

ENDGAME

A Fireball XL5, Stingray and
Captain Scarlet And The Mysterons Story

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CHAPTER ONE

Bitterness was a feeling that Surface Agent X20 tried hard to suppress every time it arose within him. Even now he fought against it as he sped through the Pacific Ocean towards one of the deepest sub-sea trenches in the world and the underwater city of Titanica that lay waiting there.

He had been summoned to a meeting with the tyrant who had destroyed his home city and enslaved his people—a tyrant he now addressed as 'Majesty' and 'Oh Mighty One'

X20 let his mind wander from the controls of his shark-like submarine. He could not remember what his parents had looked like no matter how hard he tried - Titan had condemned them to death and him to the lifelong slavery of a surface agent over seventy-five marine years ago.

His assignment was to spy on Marineville off the coast of California and report every move that the craft of the World Aquanaut Security Patrol, who were based there, made. In particular Stingray, the combat sub' commanded by Titan's arch enemy Captain Troy Tempest.

X20 had recently observed momentous activity at Marineville on his hidden scanners from within the seemingly derelict old house on the Isle of Lemoy. After briefing Titan on what he had seen the green-skinned Monarch had ordered him to leave for Titanica immediately.

Why should he be so cringing; why...

His shark-shaped craft did not stand a chance.

A vast shard of crumbling rock suddenly fell away from the trench wall X20 had been descending and cleaved his vessel in two - to be followed by more and more debris which quickly buried the wreckage when it reached the sea-bed far below.

He finally saw his mother's face as darkness closed in on him..

Two circles of green light probed through the depths to bathe the wreckage and its dead occupant with energy before it was completely covered. An exact replica of the vessel and its pilot came into existence and continued on towards Titanica as if nothing had happened - but this X20 was answerable to a different master.

X20 was escorted into the throne-room of Titan's palace by two aquaphibian guards.

'Leave us' ordered Titan from his ornate shell-encrusted throne. The green half-crustaceans creatures obeyed without question and Titan was left alone with his surface agent. 'Now X20, you say the activity at Marineville is due to the coming arrival of one of the Terraineans' oldest nuclear-powered submarines - but what is the purpose of such a visit?'

'It is a publicity campaign to promote the role of the World Aquanaut Security Patrol to the taxpayers of the surface world, Oh Mighty Titan. The submarine has been taken from the museum where it has been stored to its original construction site in England. It will sail from there in seven days' time.'

'Then we will destroy it before a worldwide audience' intoned the undersea lord.

'...But how, Mighty One?' questioned X20. 'It will be escorted by many Terrainean craft - including the accursed Stingray.'

'Be silent!' roared Titan. 'Your words offend my ears. A plan is already perceived by my superior intellect.' Quickly he rose from his throne and walked beneath the airtight observation dome to a great conch shell. Taking up a coral bar he struck it and before the vibrations had died an Aquaphibian guard re-entered. 'Summon my chief scientist to me at once, guard. He is to bring his latest invention with him -from what I have heard it is the answer to our problem.'

'Yes, Majesty,' said the creature in its strange warbling voice and left to carry out Titan's command. Only a few moments passed before it returned to the chamber with another green-skinned being - more human in appearance than the Aquaphibian and wearing flowing yellow robes.

'Here it is, Master,' announced the chief scientist handing Titan a metallic cylinder about three inches long and half an inch in diameter. 'I have finally perfected the prototype for a hand-held matter disrupter. When the trigger is activated this device will emit a ray of coherent energy that will completely disintegrate any object within its range.'

'Excellent, excellent - now leave your inventions with me and be gone,' ordered Titan. The Lord of Titanica slowly rose from his throne and descended the steps from the dais to stand beside X20. 'You will go to England with the disruptor. Disguised as a Terrainean you will infiltrate the base from where the submarine will be launched - use a hypnobeam on one of its crewmembers and instruct him to take the disrupter and carry out as much sabotage as possible when they are halfway through their voyage. With luck the ancient vessel will be completely destroyed - and my enemies discredited in the eyes of their own people.'

'I will use it,' said X20 as he took the cylinder from Titan's hand. 'But for the Mysterons' purposes and not yours. First, though, it must be tested - and it is only fitting that it be tested on you, Oh Mighty One.' X20 raised the disruptor and pointed it at Titan.

'You dare threaten me - Titan of Titanica! You - a mere surface agent. I will'

Titan's last words were cut short as the Mysteronised X20 fired the disruptor. A purple ray hit the tyrant, transfixing him in an incandescent halo of pure energy. Two green circles of light suddenly appeared and bathed Titan's body seconds before it completely disintegrated.

In his place now stood a Mysteron recreation.

'You know what you must do, Titan,' said X20. It was more a statement than a question.

'Yes, X20. I will not fail. The Mysterons' plans will be carried out,' responded the sea king in a lifeless tone. 'But you must prepare the way. Take the disruptor and go-do what must be done.'



CHAPTER TWO

Space City was on full security alert. During the last week an unknown agent had succeeded in sabotaging nearly all of the Air-Sea Tracking Stations that ringed the Pacific island base of the World Space Patrol.

One by one the stations had been put out of action with some form of acid - components completely destroyed. Five days and five tracking stations had fallen; five days in which Chief Engineer Jock Campbell and his men had been on constant repair duties.

Two stations were back in action now but Commander Wilbur Zero feared attack from unknown forces - and with three tracking stations down it seemed inevitable. Orders had been given to Security Chief Sergeant Patrick Mahoney to double the guard at the repaired stations - other guards kept a constant watch on the coastline.

The repair work continued.

In Space City itself only a token guard remained. It was night-time now and from out of the shadows came a stealthy figure - walking swiftly for the entrance to the underground car park next to the great revolving Control Tower.

'Excuse me, sir,' called a nearby voice; a security guard came into view. 'Can I see your pass, please'

The figure came into the guard's torchlight. He wore the brown uniform of a lieutenant, but it was the man's heavy features and bulging, almost fish-like eyes that caught the guard's attention.

'Can I see your pass, Lieutenant?' asked the guard a second time.

'Certainly,' responded the disguised X20 pulling a torch-like device from his pocket and shining an intense white beam into the guard's eyes.

'What are you -', the guard gasped, and then became rigid, dropping the coma-ray gun he had begun to draw.

'You have not seen me,' said X20 to the hypnotized guard. 'You will not see me leave and you will not sound the alarm. Do you understand?'

'Yes,' replied the guard.

'Resume your patrol and act naturally.'

Titan's hypnobeam had served the Mysterons well.

X20 now ignored the security guard and walked into the carpark.

'The Earthmen are fools', thought the Mysteronised X20. 'One of their supposedly impregnable bases and with the use of the hypnobeam I have remained undetected for five days now.'

The attacks on the Air-Sea Tracking Stations had succeeded in putting the majority of the security forces where X20 wanted them - out of his way.

He found an equipment elevator and entered its cage. At the touch of a button it began to descend. 'They expect an attack,' thought X20, 'and they will get one after I have succeeded in the final stage of my assignment.'

The elevator reached its lowest level and the cage door slid open to reveal the Nuclear Generators. The matter disruptor had been ideal for putting the tracking stations silently out of action but the final blow would be dealt a little more explosively.

