

MARTIAN INVASION

EPISODE COMMENTARY #10
SkyWench

This is a fun episode where International Rescue meets the perils of Hollywood, ironically on the set of a sci-fi movie. The aliens we see look like they were borrowed from the underwater kingdom of *Stingray*. Cut to the producer's office...

Three gentlemen discuss whether this film will be made, due to the fact that the director has already made four turkeys. One man in particular looks very familiar indeed and we find that he is backing the whole project. As the jungle rhythms begin to play, we realize it is none other than our fiendish friend, The Hood. Cut to a temple in the Malaysian jungle...

Our glowy eyed mystic is, after a shadowy visit by an unknown entity, attempting to contact his half brother, Kyrano. Nice scenes of his golden altar in the temple. The mental attack is completed and Kyrano bears the full brunt of it in the middle of serving the Tracys, poolside. Jeff insists his friend has been working too hard and should take it easy. Tin-Tin's concern is apparent but Kyrano remembers nothing, as per usual. He is unaware that he has been programmed to disable *Thunderbird One's* Automatic Camera Detector. Fade-in to the set of our Martian Zombie epic...

An amusing scene between a make-up girl and a B-movie star ensues. The camera set-up is explained and the fact that our producer in disguise has ordered some "new" equipment is also mentioned. Our sinister financier has also paid for extra explosives for a particular scene in the flick. So, if he's willing to pay, why not use them, right? I mean, how could that logic possibly be flawed...DOH! Okay, so now half the cast is trapped inside a cave after the massive explosion.

The scene switches back to Tracy Island where Kyrano has taken an inexplicable new interest in Tin-Tin's work aboard *Thunderbird One*. He's not sure why, but seems to be under some sort of duress about information he thinks he's supposed to remember. He does remember one thing, what he's been compelled to do to the Automatic Camera Detector, after his daughter mentions the device.

Back at the movie location, there is underground water leaking into the cave where our actors are trapped and the film



crew decides it's time to call International Rescue... ya think? Anyway, they arrive on the scene, Scott needing the usual 'help with his equipment' and Virgil with Pod 5. We are introduced to a new apparatus, the *Excavator* and *Crushing Machine*. It makes short work of the rock and gravel from the cave-in and the actors are rescued just before they would have drowned. The cave basically spits them out when the water is tapped from the other end of it by the *Excavator*. At least that part made sense.

Now that the crisis is over, Scott learns that the Camera Detector has not been working when one of the crew tries to take a snapshot of his 'Bird'. He insists on viewing the playback from all the different camera angles filmed for the movie scenes and discovers that one camera captured the entire rescue. At that moment, after having discarded his disguise, The Hood tries to make his getaway with the canister of film he just shot. Scott takes off after him. Virgil has already left the scene.

Scott "Warning Shot" Tracy strikes again, after verbal requests and warnings do not deter the felon. Scott's stern voice in this scene belies his calm demeanor when discussing the situation with himself inside the cabin of *Thunderbird One*. The Hood, or Agent 79 as he is called in this ep, escapes by driving into a long tunnel. After Scott reports on the situation, Jeff orders Virgil back to cover the other end of the tunnel and he creates a rock slide that cannot be driven through. So, Agent 79 makes his way on foot instead to a small airport where he steals a single engine aircraft. Never mind that he apparently does not know how to pilot it. He takes off and the chase is on again. Our boys learn that the craft is not air worthy and he should be forced to land at any time.

Meanwhile, the original bald-headed bad guy (sorry, Dr. Evil) manoeuvres as best he can until he is forced to land at the villa of General X. We also learn through radio conversations between the two that General X is the person paying said bald guy for the task of filming International Rescue. Agent 79 then tries to land on the lawn of the villa and ends up in the second story of the general's house instead. The general has already lost faith in him and the film is supposedly burned up in the crash. If I were him, I'd play dead. That's the beauty of *Thunderbirds* though. Unlike in the James Bond movies, no one ever dies.

Scott and Virgil are invited back to the Martian Zombie movie set to view the shooting and in true serial type cliché, Scott muses over the fact that if Old Baldie is the villain who's been trying to breach their security all along, then they'll get him... some day. You've gotta love it! ;-)



NEW STORIES ON TIC!

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TEA-CUB'S STORY: FAMILY TIES -

...the high opinion of this vessel has very much sobered in our household; none of us are really that impressed by it anymore. And I've got to say, it feels rather unfair that I've been pushed into this because this is the very last place - on earth, sky and sea - that I want to be. To me, this ship is now a danger to anyone and anything with a pulse and a memory - or maybe it's the man in charge I have to be afraid of, the Commander of the Sentinel.

FREEFLOW'S STORY: REASONABLE DOUBT -

...that moment, that one moment where so much could have happened, where so much could have gone wrong, that moment he could recall with pinpoint accuracy. Where each of his brothers were, how close - God, how close! - they had been to his craft and how much danger their accident victims had been in. It was torture, a repeating cycle of images that he could not escape from.

Some great new files up for you, courtesy of some very talented authors!



a great big HELLO from NED COOK!

You know those corporate bonding weekends?

Well, the NTBS management thought it would be a good idea if they took us off to bond, and get to know each other again. Seems they felt we were getting a bit distant from each other (I'd call it 'snipey', actually), so they organised an exotic tropical getaway in Hawaii where our minds could meet over broiled crab and *pina coladas* and girls in grass skirts.

