced forwards.

Scott reached out and touched the mirror. His breath misted it up, but it couldn't remove the shape he'd somehow drawn without even thinking about it. Drums started again. He had time for a single, terrified shout before...

Virgil knocked on the bathroom door. "Scott? Happy Halloween! We're ready!"

Damp mist had started to flood out from beneath the door. He heard far off, mad laughter that sounded somehow like Scott. The lights flickered like crazy. Virgil frantically broke down the door in two hard shoves.

He caught a single glimpse of Scott floating on the other side of the mirror, his mouth open and eyes screwed up with laughter or pain behind, banging his palms against the impossible surface to be let out.

Virgil ran towards him and Scott was pulled away into the darkness that shifted beyond. Virgil hammered desperately on the mirror's flat surface, but there was no way to follow. The way back was closed.



## JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS

The desert of skulls stretched as far as Virgil could see, each pale bone lit by a dim silver moon. Here there was no warmth. He'd been here before, only this time he was merely dreaming, a visitor. He had been near this set of the enormous fossilised monsters before, and he grew both closer and further away from the figure with every step.

"Scott!" Virgil yelled. The figure in the hood turned to Virgil, hearing his shout, lifting its arm as it did. Virgil strained to see beneath it, but their face was shrouded in midnight, and the dark shapes moving within made blood freeze down Virgil's spine. Something was wrong.

Chuckling came from all around. The chatter of ancient amusement filled his ears, and with a jolt Virgil realised that the skulls were laughing at him.

\*\*\*\*\*

They were catching up.

The streets of Interzone formed an inescapable maze around him, each dark alley reeking of dung, hashish and sweat. Smoke-blurred night air caught in his heaving lungs, but he could still hear his

pursuers, and forced his body to push onward. The woman he carried over his shoulder moaned; her blood trickled hotly onto his neck. He glanced at an open doorway and dived into it, laid her down

carefully before pulling the door closed. He crouched down tight, arms wrapped around his shoulders; trembling in the entrance to a stranger's house, gasping for breath.

"Get to... airport..." she muttered.

"Quiet." He was unable to think clearly, clouded by drugs and heat and panic. Nearly five hard years of neglect had also taken their toll. His body was trembling in protest at his last burst of speed. "Be quiet, they're close."

"Shoulda paid her..." she made a chuckling, rasping sound that descended into racking coughs. He shoved his hand over her mouth, desperate; her spit flecked his palm. She glared up with eyes lit by agony.

"Shut up," he said quietly, leaning over her.

She breathed awkwardly under him, making bad, shallow noises in her throat. He heard boots thump into the street behind him, and stop. He huddled in his ripped coat, praying they

wouldn't find him.

A cat yowled down the street. The boots began to move again. He let himself breathe out in gratitude.

There was a sudden noise on his left. Inside the house, in the hall, a little old lady stared at him, asking something in French. She wanted to know what the hell he was doing there; and then she screamed for her sons.

He started to get up, apologising in French while his back throbbed and all his muscles protested. He nearly gave up on trying to move, but then four dangerous-looking men appeared right behind the old lady. He figured they were her sons, each one a mean-looking Interzone thug, probably members of the local gangs. Adrenaline kicked in again. He pulled the girl up, shouting, "She's hurt! We just have to get to the airport and we'll be out of your way."

"Get out of here, junkie!" Son number one came storming down the corridor towards them.

He pushed on the door he'd entered through, as eager to get out through it as he had been to get in.

The door came away weightlessly, and he squinted in the dark caused by the big Korean who grinned down at him.



“Virgil Tracy?” the Korean asked.

Virgil panted a hoarse, “No...”

“You lie.” The big man lifted him easily and hauled him into the street, throwing him down. Virgil scuffed to the filthy ground, rolling with the fall. He fought his fogged senses as the big man closed in.

“You stole from Madame Xu. Hand it over, junkie.”

Virgil shook his head. “I...I can’t...”

“Where is what you stole?” the big Korean motioned to the two men he’d brought with him.

They lifted Virgil off his feet. The Korean pulled out, a long, shining knife that hungrily reflected Virgil’s panicked eyes.

“Tell now, or later, Tracy. But you will tell.”