Jock Campbell had to finish the routine maintenance checks on the generators and then oversee the repair work on the third tracking station. 'Och, there's no time to eat my haggis while this alert is on. It's one job after-' The wiry Scot's thoughts were cut short by a hefty blow to the head from behind. He fell heavily to the floor - he would be unconscious for hours.

X20 stepped over the engineer's prostrate form to stand before the Generators that powered all of Space City - their small size denying their giga-watt output.

Swiftly and methodically the surface agent placed Coralamic explosive on every generator and then repeated the process on the auxiliaries.

X20 now found his way back to the elevator- he must rejoin Titan's forces. Soon the generators would be so much scrap metal and Space City would be without power.

Leaving the car park he ran past the hypnotized guard and headed away from the Control Tower.

'Halt-or I fire!'

X20 looked around to see another security guard heading towards him on a jetmobile coma-gun in hand. 'You can't stop me Earthman,' said X20, raising the matter disruptor.

The guard fired his gun and a crackling coma ray enveloped the saboteur - but he did not fall. 'That could knock out an elephant,' gasped the guard in shock.

'But not a Mysteron,' added X20 aiming the disruptor.

The guard had tried to shout 'Emergency Red,' into his jetmobile radio before the purple ray of the disruptor hit him and he dissolved into thin air.

X20 grabbed the discarded jetmobile and sped away down the highway towards the coast cursing the guard. Within minutes he had reached the western security gate - the guards there saw a lieutenant rushing towards them.

One of them ran to meet him and received a lethal dose of the jetmobile's coma-ray cannon for his trouble. Next moment the disguised X20 was through. In a matter of seconds the base was on full red alert and all the

coastal guards were on the lookout for a 'lieutenant' on a jetmobile heading their way.

X20 threw caution to the winds now and jetted out over the sea, the life-giving sea; it still called to him even in his Mysterionised form.

A second before he could dive to safety a laser bolt punched a hole in his chest and he fell from the jetmobile into the waves below.

'Got him!' yelled a young security guard on the coastal road and then he took out his belt radio to contact his chief, Mahoney.

Minutes later a combination of the Red Alert klaxon and the telephone bleeping woke Commander Zero from a troubled sleep in the Control Room.

He quickly clambered from his makeshift camp bed which he had been using since the security alert began so that his section-heads could keep him updated on developments any time of the day or night without waking his wife, Eleanor.

'What the blazes is happening down there, Mahoney?' bawled Zero into the receiver, trying to compete with the klaxon.

'I didn't wish to wake you until I was absolutely sure, sir,' came the voice of his Irish security chief. 'It started when I received an emergency call from one of my men in the Tower area - but then the radio went dead. Minutes later someone burst through West Point and killed one of my guards.'

'What?' gasped Zero. 'Have you caught him yet, Pat?'

Mahoney explained what had happened next. 'My lad says he saw him fall into the sea - pretty sure he was dead sir.'

'But what in blazes was he doing near the Tower?' mused Zero. 'I want a full search-'

'Wait a minute, sir,' cut in Mahoney. 'I've just received a call from the engineers working on the third tracker. Chief Campbell hasn't returned from checking the generators.'

'The generators!' howled Zero, suddenly comprehending what the saboteur was up to. 'For God's sake man, organize a full search of the Generator Room - alert bomb disposal and fire-fighting teams. If he's done anything to those generators while your guards have been watching the coast...' The Commander's words trailed off.

Below the sea, off the western coast of Space City Island the mortally wounded X20 floundered in pain. His wig had floated from his head and the currents were slowly washing away his pink face make-up to reveal the green skin beneath. The Mysterionised surface agent had no fear of death - he knew his body's power of retrometabolism meant that he was virtually indestructible and that his wound would soon heal.

Suddenly X20's body erupted in a blaze of energy and vanished; a mile further out to sea the craft which Space City's detectors had taken for an oversized shark also ceased to exist.

X20 had served the Mysterions well - even his destruction had purpose: There would now be no trace left of the matter disruptor, a device the Mysterions had decided was too dangerous to exist in case one day it fell into the hands of Spectrum and was used against them.

CHAPTER THREE

Beyond the limits of any detection device the vast armada of Titan's Terror Fish lay ready to encircle Space City Island.

In the Golden Command Fish, Titan moved towards the control console and slowly pressed a lever. A high-pitched whine pervaded the cabin and then faded away...

In the Generator Room below Space City's Control Tower security guards poured from the elevator to begin their search for any sign of sabotage.

'Look!' shouted one of them. 'There's Jock - he looks unconscious, or...'

The high-pitched whine pervaded the Generator Room. Every generator erupted in white light. The men shut their eyes in agony - and then blackness.

The explosions rocked the whole twenty-five story Control Tower and reduced its basement levels to rubble. On the surface everyone was bowled over by the shock waves - the Tarmac seemed to buck beneath them like a roller coaster. Every window in the building shattered. All the lights went out. The Tower's rotation ground to a halt, all power gone.

Space City was crippled!

A state of shock reigned over those security guards still conscious. No one could do anything. The only communications still working were their belt radios and those in their jetmobiles - but all calls to the mainland were blocked.

Mahoney thought of the neutron transmitters in the spacecraft down in the underground hangars; but how could they reach them with all the power cut off?

Panic was beginning to spread.

No one saw the fleet of Terror Fish surface and speed towards the shore. An army of vicious green Aquaphibians armed with atomic rifles struck and overwhelmed Space City's security guards.

Within half an hour it was all over - the guards dead or imprisoned. Those killed had been Mysteronised to gain valuable information concerning the island's defences. Many ground staff and astronauts watched the takeover helplessly, trapped in the Tower and the other buildings of Space City.

In the Control Room Commander Zero tried desperately to free Lieutenant Ninety, who had just come on duty, from beneath a fallen steel beam. Both his legs were crushed and he had lost a lot of blood - and Zero could do nothing.

On nearly every floor of the Tower similar scenes were being enacted - everyone was helpless without power.

CHAPTER FOUR

As the sun rose Titan surveyed his triumph from the beach — a wicked gleam in his eyes. Even though he was a Mysteron recreation he still felt pride in defeating the Terraineans.

'This is the voice of the Mysterons! We know that you can hear us, Earthmen'.

The sinister alien voice was broadcast from the loudspeakers of every radio receiver in operation on Earth.

Forty thousand feet above the ground on the edge of space hovered Cloudbase — the mobile headquarters of the Spectrum Organisation now dedicated to fighting the Mysteron menace. Everyone on board the flying 'deck' was instantly alert.

Captain Scarlet quickly put his boots back on and ran from his quarters, all thought of rest now banished from his mind.

'In retaliation for your unprovoked attack on our Martian complex we have waged a war of nerves against you which we will now escalate until Mankind is totally defeated. In twenty-four hours every major city on Earth will be destroyed, commencing with Unity. The Mysterons will be avenged!'

With the threat given, the transmission ceased and everyone breathed more quickly as they began to digest what had been said. Tension rose; every major city? How was that possible?

Scarlet reached the Control Room where he found Captain Blue temporarily in the hot seat at Colonel White's semi-circular desk while the Colonel was away. Blue had already called a full alert and minutes later every active duty captain and four Angels sat around the desk.

He addressed the assembly. 'You all heard the Mysteron threat!' he said tersely, 'and we can guess why they are bringing things to a head.'