At least that's what I thought we were going to do.

Dear readers, don't be fooled the way that I was! We spent the whole weekend locked inside an icy air-conditioned conference room sucking on mints and hashing out trust issues and tying knots in ropes and making word puzzles, of all things.

All of this was meant to bring us closer together and make us more of a team. Go figure! All that I got outta the whole exercise was that my PA Trixie can't tie knots - and I also found out she's not even a real blonde! (I get fooled every time, sigh.)

And so much for team building. Today's my first day back in the office and somebody has already swiped my NTBS coffee mug. And that pesky Joe has parked his truck in my spot. AGAIN!

MY CRY FOR HELP!

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keeping it VISCERAL

Samantha Winchester

how to write a kick-butt action sequence

I've heard it a hundred times: "But I'm a girl, I don't know how to write action sequences!" I shake my head, because writing a kick-butt action sequence isn't nearly as hard as most writers think...and it certainly shouldn't be seen as something only guys can do. Particularly with a fandom like Thunderbirds, where most of the writers are women, and what the Tracys do for a living is obviously very action oriented. Come on, don't be such a wuss, give it a try!

But how do you go about writing an action scene that keeps the reader glued to the page? Let's analyze the problem. A lot of the action sequences I read suffer from one of three main shortcomings:

1) Too much description, which slows down the action.

Don't start describing the function and history of the object that Scott's hiding behind, or the lengthy trials Brains and the boys had to go through to get a piece of equipment ready to use in the field, or you'll drag the reader totally off the track and it will be very hard for them to get that sense of immediacy flowing again.

2) Too little description, so the reader gets confused and you're not sure what's happening.

I often read portions of an action scene and think things like, "Wait a minute, where did that person come from?" or "They're on the second story? How did that other guy get up there, then?" or "The boiler blew up? How come none of the others seemed to notice that?" If you're confused, then your readers will be confused as well, and wind up having to go back and re-read the sequence more than once to figure out what's going on. Nothing like that to destroy the total immersion experience that you want to create in order to suck a reader into the story until the last page is read.

3) Dry, boring description that reads like a newspaper article, describing what happened a day or two after the event.

There's nothing worse than unemotional, detached prose that gives the bones of the scene but sounds like a summary in an English Literature class. Lack of discernable bias might be a good thing in journalism, but in fiction it kills the whole thing dead on the page.

The first step is planning. *Don't skip this.* Think of it like a storyboard, to keep you straight during the writing process. You need to have in your head a rough map of not only how the action will play out, but where everyone will be during the sequence. You must know what the area looks like (is it a warehouse, a multistory parking lot, an open field?). If you don't, get your butt to a computer, pronto, and do some research! You can't describe something you aren't familiar with, and there's nothing worse than "white room" writing in an action sequence. You also need to know what each of your characters will see, hear and feel, both singly and in combination. If Character A throws a smoke grenade, then he's going to affect the vision of Characters B and C, if they're in the same vicinity. If there's an explosion, how close is it to all of them? Will any of them be blown off their feet or struck with shrapnel? And if Bad Guy 1 comes out with an Uzi and starts spraying the vicinity with automatic fire, are any of your main characters close enough to get hit? They'll certainly hear it, and should react accordingly.

Don't get too anxious about this part of the process – just make sure you know enough to "see" it in your head. You can even sketch it out on paper, with stick figures. Storyboard, remember?

Now, here comes the most important part. *Get visceral.* Don't stand back from the story. Plunge yourself into each character's shoes, see what they see, feel what they feel. This will be easier if you've ever been through a traumatic experience yourself, like a car accident, a house fire, a hurricane. Think about how you felt, what you saw. You didn't have a clear, "helicopter" view of the surroundings, or what was happening to everyone else. You probably remember bits and pieces, like if it was a fire, the acrid smell of smoke, the hot blast of the air, the way the ground crackedled under your feet, your eyes stinging, stumbling over obstacles, shouts and cries coming from somewhere, your pounding heart, the fear. This is what I mean by keeping it visceral. Impressions: fragments of your surroundings, smells, tastes, sounds, tactile feelings. Your character would feel the same way. If there's smoke, he won't be able to see very well, and his eyes will sting unless he has a mask on. If there's debris all over the ground, it will make the going tough, and he might stumble and fall over some of it. Everything will seem to come at him in sudden, jagged impressions, and he won't see the whole picture of everything – he won't see the bad guy pick up the pipe and swing it unless he is watching it happen to someone else, from a distance. What he'll see is a sudden movement from the corner of his eye, and a rush of wind as the pipe scythes toward his head.

My use of the word "scythes" there leads me to a vital component of keeping things visceral...your word usage. Here are two ways to describe the same scene:

1:
The helicopter came down to the ground. Gordon got out and ran toward the nearby bushes.

2:
The helicopter dropped out of the sky in a fast and dirty swoop, coming to a stomach-lurching halt a couple of feet above the ground. The pilot's good-luck message ringing in his ears, Gordon stripped off his headphones, grabbed the webbed strap of his gear bag and jumped. He hit the dirt running, remembering to duck, stumbling a little as the rotor backwash beat down on him from above. The tropical air rolled over him like a hot, wet wall, soaking him to the skin in seconds. As soon as he was clear of the blades' deadly arc, he straightened and gave the pilot the thumbs-up. The 'copter hurled itself forward immediately, nose down, main rotors dragging it back into the sky with sheer brute force. Gordon couldn't wait to see it reach safety – there was no time to waste. He twisted around and ran for the cover of the nearby bushes.

