

THE DATING GAME (PART 1)

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These days, everybody knows that Thunderbirds takes place in the year 2026 - or does it? Chris Bentley examines the evidence and comes to a conclusion that will rock Anderson fandom!

In the Thunderbirds episode *Give Or Take A Million*, Tin-Tin Kyrano tears a page off a calendar that is clearly dated 2026, thereby firmly setting Gerry Anderson's most popular television series in the middle of the first half of the 21st century. Unfortunately, this single cut-away shot, lasting no more than a few seconds on screen, totally contradicts the carefully constructed unified future world of Century 21 Publishing's "TV Century 21" comic magazine, where the events of Fireball XL5, Stingray, Thunderbirds and Captain Scarlet And The Mysterons all take place during the same time frame, the mid-2060s, enabling cross-continuity between the shows. The "TV21" scenario is very appealing and makes a lot of sense to fans of these series, but how can we ignore the on-screen evidence that Thunderbirds takes place in 2026?

Let's look a bit more closely at *Give Or Take A Million*, setting aside Tin-Tin's calendar for a moment. Prior to this, we are shown a countdown of the days to Christmas on a series of close-up shots of the calendar on Jeff Tracy's desk. We see each successive date from Wednesday, December 21st through to Saturday, December 24th. Christmas Day in this year, therefore, takes place on a Sunday and although there will be seven years between 2020 and 2070 in which this occurs (2022, 2033, 2039, 2044, 2050, 2061 and 2067), 2026 isn't one of them.

Whichever year it is, the film *Thunderbirds Are Go* is set in the same year. In the movie, we see a calendar clock in the Tracy Island pool room which shows the date of Zero X's return to Earth from Mars: the calendar moves rapidly from Friday, 22nd July through to Friday, 2nd September. A year with these dates also has Christmas Day falling on a Sunday, so it would seem likely that the events of the feature film take place only a few months before those of *Give Or Take A Million*.

In the only example of on-screen cross-continuity between the Gerry Anderson series, the M.E.V. section of Zero X is seen on Mars in the opening sequences of *The Mysterons*, the pilot episode of Captain Scarlet And The Mysterons, clearly establishing that Thunderbirds and Captain Scarlet are set in the same 'universe'. We are told in no uncertain terms that *The Mysterons* takes place in 2068 A.D. as a caption appears on-screen at the start of the episode. Given the advances in technology that have been seen over any forty year period in the 20th century, it seems extremely unlikely (and unbelievable) that a spacecraft designed to explore Mars in 2026 would still be being used in 2068, so it is a natural assumption that *Thunderbirds Are Go* takes place shortly before *The Mysterons* - months or a few years rather than decades. It is reasonable to deduce, therefore, that the events of *Thunderbirds Are Go* and *Give Or Take A Million* both take place in 2067, in which December 25th falls on a Sunday.

Of course, all of this relies on the supposition that the future events of Thunderbirds take place in 'our' universe, so that specific dates fall on the same days of the week as in our calendar. Acceptance of this standpoint (or otherwise) is the prerogative of the individual viewer, but does dictate the validity of the deductions outlined above.

Is there more compelling evidence to date Thunderbirds in a time frame other than the 2020s that does not rely on such supposition? Surprisingly, yes there is, and it is surprising because it is just as (if not more) compelling than Tin-Tin's calendar in *Give Or Take A Million*. In the episode *30 Minutes After Noon*, we are shown a number of scenes set in the Spoke City office of Police Commissioner Garfield. On one of the walls is an Auto Date Calendar and, although it doesn't appear as clearly on screen as Tin-Tin's calendar, it is nonetheless clear enough for us to read the date: on its first appearance it reads 12/7/65, and then later (the next day) it reads 13/7/65. Obviously, this cannot be 1965, so the date of the Hudson Building fire (and Tom Prescott's wedding anniversary) in the episode is July 12th, 2065. This dating is confirmed on the Thunderbirds Century 21 Mini-Album "Sun Probe featuring Thunderbird 3" where Alan Tracy's narrative introduction to the events of the episode *Sun Probe* tells us that the Sun Probe incident was one of the highlights of 2065".

As if that were not enough, further evidence appears in the second feature film, *Thunderbird 6*. As *Skyship One* overflies the Pyramids towards the end of the world tour, Lady Penelope reads a newspaper at breakfast: the date of this paper appears clearly on screen as June 17, 2068.

We are, therefore, presented with two very conflicting dates for Thunderbirds, although the argument is much more convincing that both the series and the feature films are set between 2065 and 2068 rather than in 2026. Thunderbirds' art director Bob Bell has gone on record as saying that the date on the calendar cut-away shot in *Give Or Take A Million* was a mistake perpetrated by one of his assistants, and that the writers, producers and designers were in no doubt during the making of the programme (in 1964/65) that they were presenting a vision of the future set 100 years hence, not 60 years. Apart from that calendar shot, there is no other evidence to support the viewpoint that Thunderbirds takes place in the late 2020s, so unless someone can present a logical reason why the Tracys would keep a forty-year-old calendar on the wall, we should consign that particular piece of footage to the 'Oops!' bin.