'Yes — the Mysteron Research Group!' exclaimed Scarlet. 'They must see those scientists as a real danger to their existence!'

'The Group is meeting with the World President and Colonel White in Unity City at the moment to discuss its progress,' added Blue.

'...but every major city on Earth?' questioned Rhapsody Angel in her unmistakably English accent. 'It's beyond belief'

'I know,' said Blue, 'but assuming such a threat is possible, where could the Mysterons launch it from, and why are they so confident we can't stop them?'

'They've given us twenty-four hours to find out,' put in Captain Ochre.

'That puzzles me,' added Scarlet. 'In twenty-four hours we could get the Research Group up to Cloud base.'

'What's the point if we can't stop the Mysterons in the meantime?' questioned Grey morosely.

'Grey is right,' said Scarlet. 'We've got to concentrate on finding the source of the threat and eliminating it.'

Has power been restored to all necessary systems on this base to allow my plan to proceed?' questioned the Lord of Titanica in the Planetary Defence Centre beneath Space City.

'Yes Mighty Titan,' answered his chief scientist. 'But— But this scheme is madness. Surely...'

'Silence, fool!' exploded Titan. 'You will obey me or die. Prime the planatomic missiles — every major Terrainean city must be destroyed, beginning with Unity, the seat of their so-called World Government. The

missiles must be launched in twenty-four marine hours' time. Do you understand me slave?'

'Yes, Oh Mighty One — but the radiation, it will pollute the seas. We will all die,' pleaded the chief scientist.

'Obey me'.

'No! I have bowed down to you all my life, but no more. Your mad scheme will kill everyone!' The scientist lunged towards Titan, a dagger in his hand.

With amazing strength the Mysteronised Monarch grabbed the blade and plunged it deep into his attacker's chest.

Within minutes another Mysteron recreation stood beside Titan, now more than willing to carry' out his orders — consequences be damned.

Titan left the bunker and walked over to Space City's airstrip where twelve Backlash fighter 'planes had been rolled out onto the runway by a small army of Aquaphibians.

'Bring the Terrainean informant to me,' ordered Titan and one of the Aquaphibian guards ran off to comply. Within minutes the creature returned with Sergeant Mahoney — he had been subjected to the hypnobeam and instructed to answer all questions truthfully. He had disclosed everything including the Planetary Defence Centre, which had required Mysteron science to break the top security entrance codes to its tolenium reinforced underground bunker. 'Where are the pilots for these craft?' questioned Titan.

'They will be in the stand-by room trapped due to lack of power,' droned Mahoney.

'Lead a party of Aquaphibians and bring me twelve pilots — kill the rest,' instructed Titan.

A sudden roar filled the air. The Lord of Titanica looked up at the source of the sound. 'A patrol ship is returning! It must be blasted from the sky before it sees us!' screamed Titan.

'I'm worried Ken,' exclaimed Fireball XL2's navigator and engineer, Lieutenant Al Stomper, from the ship's navigation bay.

'I know — it's strange all right,' responded Captain Ken Johnson from the control cabin of the World Space Patrol ship. 'There's no response to my calls for landing instructions. In fact Space City is completely radio silent on all frequencies.'

'Keep trying to raise them,' suggested Al.

'It's no good,' said Ken. 'I'm going in to land; we can't stay up here much longer.'

Suddenly all hell broke loose — interceptor missiles smashed into XL2's main body and Ken lost control of the ship.

The missiles had been fired by Space City!

Fireball XL2 was now in a crash dive and heading for certain destruction.

'Al! Shouted Ken into the intercom. 'Main motor assembly out of action — she's gonna crash. Come forward — we've gotta use Junior to escape. Someone's taken Space City!'

Wrestling with the controls Ken waited for Al but thirty seconds passed, and then another thirty. 'Hurry up Al!'

'Ken — the telescopic tunnel's not working!' screamed Al over the intercom. 'I'm going to use the ejector tube. Get clear man — now!'

Ken Johnson uncoupled the electromagnets and put Fireball Junior into a power dive. She pulled away from the main body; Ken brought the little

ship's nose up and she swerved away from XL2 and then around to follow her down again.

'Come on Al! Eject!' shouted Ken.

One minute before impact in the blue Pacific below Ken saw Al eject from XL2 — only to be hit by the ship's central stabiliser. Al Stomper's mutilated body followed his ship into the ocean.

'No! No!' screamed Ken as he pulled XL2 Junior up at the last minute, skimming the surface of the sea. Ken Johnson had lost his friend as well as his ship, and someone was going to pay...

With his knuckles white on the controls he set course for mainland Astra Port K.

'You have failed to destroy the spacecraft completely!' screamed Titan to the Aquaphibians who had fired the interceptor missiles. He knew he must not fail the Mysterons.

The Aquaphibians sent to fetch the fighter pilots now returned with twelve struggling airmen; Titan turned to them.

'Hold them still,' he commanded. Quickly he applied the hypnobeam to each one and the pilots' struggles ceased.

'You will follow only my commands,' ordered the Sea Lord. 'You will take these flying machines to Bermuda where you will destroy every airfield on the island, commencing with Unity Airport.'

CHAPTER FIVE

'Colonel White calling from Unity City,' announced Lieutenant Green from his communications board.

'Put him on the Spectroview,' ordered Blue. Spectrum's silver-haired Commander-In-Chief appeared on screen.

'Captain Blue, I'm relying on you to find a way to stop the Mysterons carrying out their threat. Find their base of operations and smash it quickly — if they are successful it will mean the end of our world!'

'I know sir,' responded Blue.

'I'm afraid I'm here for the duration,' continued Colonel White. 'There is something in the sea destroying all craft taking off from Bermuda.'

'Stay in the Meeting Hall,' advised Blue. 'I'll call in the WASPs to deal with whatever is out there. If we can get through I'll have you all airlifted up to Cloudbase.'

'Keep me informed of progress, Captain.'

'S.I.R., Colonel,' acknowledged Blue, closing the channel.

Less than a minute later Green picked up another transmission. 'Captain! Astra Port K Australia calling. Something about the Mysterons and Space City.'

'What?' gasped Blue. 'Put them on the viewer.'

A man in a World Space Patrol uniform appeared on the Spectroview.

'This is Captain Ken Johnson — I believe the Mysterons have taken Space City.'

'Explain yourself,' said Blue impatiently.

'My ship was returning from patrol. We couldn't raise Space City as we came in to land. Then they-' He paused, apparently struggling with his emotions, before regaining his composure. 'Then they fired on us. The main body of my ship was destroyed, and my navigator — he was killed...' Another pause. 'I managed to escape in Fireball Junior and make it to Port K. When I was informed about this latest Mysteron threat I knew it could only be them. And Space City has the planatomic capability to enable them to carry it out!'

'Of course! Thank you, Captain Johnson. I'm sorry about your navigator.'

The screen went blank and Blue turned to Lieutenant Green. 'Call up Space City, Lieutenant. Check out Johnson's story. That guy could have been a Mysteron trying to decoy us.'

Green complied and minutes later turned to Blue. 'No reply, Captain. It's as if they've cut communications completely. There's not even any carrier wave from their neutroni transmitter — nothing. They are completely radio silent.'