See the difference? Didn't the second paragraph make you feel much more like you were *there*?

Yes, it takes more effort. But you can do it, as long as you remember to keep asking yourself not just "what happens to him next?" but also "how does what happens to him next *look, sound and feel*?" Keep it visceral and you'll keep your audience.



Dear John

Dear John,

Man, do I need your help! My girlfriend gave me a present a few months ago and she thinks I adore it. Well, I did think it was kinda cute, when it was small -- but now it's six feet long and all teeth and claws and scales, and I can't get into my bathroom without risking losing a limb. Getting food flown in is expensive, and you should see the mess it makes when it eats! All I can do is get out the hose. My problem is that the only creature on this island with a worse temper is my girlfriend. How do I tell her this thing needs to be donated to a zoo, pronto, without winding up in the hospital myself?

Tired of Using My Brother's Shower

Dear Tired,

I don't know what it is that is living in your bathroom, but it sounds big and nasty. Kind of like a boil I had once. And the only thing you can do with a boil (or a big scary monster) is to take the head off. As you point out, bathrooms can be hosed down,

and girlfriends are always pleased by a nice pair of shoes and a matching handbag. And if you're frugal about it, there might be enough left over for a shiny pair of 'nads for yourself.

John

Dear John,

I'm sure you can't help me, since you're probably one of those pseudo-intellectual maggots who thinks the pen is mightier than the *parang latok*. Not that you'd know what that is, girly man - I bet you've never fought your way out of an Indonesian jungle with nothing more than a rusted antique knife! You don't know what it is to hate like I do. And I hate. I hate THEM. Every one of them. I hate them so much I make things explode just to make them come to me so I can lie in wait and watch them and pinch their heads. I hate them so much I bought a toy company just so I could have dolls of them and BLOW THEM UP! I HATE THEM I HATE THEM I HATE THEM!

You got lucky, scumbag. I forgot my question.

Pinching Your Head

Dear Pinching,

My *parang latok* is bigger than your *parang latok*. Any day.

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!**

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LOLBIRDS

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last month's winning caption by anonymous



Jeff: 'Nooo! So then what did he say?'

PENNYSPY'S THUNDERBIRDS EPISODE GUIDE

04: SUN PROBE

This is the episode where the members of International Rescue show their true versatility and commitment to their mission. "Sun Probe" is one of the more iconic episodes, certainly one of the ones I watched the most frequently, back when the show was broadcast in the early nineties. Over-familiarity originally made me less enthusiastic about this episode than most, but rewatching it now has reminded me why it's still a strong instalment, containing some great character moments, particularly for our favourite stuttering scientist.

We open on *Sun Probe* about to be launched. As one of the main complaints I have for this episode, the long, drawn out launch right at the start is what annoys me the most. Some of it seems unnecessarily stretched – another example of the need to extend the first ten episodes after Lew Grade's decree. Each stage gets laboriously described by Colonel Benson in the control tower (wearing a particularly nasty dark ochre top and grey waistcoat). He wishes the three 'solarnauts,' Asher, Harris and, er, Camp, luck on their journey. When they go. In half an hour. I am extremely relieved that this isn't filmed in 'real time'. Anyway, as the rocket trundles towards launch it's made clear that THIS IS A BIG DEAL. The countdowns emphasise *Sun Probe's* immense rocket power. The fuel container disappears underground like a miniature Marineville. The countdown mercifully ends, and – Colonel Benson is thrilled – "Lift off is A-Ok! Operation *Sun Probe* is on!"

The Tracys – Scott, Alan and Jeff, anyway – are watching all this on Jeff's tiny TV monitor in the Tracy Villa's

lounge-cum-study area. Tin-Tin is here too, snuggled up sweetly next to Alan. Jeff is pretty excited by the rocket launch, which "never fails to give me a kick," and then he speculates about Brains' whereabouts, thinking that the scientist would be interested in the historic event. No, in this world there are apparently no VCRs, DVD-Recorders or Sky+...or even youtube. An equally baffled Scott goes off to remind Brains himself.

Brains is busy tinkering with his latest invention in the lab, Braman. Braman is a copper-covered robot with a humanoid shape, which Brains seems to be programming as his all-purpose PA-calculator-bottle-washer (basically the exact opposite of Bender from *Futurama*). Scott arrives to tell him about *Sun Probe*, but ends up perplexed at Brains' total disinterest. Scott's reaction to Brains' frustration with his new metal friend is amusing, too – but it was still nice of him to try to tell Brains...

Scott leaves Brains to it and we watch more handy exposition provided by the news reporter. It turns out that the *Sun Probe* launch all happened a week ago and a cute low-tech animation explains the solarnauts' mission - to fly as close to the Earth's sun as they can, launch the eponymous 'probe' and return to Earth with the piece of matter from the sun's flare. What I find the *most* impressive is that they're able to accomplish this epic journey in a single week! However, they never actually explain just what they're going to do with this piece of solar energy once it's contained. Any fanatic takers?