Virgil said, “OK. OK, I’ll do better - I’ll show you. You’ll never find it without me.”

“I say we check him over first,” one of the smaller guys holding Virgil pressed a knee hard against his ass, “These junkies will hide it anywhere.”

The big Korean grinned, and lifted the knife. “What do you say...?”

Virgil struggled, received a punch in the face, screwed up his bleeding mouth. “I can show you. It’s...it’s in...”

“Too slow.” The big Korean traced the knife point indelicately down Virgil’s grizzled chin. “Say.”

“In my coat. Asshole.” Virgil glared.

The Korean glared back, then laughed unpleasantly. “Check his coat.”

The one on Virgil’s right side hunted through the coat, tearing it more in the process. “He’s lying. It’s not here.”

“What?” Virgil groaned. “No, it was there, I put it there...”

“Then you dropped it?” the big Korean said.

“Yes!”

“You lie again. You hide it somewhere.”

“No... I’m not lying.”

The big Korean shook his head. “Guess we have to check everywhere. Know an easy place to start. Hold him.”

“No!” Virgil struggled fiercely as they turned him over.

A shot rang out.

The big Korean slid sideways past Virgil, a surprised look on his face. There were two more shots. Virgil slumped forwards, pushed down by the dead weight of his other two captors. He lay there, weakened, gasping for air again.

A blonde figure came out of the fog, and at her side a tall, dour looking man. Virgil grinned through a deepening haze. “... How did you...?”

He took a breath of salty air, and his eyes weighed shut.

\*\*\*\*\*

When he came to, he was propped up in a small lounge in one of the tiny apartments in the area, and the little old lady he’d frightened was tending to his head while Penelope looked down at him. He hadn’t quite seen that expression on her face before. Only later did he decipher it as sheer, unfiltered pity.

“Virgil, what on earth possessed you to do this to yourself?”

He gave a cracked laugh. “You know why.”

“You think Scott’s here? Amongst the junkies, the slavers, and the whores?”

Virgil gathered a breath. He was almost not surprised to see that a couple of the old lady’s fearsome sons were hovering with puppydog eyes as they watched Penelope, interrupting their conversation and asking her if there was anything she needed. Penny dismissed the brothers with a gracious manner that made Virgil smile, despite his many aches and pains.

Seeing the look of pity return to Penelope’s face, he simply said, “It was going just great til Dad cut me off. That was his idea, wasn’t it? Declare me mentally incompetent, cut off my accounts. I didn’t even



realise he had that much influence. You helped, right?”

Penelope’s face tightened into a mask of anger. The little old lady paused, as if sensing the fury in the air.

Penelope said curtly, “You broke a mad woman out of an asylum and put three guards in hospital. Rather an impressive feat, I’ll concede, but ridiculous nonetheless.”

“I needed her. Bear wouldn’t help me. I had no choice!”

“Oh, really? You raided Bear’s cabin and killed one of his dogs while on your insane quest. Just because he wanted you to wait until the time was right. Why wouldn’t you simply wait, Virgil?”

The answer to that was easy, the easiest thing he’d been asked in his whole life. He said, “You didn’t see Scott’s eyes. No one did.”

“Virgil...”

“Scott sacrificed everything. First the Curwens use him to take over the damn Island and everyone on it. Then he stops their insane grandfather from ending everything sane in the whole world, pulls us back from the edge of chaos. You remember the way we were going before he did that? Dogs and cats living together, the works.”

“The world was dying, I know. We were all there, Virgil.”

“And he spent a year fixing what happened, as though it was all his fault. And it wasn’t. I saw what took him, Penny. He knew he was headed into hell. And we tried, once, but he’s still there. He’s in pain.

And I’m so close, Penny. I’m so close to getting him back.”

“And you’ve been out of touch for over four years, Virgil. Yes, your father wanted me to help him cut off your accounts. He was out of ideas, and so was I. He wants the family back together again.”

“It’ll never be ‘back together’, Penny.”

“Not if you stay in this hell hole a minute longer. Do you honestly think Scott’s alive in this dreadful place? I’ve searched, too, Virgil. I’ve been looking high and low. He’s gone.”