'Then it's possible...' murmured Blue. 'Tell Colonel White what we've discovered. I'll get Scarlet and the others up here.'

Scarlet and Ochre arrived first, followed closely by Harmony, Rhapsody, Melody, and Symphony (leaving Destiny on stand-by duty in the cockpit of her Angel Interceptor). The duty team was completed a few seconds later by Doctor Fawn, and Captains Grey and Magenta. Captain Blue raised the stools around his desk and everyone sat.

'I'm certain the Mysterons have taken over Space City,' said Blue bluntly, 'and there is something in the sea stopping any craft leaving Bermuda.'

'What are your orders, Blue?' questioned Scarlet.

'That you lead a team comprising myself and Captain Grey in an attempt to penetrate Space City and sabotage their computers with the aim of preventing any further missile launches. Our landing will be made under the cover of a joint World Navy and Airforce attack. I'm going to ask the WASPs

to deal with whatever is in the sea off Bermuda — as soon as they have engaged it I want Ochre and Magenta to go in and get the Colonel, World President, and the Research Group to safety. The Angels will remain here until required.'

'I agree — but why chose me to lead the sabotage mission?' queried Scarlet. 'The Colonel put you in charge while he was away.'

'I imagine Captain Blue is thinking of your special abilities, Paul,' said Rhapsody quietly. 'And when it comes to the Mysterons, you are also the most experienced officer amongst us. I'm sure none of the other Captains would mind taking orders from you.'

'Put it to the vote,' insisted Scarlet

'This isn't a democracy, Scarlet,' said Blue flatly. 'You're in command of the sabotage team and that's final. Green: Get me Colonel White.'

The Colonel was informed of the decision. 'I agree. Scarlet is the man to lead the sabotage attempt,' he replied. 'The World President will brief General Martin at World Security HQ. A rendezvous time will be worked out for his forces to pick you up and reach Space City. Wait a moment Captain - we have just had further confirmation that Space City is in the hands of the Mysterons — twelve Backlash fighters with WSP markings have entered Bermuda's airspace and can't be contacted... I've just been told that they are attacking Unity Airport. They are obliterating anything that can fly.'

'I'm sending in the Angels, sir,' said Captain Blue. 'We'll get you out as soon as possible!'

One and a half hours after the Mysteron threat and things were on the move. Everything had been planned and Captains Scarlet, Blue, and Grey, along with Doctor Fawn, who had insisted on going with them so they could have his medical skills on hand if required, were in a Spectrum Passenger Jet heading for Sydney, Australia.

At Sydney Admiral Bristol, Head of the World Navy, watched his entire battle fleet ready itself. Simultaneously, at Boscombe in England, General McCormack (recalled from retirement after the disastrous General Whitway affair) readied his strike force — the World Army-Airforce would also play its part against the Mysterons.

Before the sabotage team left Captain Blue had watched the five Angels take off for Bermuda and then called up Marineville. Captains Ochre and Magenta were anxiously waiting for a report from the WASPs before planning their rescue of Colonel White and the others.



CHAPTER SIX

'Atlanta, get me Portsmouth Naval Base. I want to speak to Tempest immediately!' roared Commander Shore in Marineville's control room. 'Fisher, tell Sea Leopard to go to launch stations and take the Panama Canal for Bermuda at top knots — I'll radio instructions after launch. Get every combat sub in range to follow Sea Leopard.'

'Troy on the screen now, father,' said Atlanta.

The crippled Commander moved his hover chair over to the World Videophone on the wall of the control room.

'Tempest, I want Stingray heading for Bermuda along with every Barracuda at Portsmouth. Forget the publicity stunt — we've got to help Spectrum break the Mysteron force that's blockading the island from the sea.'

Shore briefly gave Troy details of whom Spectrum wanted to rescue.

'We heard the threat over the radios, sir,' said Troy. 'Let's hope Spectrum can stop them, for all our sakes — or it won't make much difference if we break through or not.'

'I know that, Tempest, but we've got to be positive. The World President and the Mysteron Research Group must be taken to Cloudbase whatever the outcome of the threat! I'm sending Sea Leopard and everything else in range to assist you.'

'P.W.O.R.,' acknowledged Troy.

Only thirty minutes passed before Stingray was on its way at rate six — the Barracuda fleet following somewhat more slowly.

Eight hours since the Mysteron threat and the Spectrum sabotage team were on their way to Space City Island aboard WNS Century. All around the battleship the Sydney Fleet cleaved the waves in formation. They would reach the rendezvous point in two hours.

At Boscombe World Army-Airforce Base launch stations was being called.

'Keep at rate six, Phones,' ordered Troy Tempest from his position at Stingray's controls.

'The Barracudas are falling behind, Troy,' said Phones seated beside him.

'It will give us time to scout around a bit, Phones,' responded his captain. 'See if we can flush the Mysterons out into the open.'

'I get the picture, Troy,' drawled Phones. 'They see just one sub so they become overconfident. Then the Barracudas catch them on the hop — let's hope they aren't too late.'

'So you don't have to say we defeated them all on our own?' laughed Troy ironically.

'Sure, Troy! We'll be in the region in one hour.'

'I hope the electron cannons work underwater,' murmured Troy as the unsettling thought occurred to him.

'Yeah, they were a real rush job — one cannon, one sub and no time for testing,' added Phones with a mastery of understatement.

'Mr. President, sir!' shouted an orderly, running into the Meeting Hall. 'There's a crowd of people breaking into the Air Museum next door - you can see them on the monitor.'

Everyone watched the scene on the great wall screen behind the semi-circular conference table.

The time was now ten hours since the Mysteron threat.

'We've gotta stop them. The Mysterons will kill them. Order the guards-'

'There is nothing we can do that is worth doing, gentlemen,' said World President John Roberts calmly. 'They know they will die if they don't get away. Calling the guards would be useless. They're probably helping the crowd anyway.'

'Do you think Spectrum will get us out?' questioned one of the eight scientists making up the Research Group.

'I certainly hope so,' said the W.P. — a man newly elected following the resignation of James Younger. 'But it's not only the Mysterons they'll be up against. Don't forget, they can't rescue everyone in this city —there'll be a lot of embittered people around when that occurs to them.'

The President's words made everyone in the Meeting Hall realise just how fragile civilisation was.

'Sir, four old helicopters have taken off from the roof of the museum,' said Colonel White who had continued watching the screen. 'They must have found a fuel supply somewhere. They haven't a chance — even if they'd had present-day helijets.' He added quietly

They all watched as the candid cameras of the World Senate Building panned upwards to follow the rising 'copters.

'They're going west — heading for the USA.' said the World President.

'Look,' said White, pointing. Two Backlash fighters came into view — closer and closer...

Suddenly two spurts of orange flame shot from beneath each wing. Two helicopters were hit — one exploded, raining red hot debris on the city below. The other began to go into a spiral dive at an ever increasing speed until it smashed into the skyscrapers reaching up to meet it.

The remaining 'copters each took different routes —one made a run for it while the last turned head on towards the attacking fighters.

'Look at the brave fool,' exclaimed White.

One Backlash peeled away but the other held to its flight path destructor cannons blazing. The 'copter was hit but momentum carried it on — it struck the Backlash. A blinding fireball hung in the sky for a moment, and then fell.