Strapped safely inside the *Sun Probe*, the three solarnauts joke nervously about their fear of melting away, should their refrigerating gadget expire at any point. (For the record, this little scene tends to set off many puppet-likely-to-melt-related jokes in one's parents). Anyway, the mission is still going smoothly, so far, and now it's Jeff who tries to get Brains to come and watch *Sun Probe* go into orbit. Brains has now moved his robot into the bit of the lounge that's behind a big oriental-style wooden screen. Jeff reminds him that the *Sun Probe* mission is about to get interesting, only for Brains to casually correct him on the timing of the orbit. In a sweet bit of characterisation, Jeff is amused to realise that his friend is "not as blasé" as he behaves and in fact knows the mission off by heart. Brains' response is a surprisingly shrill, "Oh, no, sir!" to which Jeff says, "You

could have fooled me!" But it really gives a sense of Jeff's gruff sense of humour and the earnest tunnel-vision of our Brains when he's working.

In the (inevitably ill-fated) *Sun Probe*, it's time to fire retros to get them into position for the mission's final stage. Its rockets sound suspiciously like one of the *Thunderbird* craft landing. There's more mission dialogue and many mini-countdowns as the 'collect a piece of the sun' operation finally gets going.

While *Sun Probe* reaches its end game, Brains is trying to speed up Braman's responses by teaching him chess. Speculating aloud, the scientist wonders if he could ever create a robot brain as fine as a human's, before announcing 'checkmate' to his metallic protégé.

Cutting back to outer space, the Probe has successfully made it through the sun's flare – the Tracys watch a 'tel-radio picture' of the event – and more of Barry Gray's spooky 'space music' plays over the video. *Sun Probe's* probe reconnects with the rest of the ship just as Brains enters the room. Watching the picture and totally out of the blue, Brains figures something out that the rest of the space agency appear to have overlooked. Even as he mutters, "I don't think they're gonna make it," and Jeff replies, a little naively, "But everything's going fine," (jinx!) the announcer squeals that *Sun Probe's* rockets have failed and the spaceship is now on a dead collision course with the sun! One more time - the *entire* space agency missed that possibility? The announcer excitedly says "Stay tuned!"





There's a short break here, during which time the rest of the family suddenly turns up in the lounge - clearly not every Tracy was all that excited about the *Sun Probe* mission. I have a theory that all the coverage was buried on a dedicated satellite channel like National Geographic. Alan and Tin-Tin are still snuggled up on a seat together, Scott is beside Virgil, and for all you Gordon fans, yes, he's finally here! Now that everyone's gathered together, there's rapid discussion about what could have happened to doom the *Sun Probe* mission.

Brains speculates that *Sun Probe* was unable to fire its engines due to high levels of radioactivity from the sun. It will need a boosting signal from Cape Kennedy to set them off - Scott impatiently demands why they don't just *do* that? Brains says that they probably already are, but their signal is probably not strong or close enough.

They've clearly left the TV playing and at that point, Colonel Benson broadcasts in his full awful-ochre-shirt-with-dark-waistcoat glory. I just hate the colour scheme, ok? And the poor guy has no other outfits. Not even a proper uniform! Anyway, the Colonel has also worked out that *Sun Probe* is doomed, unless International Rescue, "if you are watching", can possibly help them.

On this bombshell, the others wonder what to do, and Brains leaps into action and - starts playing chess with Braman again. Which Alan totally "doesn't dig." Cliff-hanger music plays and we leave Brains to tinker - I mean *think*.

Back in *Sun Probe*, the solarnauts are understandably freaked out by the change in their mission's status from 'darn dangerous' to 'certain death.' It's a pity we don't really learn more about these guys, although it's easy enough to empathise with their predicament - a nightmare that one of them has claimed to have had many times. The refrigeration gadget is already becoming less and less effective. That nightmare is now a reality.

On Tracy Island, snacks and big cups of coffee fuel a heated discussion about what International Rescue should do to help. Scott figures it's obvious - they should use *Thunderbird Three* to get close and send *Sun Probe* a rescue signal from there. Virgil disagrees strongly, pushing for *Thunderbird Two's* far superior broadcasting power. Scott points out that that only counts if they were both at ground level - this is probably the only time you see these two brothers ever disagree on anything. Tin-Tin is more anxious that the whole world is waiting for IR to come up with a response and they've already taken three hours (three-freakin'-hours! How? Were they deciding on donut toppings?) arguing about it. Then Gordon, *finally*, gets a chance to prove his usefulness by pointing out the reasonably obvious facts - *both* craft have an equal chance of success or failure. So why not give *both* of them a try?

This plan is immediately agreed upon and Brains is ordered to get working on a launch for *Thunderbird Three*. Virgil heads off to ready *Thunderbird Two's* supplies. Alan volunteers Tin-Tin to do work, or something on *Thunderbird Three*. By the sound of it she will be needed to press the button that operates the safety beam. Maybe she has the smallest fingers.

A short time later, Scott, Alan and Tin-Tin are lined up on the couch in the lounge. This will be Tin-Tin's first ever mission and Jeff wishes them all luck before they launch. The couch disappears under the floor with its three passengers, beginning *Thunderbird Three's* quite extravagant launch sequence. It always makes me smile because whenever they do this, the characters manage to look somewhat self-conscious, and is it just me or is Scott visibly keeping his distance from Alan and Tin-Tin?