“Then you weren’t looking low enough.” Virgil said. He sat up, wincing as he did. Parker stood beside another cot where the girl lay, bandaged and watching the argument with watery blue eyes. Virgil said, “We need to get her to a hospital. But I need her, I’m not letting you return her to the asylum. We get her looked at and then she comes with me.”

“Lucy Curwen has sucked you into her madness, the same one that possessed poor Scott; the same that almost destroyed you all. Please come back with me. Rest. Recover. Your father needs you.”

“You have no idea how close I am to finding Scott. I can’t leave now.”

“How close?”

“I have one more trip to make. I just have to find... what I need... to get there.”

“The drugs?” Penelope sounded disgusted. “No, that ends here, Virgil.”

“Not yet!” Virgil stood up, then. He wavered, his eyes watered, stomach woozing ominously inside before settling. “Penelope, I just need one more trip. The drug, the Taduki, it opens doors...”

“Nonsense.”

“No.” He clasped Penelope’s wrists gently, willing her to see him again. “Penny, listen to me. I know where he is, I just have to get to him.”

“You’ve been smoking so much of that awful stuff, you’ve entirely lost your grip on reality.”

Virgil fought the urge to shake her. “No. I swear it. The drug – the Taduki drug – it shows me where they took him. The deal he made drew him into their world. He’s alive, and whole, and I can bring him back, I swear it.”

“And why do you need her for that?”

“When Bear refused to help any more, I had no choice. She’s shown me the way so far, I still need her.”

“She’s made you into a shell, Virgil.” Penelope said, sounding furious again. “A few days going dry will help with that. I promised your father I would bring you home, and I shall.”

“I just need one more trip.” Virgil said. “One more and I’ll have him back.”

She pulled herself away sharply, turning to Parker who was administering to Lucy. “We’re leaving, Parker. Bring Curwen with us. We should be able to find our way to the airport from here.”

“I can’t let you do that.” Virgil said. “I need you to believe me, just this time. We need to find the drugs, I think I dropped them on the way here.”

“While you were running for your life.”

“Yeah.” He was beyond shame at this point, “Penny, please. Think about the crazy shit we’ve seen. The monsters we escaped from five years ago. Those



creatures in Arkham. The shoggoths, for fuck's sake. Penny, why won't you believe that I can enter a whole other world when I take that stuff?"

"Because it's an utterly ridiculous notion."

"It's true. And I've almost found Scott. And all I have to do when I get to him, is put one of these around his neck." He held up Scott's USAF dog tags; they'd been around his throat since he'd started looking, each on its own separate chain. There was a reason for that. "He's alive. And he's suffering."

"And what, you'll pull him out of a dream? This isn't a fantasy, Virgil."

"This last trip means I can get him out of the dream later on. The dog tags will link me to him. I put one on him in the dream, and I can pull him out when I'm back in the real world. Just give me a few more hours."

"No."

"Then I'll go back to Xu's on my own, and you can hang out and watch me get killed. Or leave. But I'm not leaving Interzone without the drug."

Penelope glared at him. "Oh, really?"

"I'm not leaving. So you can either shoot me, or let me get more on my own."

Penelope sighed, put a hand on his arm. "Virgil, wait."

He paused. "What?"

"Virgil – I see you believe all this is true. Some of it may seem very real. I... I don't want you to die here. I want to bring you home."

Virgil shook his head, "Not without Scott."

Penelope folded her arms. She was unreadable. He stuffed the tags back out of sight under his coat. "I mean it, Penny, I'm not going. I'm so goddam close..." He wasn't confident that he could take on both Penelope and Parker in his current condition, but he was prepared to find out if he had to.

He felt a light touch on his head and looked up. Penelope stood over him. "Virgil..."

"My mind's made up."

"I know." She sighed. "If this is the only way you'll come home – here." She brought out a small, silver foil wrapped packet and handed it to him. "This is yours, I believe."

"You found it?" He unwrapped it, unbelieving; checked it. The deceptively unpromising little rock of honey and pepper scented drug sat inside the crinkle of foil. Taduki. His whole body craved the taste, and the dreams. "How long were you following us?"

"We were there when you when you robbed Xu's smoking den. Who do you think kept the first wave of guards off your backs?"