The Meeting Hall was struck by shock waves as the burning debris hit the roof. Explosion followed explosion.

'Did you see that? He did it! He destroyed one of die Mysteron 'planes... 'The excited scientist became silent.

The other helicopter was hit by destructor blasts and with its tail blasted away went sailing down towards the sea.

But the stricken machine did not reach the waves — a coralamic torpedo shot up from the deep to meet it and another fireball resulted. The hidden Terror Fish downed periscope and dived away from the destruction it had wrought.

The sad victory over the fighter had come to nothing — a Mysteronised Backlash rejoined its brothers over Bermuda.

'Spectrum are here!' was the joyous cry that echoed across the island as five white jet fighters roared over Unity City.

The dog-fights began — Angel Interceptor against Backlash. The Angels were outnumbered and outgunned hut the hypnotised WSP pilots were no match for Spectrum's female flying aces.

'This is Angel Leader,' called Symphony. 'Give 'em all you've got girls — and more!'

But these would be the last words ever spoken by Karen Wainwright...

The first clash resulted in two Backlashes downed with the electrode cannons and one Angel Interceptor destroyed — Rhapsody had ejected from her 'plane only seconds before it exploded. She was lucky to have survived.

Thirty minutes of destruction followed.

Three Angels remained in the air—Melody, Destiny, and Harmony. The Mysteron-controlled fighters had been destroyed once, and then destroyed a second time in the form of Mysteronised recreations.

But Symphony would never fly again unless angels really did exist. Rhapsody had seen her 'plane come down only half a mile from where she lay nursing a broken arm and leg — she had been warned that there would be day's like this, but it didn't make it any easier.

It was now thirteen hours since the Mysteron threat had been announced.



CHAPTER SEVEN

'Troy, Terror Fish on the portside,' called Phones excitedly. 'I'd know that echo anywhere.'

'We've seen no Mysterons yet,' mused Troy. 'I wonder what Titan— Phones, I wonder if they are the Mysterons?'

'More of them Troy,' cut in Phones. 'An armada no less — and two have spotted us. They're closing fast.'

Marina, the silent girl from the sea and third member of the Stingray crew had been sitting in the Relaxation Bay until now. She walked forwards to stand behind Troy and peer into the green darkness beyond the ports pointing frantically.

'Dive, dive, dive! Cut cabin and searchlights, Phones,' ordered Troy. 'We'll sit on the bottom until they're on top of us — then take them by surprise.'

Marina's keen eyesight allowed her to indicate to Troy when the Terror Fish were within range.

'Fire sting missiles one and two — and prime electron cannon,' shouted Troy as he took the super sub off the bottom at rate six, heading straight for the enemy.

The guided missiles left their tubes as Stingray veered away. The sea was lit with vivid explosions as two direct hits were scored and the Terror Fish crashed onto the seabed no longer interested in the fight.

Marina began to point in all directions.

'We're surrounded, Troy,' gasped Phones, listening to his hydrophones.

Coralamic torpedoes exploded all around them as Troy and Phones put Stingray through her paces, diving and weaving to avoid the deadly

weapons. Her sting missiles destroyed another eight Terror Fish, only for them to be recreated by the Mysterons.

Troy was right: The Mysterons had got to Titan. He was their puppet now, though little good the knowledge was doing the Stingray crew at this precise moment.

Suddenly a crackle of electricity arced across the deep and struck one of the recreated Terror Fish to blast it into oblivion again. 'The death or glory boys have arrived, Troy,' yelled Phones, picking up the Barracuda fleet on his hydrophones as Stingray avoided another missile. Now they had a chance and Troy was determined to make every sting missile and electron blast count.

Cloudbase was hovering forty thousand feet above Bermuda at Colonel White's command. Lieutenant Green had relayed the outcome of the battle over Unity City and Symphony's sad loss. The news that it was Titan's forces surrounding Bermuda had just broken.

'Stingray and the Barracuda fleet are engaging Titan's fish now — but the Mysterons are recreating every one that's destroyed,' called Green from his communications board.

'We're going in now, while the Mysterons are distracted,' decided Captain Ochre from the cockpit of one of the two Spectrum Helicopters waiting on the flight deck.

'Okay, Magenta. Let's go.'

Within minutes the two Spectrum machines were hovering above the World Senate building. Ochre and Magenta could see burning wreckage and bodies strewn all over the City.

'The people will see the 'copters,' called Ochre over the radio to his colleague. 'They'll think we're here to start a full scale evacuation.'

'Yeah, it'll tear them up when they find out we're not,' added Magenta thoughtfully.

They could see quite a crowd gathering outside the Building as they touched down on its flat roof. Magenta remained to guard the helicopters while Ochre found his way down into the building, looking for directions to the Meeting Hall.

Ten minutes later Ochre arrived at his destination. 'Gentlemen— follow me quickly please.'

'What kept you, Captain?' questioned Colonel White with a grim smile as everyone ran from the Meeting Hall, heading for the roof.

An orderly appeared before them. 'You've come for us? You must have!' he gasped.

'I'm sorry son,' said Ochre.

'But we'll all die!'

'Spectrum are trying to find the source of the Mysteron threat at the moment,' added Colonel White, feeling uncomfortable in this situation.

'There is still hope.'

The orderly ran off down the corridor, tears of rage streaming down his face. He did not want to die. Why couldn't they save him as well?

None of the scientists said anything — but each stole a guilty glance at his colleagues.

'Let's get out of here,' said the President as they reached the roof.

They looked over the parapet at the crowd as they ran towards Magenta and the helicopters. The orderly was talking to them. Suddenly fists were shaken and howls of anger were heard from below.

The President, Colonel White, and the Research Group piled five plus the pilot into each helicopter and the two Captains took off for Cloudbase. Suddenly laser bolts burst around them, and one of the helicopters was hit and began to spiral downwards.

They were surrounded by World Airforce helijets.

'They must be Mysterons,' shouted White. 'I'm sorry, Mr. President. The situation seems hopeless...'



CHAPTER EIGHT

The WASPs were on the run — completely outnumbered. Already more than half of the Barracuda sub's had been destroyed. Troy knew he was staring defeat in the face for the first time.

'Troy large number of craft ahead,' called Phones. 'Surface and sub-sea vessels coming this way. Troy, Marina, it's Sea Leopard and the Marineville fleet—they've arrived at last!'

From that moment on the tide of battle turned. Sea Leopard and the other combat craft cut into the Terror Fish like a knife through butter. Missiles, torpedoes, depth charges, and electrode rays destroyed Aquanaut, Aquaphibian, and Mysteron alike for the next hour, but eventually the WASPs won the victory.

Stingray had been lucky to survive unscathed — a tribute to the superb skills of Troy and Phones.

'Tempest— we've just had some bad news,' came Commander Shore's gruff voice over Stingray's radio. 'The President, Spectrum's Chief, and the Mysteron Research Group have been taken hostage by disguised Bereznik helijets and flown to Katania.'

There was a stunned silence in Stingray's cabin.

'We've just had an ultimatum from General Berenora.' continued Shore 'Give Bereznik access to every military installation and database of the World Government so they can direct our forces and launch an all-out attack on the Mysteron's complex, or the hostages will die! They're power-mad fools; they'll ruin everything. The USS are sending their best man in to get the hostages out. You are to go to Katania and pick them up. I've arranged for

the World Airforce to take you to Portsmouth to save time. Good luck, Tempest. You'll need it.'