In fact, they seem so awkward that they've managed to swap seats, possibly on a dare, on their way down the deep drop into the hangar beneath (in the miniatures shot). Then once the sofa inserts them into *Thunderbird Three*, they're back where they started. Alan hot-foots it up to the control room, ordering them all to "take up launch positions." This involves him getting into his uniform and standing on an automatic, swivelling control panel, whilst Scott and Tin-Tin sit in silence, on a couple of comfy recliners. Frankly, Scott has an expectant 'and where's my martini?' air about him.

Next thing, *Thunderbird Three* is blasting off - this is Scott's cue to ditch Tin-Tin and go help Alan. We get a lovely shot of *Thunderbird Three's* fiery rocket flame creating heat-haze as it leaves the green orbit of Earth. Alan calls Tin-Tin to ask her to start work, which she says she's already doing. There isn't a moment to waste - after all, if they're going to catch up with *Sun Probe*, they'll probably be at the Sun in less than a week!

Please bear this *week long* delay in mind, as that seems to be how long Virgil and Brains have spent on loading *Thunderbird Two* with appropriate equipment. The optimum point for *Thunderbird Two* to broadcast from is way up in the Himalayas. Grandma has apparently rustled up some freezing weather gear. Virgil and Brains play a strange version of the *Generation Game's* conveyor belt (except Virgil has a list, cheating slightly) and they tick each box off with (apparently wholly inaccurate) reference numbers. They're almost done when Brains suggests that they pack one of his super computers, just in case...

Thunderbird Two rumbles out to a rather quiet launch. There's a lovely shot from outside *TB2's* cabin, looking in at Virgil piloting while Brains reads an inflight magazine...or, ok, it's probably a file about the mission. Jeff and Gordon are on the balcony watching them go and Jeff admits to some uncertainty about their ability to succeed this time.

After a short break, we're back with the hapless crew of *Sun Probe*, who have just twenty-four hours left. They're getting frazzled and almost don't believe it when Alan's voice reaches them on the radio. Scott and Alan inform the crew of their plan, to fire *Sun Probe's* retros with their own signal, which Tin-Tin is now ready to send. Scott's already worried about the vast increase in heat from the sun. They all anxiously watch the display telling them how close they are to success.

It turns out that they're still four hours short of where they need to be, whilst *Thunderbird Three* is in increasing danger from the heat. Alan radios Jeff with the bad news. Jeff frets at asking Tin-Tin to risk her life like this, but her father and Jeff's loyal servant™, Kyrano, assures Jeff that she's willing to do whatever it takes, especially as he and his daughter owe Jeff their lives. Another snippet of back story worth wondering about, which is never fully explored in the show proper.

Still concerned about *Thunderbird Three*, Jeff calls up Virgil in the Himalayas to see what their progress is. Somehow it has taken a *week* to get *Thunderbird Two* ready to do her part in the mission. Jeff asks about the weather conditions and Virg responds with a laidback, "Pretty stormy, Father. Pretty stormy." He isn't kidding - it may be the understatement of the 21st Century. In one of the most vivid scenes in the show, *Thunderbird Two* glides through snow blasted mountain tops. *Thunderbird Two's* almost totally covered in snow by now. Virgil brings her in to land on a ledge that, he's confident, should be directly below them. They must have some decent GPS in there. Once they land, Virgil calls base again and says they're setting up on Mount Arkan and are about to get out the Transmitter Truck (never named here, but generally known to fans as 'Jodrell 6'). Virgil seems optimistic as he brings out this Big Truck, which is basically a giant satellite dish stuck on top of sturdy caterpillar wheels. Inside it, Virgil and Brains are wearing some nasty white and splodge coloured fur hats - also, pale blue snowsuits are NOT a good look for poor Virgie.

Still, this scene really feels authentically cold and there's a nice shot of the sun being almost invisible through the thick cloud and snow cover.

Much, *much* closer to the sun, in *Thunderbird Three*, Alan is now trying to persuade Tin-Tin to use an escape pod before they get much nearer to burning up. She refuses, saying that there is no time and they *must* rescue *Sun Probe's* crew. They try the beam again - and a visibly too-hot Scott sounds ragged and irritated when he sees they're still two hours short of success. *Thunderbird Three* isn't built to endure these conditions, and Alan fervently hopes that they can all stand up to the heat.

Neatly mirroring Alan's line, Virgil hopes that he and Brains can stand up to the cold. He patiently listens to

Brains spell out a tech-babble-heavy plan, (i.e., he will make some calculations, then send the signal), before gallantly offering to make them both some hot coffee.

Things aren't looking good for *Sun Probe*. The heat is worse than ever, nothing is working, and they haven't heard from their potential rescuers in four hours. The crew of *Thunderbird Three* aren't in the coolest shape, either – the heat is having a very bad effect on Scott and Alan, and Tin-Tin almost doesn't hear the order to try the signal again. To their utter horror, it's still not working!

Scott is almost passing out from the extreme heat and Alan encourages Tin-Tin to do whatever it takes to make the signal work. As a last resort, Tin-Tin drastically overrides *TB3's* system and then resends the beam. They all watch it anxiously – and Alan's hair is *huge* at this point! The signal makes a louder and more encouraging noise until, suddenly, *finally*, the damn thing hits the image of *Sun Probe* and fires the retros!