"Oh."

"Oh yes. So, tell me, Virgil. Will one more 'hit' actually do the trick?"

"More than you can imagine." He said.

"We won't do it here," Penelope said, "And once you've done it, you are returning to the Island. Is that clear?"

Virgil leaned over and kissed her on the forehead. "Penelope, you're an angel."

"And you need a bath," she said firmly, but her eyes lightened a little. "Let's leave this place."

"No problem," he said.

\*\*\*\*\*

Penelope knew a doctor in another part of Morocco who they could trust. To get there without further questions about Lucy, and to avoid Madame Xu's spies, Penelope discreetly bribed a pilot and the right officials so they could hop a small charter flight to get them out of Interzone. Most private flights in and out of the lawless city tended to be arranged that way. It was how Virgil had arrived here without his real papers. No questions were asked about Lucy,

The flight there was silent apart from Lucy's laboured breathing. Virgil held tight to the Taduki in his pocket, unable to sleep, his mind played over and over the plan he had to put into motion, the steps he had to take.

Every sacrifice he'd made to find Scott.

His brother waited on the other side of the mirror.



Too weary to sleep, Virgil stared past his own reflection. After a while, he realised that Penelope was staring at him.

"What is it, Penny? I grow an extra ear or something?"

"Not so far, Virgil. But it's been four years. You must have one or two questions, surely."

Trying not to think about his family every day had become a habit. He nearly wrenched a brain cell as a hundred questions suddenly brimmed. "How are they?" Virgil said, finally narrowing it down.

"Surviving," Penelope said. "Did you see the reports on the last rescue?"

Even in the depths of Interzone smog, he'd glimpsed a headline or two. "Yeah, heard about that earthquake in Iran. They've got some replacements for Scott and me."

"Yes. I'm afraid they have. Your father had no choice."

"How's Dad?"

Penelope bit her lip, looking away. "He's fine."

Virgil frowned. "What's wrong with him?"

"What the Curwens did to your family took a great deal out of him. Add that to the strain of making the organisation functional again, and – he looks old, Virgil. He wants to see you."

"Is he ill? What do you mean by old, for fuck's sake? Tell me."

"All right. John is taking the strain, as far as I can tell. He's adeptly handling the business end of things, while the rest of the organisation expands

and develops. No, your father isn't dying, Virgil, but he's not the man he was, either. Losing Scott, and then you deciding to disappear as well, hurt him far more than you seem willing to realise. You honestly had no idea how much he wanted Scott back."

"We tried once. Then he gave up." Virgil felt the old anger flare, the amazement that Jeff had thrown in the towel after a single effort to retrieve Scott.

"That wasn't the case. All of you almost died trying to do that – the Villa had to be rebuilt from scratch after that thing came through the mirror, and that was the safe option."

"So is this. Once I found the way."

"Oh yes, you and the oh-so-stable Lucy Curwen. You'd be dead in some godforsaken alleyway by now if we hadn't –"

"Only because someone cut off my funds. You closed my goddamn bank accounts, Penny. If you were trying to kill me in Interzone that was definitely the way to go about it."

"Why do you think I came straight after you?" She sighed, "Please, Virgil, you've tried it your way, and now it's long past time you came home."

"Not yet." Virgil shook his head. "What have they been doing since we got franchised, anyway?"

"Approaching normality again, despite everything that's happened. John's married now, and so is Gordon. There's a baby on its way, too. Hard to believe, isn't it?"

"I guess a lot can happen in nearly five years." Virgil felt an ache that had been dulled for a very long time re-emerge; his chest tightened. He still really missed them. "Whose baby is it?"

"Gordon's. Due any day, now."

"Gordon, huh?" He liked that.

"Yes. Your brothers have been moving on. They've had to."

Virgil wrapped his ragged coat around him and hunched back into the seat. He said, "Good for them."

"Yes."

"When do we land?"

Penelope glanced at her watch. "Ten minutes."

"See you on the ground." Virgil shut his eyes.

To read the rest of *Journey into Darkness*, visit Pennyspy's page on the Tracy Island Chronicles: <http://www.tracyislandchronicles.com/tb2/pennyspy/pennyspy.html>

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