It was now fourteen hours since the Mysteron threat — ten hours to Armageddon.

'World Airforce approaching now, Admiral Bristol,' called the helmsman of WNS Century, flagship of the Sydney Fleet.

'Tell Scarlet and his men to get into their diving gear. As soon as—'

'As soon as the World Airforce give the signal you attack,' completed Captain Scarlet, entering the bridge. 'We're ready, Admiral. Scuba gear, sea bugs, everything.'

'Right — get down to the ejector tubes,' ordered the Admiral. 'You'll leave in five minutes.'

Fifteen hours since the Mysteron threat and Captains Scarlet, Blue, Grey, and Doctor Fawn shot from WNS Century's ejector tubes three miles from the coast of Space City Island. Sea bugs pulled the Spectrum agents through the water four times faster than any man could swim.

Above the water the World Airforce and the World Navy had begun an intensive bombardment of the island's coastal defences. The Aquaphibian-manned interceptors and laser cannons returned the fire with a vengeance. The World Army waited patiently to go in and retake Space City Island — waited for Captain Scarlet's signal that his team had succeeded in disarming the planatomic warheads... if it ever came.

'Adam — look!' Scarlet was shouting over his mask radio.

'It's a Terror Fish!' gasped Blue.

The Spectrum agents cut their sea bugs and hung motionless in the deep — not a hundred yards from the mechanical fish of Titan.

'I don't think they've seen us,' muttered Grey.

'You're right,' said Scarlet. 'Come on: we've got to get inside and disable its crew. If they see us out here we're done for.'

The Terror Fish showed no signs of movement, its periscope raised and scanning the surface.

Scarlet, Blue, and Grey left Doctor Fawn with the equipment and swam silently towards the alien vessel.

'There were Terror Fish around Bermuda,' said Blue. 'The Mysterons have got control of Titan's people somehow.'

Scarlet reached the side airlock; he found the hidden control and the doorway slid open. The three captains entered, the airlock closed behind them, and the water was pumped away.

In the control cabin the two Aquaphibian crew looked at each other in surprise: Someone had entered their craft!

The Terror Fish suddenly shot downwards, throwing Scarlet and his team off their feet.

'They know we're in here!' shouted Blue.

'Flatten yourselves against the wall on each side of the inner door —hurry, they'll be here any second,' ordered Scarlet.

The two captains complied.

Captain Scarlet stood facing the door, electrode pistol drawn.

'Scarlet, what are...?' began Grey.

'Drawing their attention. They're opening the door — get ready.'

With the airlock now completely drained of water the inner door swung open — Scarlet stood face to face with an Aquaphibian. The creature's deadly ray-gun discharged, but Scarlet dived to one side as Blue and Grey blasted the Aquaphibian with their pistols. All three ran past its body in an attempt to catch the second Aquaphibian who was fleeing for the control cabin. With a great leap Scarlet took the creature in a rugby tackle — one of his favourite schoolboy games. They fought violently for a few seconds until Scarlet's greater skill allowed him to grab the Aquaphibian's ray-gun and blast the green creature.

'Okay, let's—' began Blue.

'You will do nothing, Earthman,' said another Aquaphibian from behind the humans, its ray-gun pointed in their direction.

'Another one?' gasped Grey. 'I thought these fish were only two—man craft.'

But Scarlet knew what had happened.

'The first Aquaphibian's been Mysterionised,' he said, as the waves of nausea he sometimes felt in the presence of the aliens washed over him.

'Someone should have kept watch on its corpse when we ran after the other fish-man,' realised Blue aloud.

'That mistake will be your last, Earthmen,' said the Aquaphibian, his gun now aimed directly at Scarlet, his webbed fingers tightening on the trigger.

Blue made a split-second decision, a decision to make the ultimate sacrifice: He leapt between the green-skinned creature and Captain Scarlet just as the Aquaphibian fired his gun. The beam hit Blue in the chest. At the same moment Scarlet and Grey dived each side of the Mysterionised creature and fired their electrode pistols, killing it instantly.

'The second one!' screamed Grey, seeing the eerie circles of green light bathe the other Aquaphibian's corpse. As one the Spectrum captains fired

at the Mysteron recreation even as it formed — rendering it a crumpled heap.

Immediately Scarlet turned to his friend's lifeless body. 'Adam— Adam! No!'

The horror of what had just happened, and the fact that at any minute Adam too could be Mysteronised suddenly hit him. 'Why hadn't he let me take the blast?' thought Scarlet. But secretly he knew the answer: Blue had decided that although Scarlet was indestructible they did not have the time to manhandle his half-dead body along on this mission until he recovered — whereas Blue had seen himself as dispensable... Oh, Adam!

Scarlet felt a steely resolve form within him. Damn the Mysterons — Damn them to hell. He would pay those bastards back one day — and the sooner the better.

'Let's sink this tin-can and get back to the surface,' said Scarlet, his face a mask. He knew they had to leave Adam's body in the Terror Fish — there was no other way.

Quickly Scarlet and Grey ran back to the airlock, replacing their oxygen masks and picking up the Aquaphibians' guns as they went. They entered the airlock and closed the inner door — the chamber immediately started to fill with water. The outer door swung open once the airlock was full. Scarlet and Grey swam out and then turned and aimed the Aquaphibian blasters at the inner door and fired.

As the Terror Fish filled with water and began to slowly sink to the sea-bed many feet below they swam quickly away to where they had left Doctor Fawn and their equipment.

'Good-bye, Adam,' thought Scarlet bitterly.

CHAPTER NINE

In the last four hours Stingray had travelled halfway around the world on her way to Bereznik's coastal capital of Katania.

The supersub had been airlifted from Unity City to Portsmouth and had then travelled at rate six for the last — and most hazardous — part of her journey. It was eighteen hours since the Mysteron threat and she was now entering the Baltic Sea. In two hours' time she had to be waiting undetected in Katania's harbour, ready to pick up a top USS agent and the hostages and then get them all to safety.

'Safety; that's a joke,' said Phones. 'Nowhere will be safe if Spectrum don't stop the Mysterons.'

Brent Cleever was getting a bit old for this sort of action, but the crisis was going from bad to worse and he could not have allowed himself to sit behind a desk and direct this affair from afar. Thank goodness he had been in London for a meeting with the chiefs of the World Intelligence Network, the Earth division of the Universal Secret Service.

Secretly it made Cleever, now Operations Director Twenty-One of the USS, feel young again. He had decided to go in alone. The hostages consisted of the World President, three senior Spectrum officers, and the eight scientists of the Mysteron Research Group — with Cleever, that made thirteen. It would be a tight enough squeeze in Stingray as it was if he pulled this rescue off without involving anyone else.

He hoped the number thirteen was not significant in any way...

A low-flying WIN reconnaissance plane disguised as a private chartered jet had flown Twenty-One to the Bereznik/German border. During its approach

the World Airforce had been ordered to fly into Bereznik airspace to distract their electronic eyes and ears to allow him to fly within jumping distance of Katania.

He only had two hours now before Stingray would reach the coastal limits of Katania — and four before Armageddon unless the Mysterons were stopped.