Inside *Sun Probe*, solarnaut Harris thinks that the ship's about to break up. Then he realises, with considerable relief, that the rocket motors have actually fired! They're moving away from the sun!

Triumphant music plays – the mission has been a success!

In *Thunderbird Three*, they're desperate to go home. Scott admits he couldn't have taken much more of the heat. Alan presses the button that fires the retros. It fails. Scott snaps at him to *fire the retros*, but Alan can't get them to work. *Nothing* is working, and now they're in the same bind as *Sun Probe*, Alan realises, "We're still on a collision course with the sun!"

On Earth, the news broadcasters pick up on this bad news even before Jeff and Gordon, who were watching the TV channel report. The newscaster *again* sounds *far* too pleased about this turn of events – he chirrups that the brave International Rescue crew are headed for certain tragedy.

Jeff calls Mount Arkan, informing Virgil that Scott, Alan and Tin-Tin are unable to leave the sun's orbit. Virgil asks Brains for help with a heart-wrenching, "What are we gonna do? What're we gonna *do*?" I like how Virgil's line is delivered with far less melodrama than you might expect from only reading it. Brains is thinking frantically out loud – at one point he stops altogether, mid-thought, and Virgil has to prompt him with a patient, "Yes?" Finally, Brains realises that *Thunderbird Three's* rescue signal is draining it of power to fire its retros, and that they'll need to figure out the frequency to jam *this* transmitter. Clearly no one on *TB3* has been left able to switch it off themselves. Brains elects to work out the frequency needed by using the super computer packed in *TB2*.

In *Thunderbird Three*, poor Scott passes out entirely, slumping onto the control panel. Alan is barely conscious and has figured out the same thing as Brains. He forces himself up and gets into the lift, intending to switch off the transmitter that Tin-Tin was operating.

While the news people continue to sound ecstatic about *Thunderbird Three's* certain demise, Virgil and Brains have returned to *Thunderbird Two*. They open up the crate (remember that ever-so-useful packing list?), only to discover that – gasp – robot *Braman* is in there instead! Brains gasps, "We've brought the wrong box!" Nice choice of words, brainiac, now *no one* gets blamed for this snafu. Argh.

Unaware of this, Alan makes it down in the lift, leaning against it with his sweaty head covered, his vision apparently blurring with it as he sees Tin-Tin unconscious on her keyboard. The transmitter is still going, and Alan makes a few steps towards it. He doesn't get any further and conks out altogether barely a metre from fixing it! Perhaps if you'd all been in your spacesuits...?

Hmm.

On snow-swept Mount Arkan, Brains is stuck for an idea and Virgil is stumbling out words as he desperately tries to prompt the scientist into finding some *other* way of doing the calculation they need to save *Thunderbird Three*. Virgil suggests frantically, "That is... if you could work out...Braman's mechanics on paper, surely you could..."

We have a winner! Brains suddenly remembers that he made Braman part pocket calculator. He quickly gets the question ready – Virgil's face is a picture as Brains reads out the mathematical gobbledook. When he's finished, Brains tells Braman, "Off you go, then," and the robot starts to make noises like a broken dial-up modem. At last, it spits out an answer. Brains just isn't too sure if it'll be the right one.

Jeff and Gordon are trying to reach them on the mountain. Virgil eventually answers, filling Jeff in loosely on the details, saying that Brains is going to jam *TB3's* transmitter. The broadcast starts, and there's a long, tense wait for the signal from Braman to do its work. This beam sounds like a Doctor Who monster.

It looks like it was the right answer as *Thunderbird Three's* retros suddenly burst into life! Woo hoo! Even more triumphant music plays than when they rescued *Sun Probe*. Alan emerges from behind the sofa in *TB3*, as though he'd been hiding from a Dalek, realising that the ship is now moving away from the sun! Brains and Virgil have figured out the same thing, prompting Jeff to warmly say how proud he is of his International Rescue team today. He prepares a heroes' welcome for the crew of *Thunderbird Three* – although there's probably cake

for Virgil and Brains in the interim, considering that it'll take another week for the spacefaring threesome to make it back to Earth.

Everyone is safely back on Tracy Island. Brains chats to Braman again, relieved that, now the excitement has died down, he has a chance to work on the robot's chess abilities. Braman promptly checkmates him. Jeff enters the room at that moment and consoles the crestfallen scientist, saying, "You've been working kinda hard lately..." which Brains seizes on as the answer. Bless. Jeff thanks the scientist for saving his team, and suddenly everyone is there to thank Brains. Even Braman joins in – presumably his next words are 'Crush, Kill, Destroy...' For now, everyone laughs as Brains gives a jaunty salute, and cheeky music signals that this is the end of a rather long review. Episode. Long *episode*. That's what I meant.

In many ways this is another story that every casual viewer immediately thinks of when *Thunderbirds* is mentioned. The story's influence has spread, most recently in Danny Boyle's movie *Sunshine* and in more real life events over the past few years. I think it boils down to how much investment you put into *Sun Probe's* unfortunate crew, and your tolerance of long, drawn out rocket launches. However, from my experience of this episode from a young age I thought it was great for sparking off debates as a kid – pointing out inconsistencies and improbabilities, like reaching the sun in seven days, or wondering why no one seems to be drinking any fluids or stripping off in the intolerable heat. I think this leads us into a much longer debate about why turtleneck jumpers seemed to be such a hit with the Tracys, living on a supposedly tropical island... perhaps Brains has invented anti-thermal underwear?

Overall, this is another important, core episode that establishes characters, machines and International Rescue's greatest strengths – its ability to adapt to the situation and unwillingness to merely quit despite the odds.

Next time: THE UNINVITED!

CHECK FOR:

- > Reused stock footage of a launch: *Thunderbird Two* slides silently along the runway.
- > Hitting on Tin-Tin: Nope, just Alan and Tin-Tin.
- > Tin-Tin and Alan snuggle: Lots of this! Very sweet!
- > Tin-Tin snuggles someone else...: Nope, apparently not this time, but it was difficult to say what Scott thought about being chaperone for the two-week long flight to the sun and back!
- > Each bro's appearance: Scott, passing out, (hurt/comfort aww). Virgil being the one to kick Brains' cranium into gear for the second rescue. Also, Gordon *finally* got a very important line. Alan was in charge of *Thunderbird Three* and throwing orders around.
- > IR's fantastic-but-unreliable equipment!: Well, there *had* to be a better way to send the beacon from *Thunderbird Three*! And Brains needs to put things back where they're meant to be – going by this, I figure trying to find anything in his CD collection is a nightmare.
- > "I'm SURE all the photo evidence got destroyed": We never learn much more about this 'tel-radio picture' that broadcast footage from *Sun Probe*. Presumably it could see *TB3* as well? Maybe Lady Penelope blew up the 'tel radio' station!
- > Alan-teasing: Nope, everyone was pretty serious this week.
- > Rescuing one of their own: Padding or not, tense scenes spent rescuing *Thunderbird Three* are the main reason to watch this episode!
- > Vehicles used: *Thunderbird Two* in the blizzard, handy 'Jodrell 6' and nearly crispy *Thunderbird Three*.
- > Surprisingly dextrous puppet hands: Not obvious here, although there is a lot of lever pulling!
- > Brains actually at a rescue: Well, sort of. He's on the second one at Mount Arkan, benefitting from Virgil's superior coffee-making abilities.

OVERALL RATING:
a star-studded 8/10
(Alan's huge hair alone gave it an extra point.)



Sam's POOLSIDE POINTERS

Samantha Winchester

Say it isn't so... Ned "The Ego" Cook has gone on a corporate bonding weekend? With the rest of those narcissistic network broadcasting types at NTBS? Oh, man, what I'd give to be a fly on the wall. They're all going to have bruises under their arms from elbowing each other out of the way of the mirror.

I hope they don't do that game where you fall back and trust your partner to catch you, because if they do, Ned's going to come back with a couple of bumps the size of goose eggs on the back of his neck...

But quick, let's take advantage of the peace and quiet round the pool to talk about some grammar, shall we? Hey... wait... where are you going... I'll ask Kyrano to make *pina colodas*... come back...!

He, She or They?

The problems with personal pronouns in today's English usage

A couple of recent beta jobs made me ponder on this problem. And since we're talking about me, one of whose nicknames is "Research Girl," that inevitably led to an afternoon of internet digging. And you know what I found out?

We would be better off if we were all Finnish. They know what to do with pronouns.

At least Tero Ykspetäjä, science fiction fanzine editor, thinks so. Last year he posted an article called "The Top Five Reasons Finnish is Cooler Than English," and the number one reason was: no gender-specific personal pronouns. They don't have "he" or "she," they just have "hän," which stands in for both. Lucky them.

"He," "she" or "them?" Definitely not "one," which sounds terribly toffee-nosed to current generations. Imagine Virgil saying to Scott, "Well, I suppose one should perform one's post-flight check now." But all humor aside, the lack of a "grammatically correct" and also "universally useful" personal pronoun has been a problem for English writers for a long time. Back before the sexual revolution of the 1960s/1970s, "he" was the preferred usage for all situations. But besides not really representing the true mix of society, it often caused awkward sentences like, "Man, being a mammal, breast feeds his young." So what

to do? Exclusively using "he" feels sexist, but exclusively using "she" feels like we've all suddenly joined an earth religion. And when you need to include both, do you give yourself whiplash with several paragraphs of "he or she," or worse, "he/she?"

There's a solution. Just say "their."

'No!' I hear the purists among you screaming. You can't say "their." You can't have sentences like "Nobody meant to be unkind, but nobody put **themselves** out of **their** way to secure her comfort." Or "It is every body's duty to do as well for **themselves** as **they** can." Or "Nobody was in **their** right place, nothing was done as it ought to be."

Well, apparently Jane Austen thought it was just fine. All of those quotes are from her novels.

I used to be in the purist ranks. But in my research I uncovered a bit of grammatical bait and switch from about 150 years ago. To my surprise, "their" was perfectly acceptable usage in the singular - English having no acceptable gender-neutral pronoun - up until then, when some grammatical sticklers got together and pronounced that it really wasn't proper. So they decided everyone should use "he" instead. Which was fine with most people until women finally got enough visible market share to say, hey, what about us, Mr. Grammarian?

The need for a solution isn't only spurred by today's politically correct world, either. More than a hundred years ago, Danish linguist Otto Jespersen (who was definitely not known as a feminist) wrote "...if a personal pronoun of common gender was substituted for *he* in such a proposition as this: 'It would be interesting if each of the leading poets would tell us what he considers his best work', ladies would be spared the disparaging implication that the leading poets were all men." You tell 'em, Otto!