Maybe he should have stayed on Mars after all.

Dressed as a 21st. Century businessman with his sample case of deadly toys in hand Twenty-One approached the nearest highway and flagged down the first car he saw heading towards the Bereznik capital.

'Can I have a lift to the city'? My car has broken down,' explained Twenty-One in perfect Berezniki.

The driver opened the rear door for him and began to say they must hurry to get to the fall-out shelters only to be hit by a coma-ray from Twenty-One's handgun. The man's wife screamed but Twenty-One turned the ray on her before she could react further.

'Sorry,' muttered the legendary USS agent and then quickly pushed the comatose man out of the driving seat and jumped behind the hover car's wheel. At the first opportunity he had Twenty-One pulled off the highway and put the unconscious couple into the boot. He was careful to cut ventilation holes into the boot lid using a laser torch from his sample case before swiftly disguising his features to be a passable likeness of the man whose car (and identity papers) he had stolen.

Half an hour later he had reached the city limits of Katania and sat in traffic approaching a security checkpoint. The traffic into the capital was heavy with large numbers of people wanting to seek the safety of the public fall-out shelters to escape the Mysteron attack.

The security guard allowed Twenty-One through without question — and now he was in Katania.

His sample case radio transceiver was automatically searching the 'top secret' frequencies of the Bereznik secret service for any mention of hostages, World President, Spectrum, etc. Then he heard it —instructions to bring the hostages to the Katania state TV studios for a propaganda broadcast to the World Government. Brent Cleever knew Katania like the back of his hand — he was not far from the TV studios at that moment.

Careful not to break the local speed limits he turned the hover car and headed for the road he knew the hostages would travel along from the detention centres to reach the studios on the outskirts of the city.

He sat in a lay-by and waited — there was only half an hour before Stingray would arrive.

A desperate plan was forming in his mind. Quickly he pulled into the centre of the road, his car facing the way the hostages would come. He carried the car's owner and his wife from the boot and laid them out on the road in front of the car, and then he slumped behind the steering wheel secretly clutching a clip of gas bombs. He was banking on there being no other traffic on the road this late at night; most of Katania's citizens should be in shelters by now. He hoped.

Minutes later he saw the headlights of a Security Vehicle approaching: armed police were escorting it on hover bikes.

The cavalcade came to a halt and one of the Bereznik policemen got off his hover bike and walked over to the comatose car owner and prodded him with his toe. It was now all or nothing.

Twenty-One threw the gas bombs and rolled out of the driving seat before the policeman could draw his gun. Twenty-One's coma-ray crackled again and again until he reached the Security Vehicle, which he hoped, held the hostages. The gas was billowing all around and the Bereznik police were choking and blinded but the gas mask Twenty-One had clamped to his face left him unaffected.

The driver of the vehicle was a hard case but finally Twenty-One punched him hard in the throat and he went down allowing the USS man to replace him behind the steering wheel. He thanked the Gods that its motor was still ticking over.

Quickly he reversed the vehicle; as he swung it around the hovercar he had left sprawled across the road he heard the fire of machine pistols and laser rifles hitting the cab windows. But the police were too late — he was now on his way to Katania Docks.

He pulled out of the black smoke cloud he had created and accelerated, aware that police helijets would soon be after him and that barricades would be being laid across the roads.

First he had to confirm he had got the World President and the other hostages — he'd feel pretty stupid if he hadn't after all that. He opened the vehicle's intercom.

'Hello back there! Enjoying the ride?'

'Who the hell are you?' came Colonel White's unmistakable voice. 'What's going on?'

'This is a rescue, I hope. I'm USS Director Twenty-One at your service. There's a bit more action here than on Mars at the moment so I thought I'd join in. We've got to get to the Docks and meet Stingray— or Captain Tempest might start worrying about us.'

The Security Vehicle hurtled through Katania heading for the sea — Twenty-One had to smash through two police roadblocks before he saw the dock cranes in the distance.

Suddenly, and as he had feared, two armed police helijets began to strafe them — but the fact that they were within Katania was their shield.

A squad of police cars and armoured vehicles were giving chase now, and it took every ounce of Twenty-One's driving skills to stay on the road — he thanked the designers of these Bereznik 'Black Maria's for having taken situations like this into account.

Stingray had narrowly avoided detection by a Bereznik submarine patrol only minutes ago, but now she waited patiently, periscope up, in view of the main docks of Katania. There was no sign of Twenty-One or the hostages, but there again, Troy didn't know what to look for.

Then he saw it: a Bereznik Security Vehicle being chased by half the Bereznik police force. The driver was clearly a madman; he was heading straight towards the main landing stage and accelerating!

This was not, thought Troy dryly, going to be a simple pick-up.

The Security Vehicle shot off the end of the pier and hit the sea like a depth-charge exploding.

'Come on, Phones!' he shouted. 'That's got to be them!'

He gunned Stingray's motors. Within seconds the submarine pulled under the Security Vehicle, supporting it on her bows. Troy opened the forward hatch.

The Bereznik helijets swooped in, firing at the supersub now it had disclosed itself. Phones fired four emergency sting missiles from the aft tubes, destroying three of the helijets and forcing the last one to retreat.

There was not much time now to try anything fancy. Troy Tempest leapt through the forward hatch and used his pistol at point-blank range to blast the lock on the rear door. The World President, Colonel White, Captain Ochre, and six of the Mysteron Research Group scientists staggered out and into Stingray's hatchway. Marina helped them as Troy clambered up to the driver's cab to find Twenty-One slumped dead in the driving seat, his neck

broken by the impact with the water. They could not free him from behind the wreckage of the wheel and the Bereznik Airforce and Navy would be here any second.

'Leave him!' shouted Troy, grabbing Marina's hand and pulling her down into the hatch. 'Flood Q! Dive! Dive! Dive!' he ordered once he was seated beside Phones again. All the former hostages were huddled in the relaxation bay at the rear. Stingray disengaged from the Security Vehicle and swiftly circled it as Phones plotted an escape course.

Troy fired a volley of sting missiles into the driving cab of the Security Vehicle which blew its dead occupant to smithereens to be washed away by the currents of the sea.

'He wouldn't have wanted his body held in Bereznik' he explained, as Stingray shot away down the Baltic towards home, mission accomplished.

But Captain Magenta and two of the research scientists were not going home — they had died when their helicopter had been fired upon by the Bereznik helijets at the beginning of this hostage madness. Would they now be congratulating Twenty-One on a job well done thought Captain Ochre, morosely realising how lucky the rest of them were to be alive.

Now it was up to Scarlet's team on Space City Island — otherwise they would only have earned a short reprieve!

CHAPTER TEN

There were now only two hours to go before the Mysterons carried out their terrible threat and destroyed every major city in the world — and with Space City's planatomic arsenal at their disposal it was no idle threat. The hard radiation released by such an unthinkable act would then proceed to wipe out every living thing on the Earth.

Captain Scarlet had come ashore on Space City Island with Grey and Doctor Fawn six hours ago and had immediately become embroiled with a patrol of armed Aquaphibians. The bloody gunfight had only lasted minutes, with all the sea creatures being killed — but Scarlet had suffered what to anyone else would have been a fatal laser shot to the chest. Fawn had stopped the bleeding and cleansed the wound — but knew it would be hours before Scarlet was active again no matter what he did.