So the next time somebody tells you that using "their" in a sentence like, "Everyone was having a great time and losing their inhibitions" is bad grammar, you have the example of some legendary writers to back you up. Like Jane Austen, Oscar Wilde, Geoffrey Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, the King James Bible, Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe, Frances Sheridan, Oliver Goldsmith, Henry Fielding, Maria Edgeworth, Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, William Makepeace Thackeray, Sir Walter Scott, George Eliot (Mary Anne Evans), Charles Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, Anthony Trollope, John Ruskin, Robert Louis Stevenson, Walt Whitman, George Bernard Shaw, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling, H. G. Wells, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Edith Wharton, W. H. Auden, Lord Dunsany, George Orwell, and C. S. Lewis. It might not be the currently acceptable grammar standard, but I have a feeling that the proponents of "their" will keep storming the gates until they give way.

And in the process of waving the gender neutral pronoun flag, perhaps we can rescue guys like US Senator Sam Hayakawa from the slippery slope into Grammar Hell. Hayakawa, who ironically founded the political lobbying organization U.S. English, which is dedicated to making the English language the official language of the United States, once said about abortion, "I believe it's strictly a matter between the patient and his doctor."

Maybe one day, Sam. But we're not holding our breath.



BRAINSCAN

DON'T FORGET TO GIVE THAT THING AN **ESCAPE HATCH!**

Lee

The freakiest thing I've seen since, oh, say, that guy doing a strip-tease on the bus last week, would have to be the Boston Dynamics 'Big Dog' (go here to see exactly what I'm talking about, because it *really* has to be seen to be believed: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZjqKXetwg>).



In another case of life imitating art (no, it isn't the other way around, ever!), it seems the United States Army has bankrolled the development of an automated 'dog' capable of traversing all kinds of rough terrain - hopefully including potholes.

This prancing, dancing, robotic battle 'dog' has been constructed specifically for deployment in the field, a freakish metal companion built to carry bullets and sandwiches - and maybe the odd hand grenade or two - for its military masters. But how soon before the Army puts claws on it (for the rending of their enemies) and turn it into a crab big enough to carry the soldiers themselves? I can only hope that they learn from *Sidewinder* and include a few escape hatches in the thing, not to mention a decent air conditioning system. Perhaps it is beholden of us to send them a copy of 'Pit of Peril', before the developers even get that far?

Yeah, it's all fun and games now, but I know what everybody is thinking.

What will *really* be the logical evolution of this mechanical marvel? We can only imagine it will get bigger and better and badder - that's what the military does. Can we truly look forward to seeing a *Sidewinder* looming on the horizon, or an AT-AT (a-la *The Empire Strikes Back*)? And what after that? The rise of the Terminator?

Does our apocalyptic future start here and now, with a crude metal 'dog'?

MADAM GILLYLEE'S EPI-SCOPE

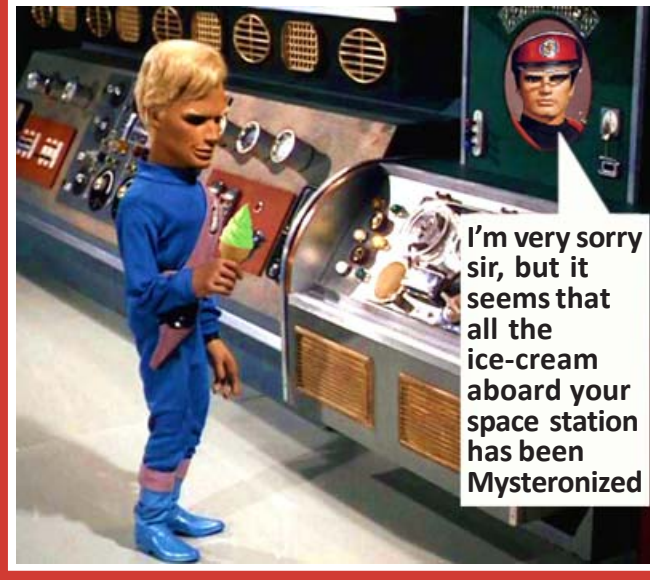
Can you guess which *Thunderbirds* character and episode this horoscope relates to? You'll find the answer somewhere in the **NEWSFLASH!**



PISCES

March Pisces who are drivers should be cautious where they drive and adapt their speed to the circumstances. They should not stop in deserted areas. Aiding people in possible need of help is commendable, but can result in danger and discomfort for themselves and their passengers. They have to be very careful in hot and sunny climates, fair skins burn far too easily if they're not well protected. This summer they should stay off their feet as much as possible.

Somewhere in Earth orbit...



TRACY ISLAND CHRONICLES

You may be wondering... why did we create this newsletter, *The Tracy Island Chronicles* and its brother sites *The Tracy Island Archives* and *Tracy Island Writers Forum* along with black sheep brother *Belah Gaat's Temple*? What was the point?

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, we have information on the voice actors behind the marionettes and we have fan-created vids. 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, BGT hangs onto stuff you shouldn't read unless you're old enough to know better, 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 40 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 month! (At least... we try to get it out every month -- 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 [ticmobilecontrol@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 *Tracy Island Writers Forum* 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 every month 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 ticmobilecontrol@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!

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