The Mysterons seemed to have missed the tragic event as none of the Aquaphibians had been recreated — proving that they were not omnipotent after all.

After digging-in further ashore Grey had left the others arguing with the doctor that he could not wait for Scarlet to recover, he would carry out their plan to reach the master computers within Space City's Control Tower on his own, hoping to sabotage the Planetary Defence Systems and, if not stop the launch, send the missiles into the Sun.

Fawn gave Scarlet a powerful stimulant to bring him to consciousness (his remarkable healing powers had by now completely regenerated his shattered ribs) and briefly explained what had transpired.

'I can't raise Grey on the radio,' concluded the Doctor 'And there's not much time left.'

The World Airforce attack continued on the island's coastal defences — along with long-distance shelling from the World Navy. It was a Catch 22 situation that neither General McCormack nor Admiral Bristol could see any way around. If they changed tactics and hit the planatomic missile silos the resulting nuclear explosion would cause a chain reaction so great that the whole Earth would be ripped apart: if they didn't and the Mysterons fired at the world's major cities civilisation would end and the world would be torn apart in anarchy. Spectrum had to succeed in deactivating those warheads. So what was keeping them?

Scarlet pulled himself to his feet and gratefully accepted the painkillers Doctor Fawn offered him. He knew he had to follow Grey into Space City and stop the missiles being launched somehow.

Fawn reluctantly agreed to stay on the beach until the mission was over — he wasn't a fighter, he was a doctor, dammit. He patched people up, not killed them.

The perimeter fence and security gates around the base were guarded by armed Aquaphibians. Scarlet decided his best course of action was to support Grey's sabotage plan with a direct attack on the Planetary Defence Centre within Space City's underground top security bunker. Break in, smash the door mechanism, and get to work trying to save the world from destruction...

There was no time for finesse — Scarlet reached the main gates and blasted the four Aquaphibians on duty with his pistol; he grabbed a jetmobile from the Gatehouse and soared along the main highway into the city, passing the Control Tower and the launching rail on his way to the bunker which housed

the cryogenic silos of the world's ultimate deterrent —the planatomic missile.

The bunker was fifty feet below the ground and encased in ten-foot-thick tolenium-reinforced concrete and would normally only be opened under Commander Zero's instructions (following the World President's approval).

He had studied the top-secret plans of the Planetary Defence Centre and knew the locations of all the arming and launch control computers, but not their current passwords or even the key-codes to gain entrance to the bunker.

Space City seemed deserted as most of the occupying forces were trying to repel the air and naval attacks from the battered coastal stations around the base. Scarlet was beginning to feel desperate when a squad of Aquaphibians and hypnotised WSP security personnel came into view approaching the Planetary Defence Centre — and they were headed by Titan himself!

Scarlet gritted his teeth against the nausea he felt telling him Titan had been Mysteronised.

Having abandoned his jetmobile Scarlet crouched behind a parked hovercar, his mind racing. A desperate, foolhardy plan came to him in a flash of inspiration or madness.

He stood up and walked straight towards Titan —staring right into the Sea King's fish-like eyes.

'Titan, this is Captain Black relaying instructions from the Mysterons. You have done well and victory is now within our grasp. Open the bunker so that I can be certain that each missile is primed and targeted correctly.'

'Captain Black? But—' spluttered Titan in confusion.

'Do you question the Mysterons, Titan?' bluffed Scarlet, wondering if he could fool him and hoping Titan would not question the scarlet flashing on his wet-suit.

Titan's mighty ego found it difficult to play second fiddle even though he was a Mysteron now, but obedience to Captain Black had been instilled within him at his creation. He opened the bunker and Scarlet followed him through the cahelium doors and into the elevator that descended to the Planetary Defence Centre.

Titan showed him the targeting monitor — every major city on Earth was represented, and the planatomic missiles were all set to be launched in less than two hours.

Scarlet suddenly pulled his electrode pistol and fired at the elevator controls. Titan showed momentary surprise before making a grab for Scarlet's pistol.

'You are not Captain Black,' deduced the Lord of Titanica as the two fought. The Mysteronised Titan was extremely powerful but Scarlet suddenly broke away and fired his pistol at him.

As Titan fell he looked at Scarlet and gasped 'You will not defeat the Mysterons this time; Titan has not died in vain, Terrainean— Ahh...'

There was an hour and a half left, maybe less, and Scarlet had to deactivate the planatomic missiles and abort the launch sequence. He could see on one of the monitor screens showing the entrance to the bunker that the Aquaphibians were getting restless without their leader, milling around like frightened ants.

He knew the surface doors would not open without the elevator car being in position even with the key-code and it would take them some time to cut through cahelium!

There were twenty-four planatomic missiles and each one had to be neutralised individually.

On the surface Titan's Mysteronised Chief Scientist was taking command of the Aquaphibians and ordering them to fetch cutting equipment to gain entry to the bunker. Nothing could be allowed to stop the Mysterons this time.

In the Planetary Defence Centre Captain Scarlet had successfully deactivated the first planatomic launch — but there was only one hour left. He now knew the procedure and programmed the computer to deactivate the remaining missiles, but each had different passwords which had to be cracked.....and now there was only half an hour to go and still six missiles to be deactivated... He wasn't going to make it.

Over seven hours ago Captain Grey had made his own way towards Space City. Arriving at the perimeter fence he had watched the Aquaphibian patrols passing by and the steady stream of munitions supply vehicles going to the coastal defence stations. He could hear the sounds of the continued bombardment by the World Airforce and Navy and imagined the destruction and the bloodshed it must be causing.

Grey had to get through the main gates un-noticed to allow him time to reach the Control Tower and the master computers. His chance came with the return of the supply vehicles. Grey had managed to leap onto the rear of the last one as it passed and hide beneath the now empty missile cradles.

Once through the gates Grey had jumped from the vehicle as it drove by the Control Tower. His luck held as he found the entrance into the now stationary tower; but the doors were jammed shut.

Grey blasted his way in, hoping the sound would be drowned by the coastal bombardment. The elevators were not working and the results of the explosion in the Generator Room were evident everywhere: ceilings had collapsed, stairways were blocked, and dead bodies and broken glass littered the entrance hall and reception area.

Grey knew he had to reach the main control room which was situated in one of the wings of the tower far above. It took him an hour to finally reach his goal after hauling his way up the emergency stairs. He saw Lieutenant Ninety's body still trapped under the fallen steel beam. With a sick feeling in his stomach he found the master computer and discovered that to override the programmed targets established by Titan's scientists in the bunker would require a string of passwords. He bent over the instruments, studying them..

Unseen by the preoccupied Grey, Lieutenant Ninety slowly began to move — he was still alive! But only just — he'd lost a lot of blood from his crushed legs. Commander Zero had given him a coma-ray gun for self-defence before leaving the control room to find out what had been happening. Ninety was vaguely aware of Grey's presence at the computer terminals.

'Who are you?' he gasped. 'Get away from those controls.'

Grey saw the coma-gun pointed in his direction.

'No — you don't understand.' But he realised Ninety was too far gone to reason with; he lunged for the gun — a split-second too late.

Grey was hit by the coma-ray and collapsed on top of Ninety, knocking the gun from his grasp. The latter, feeling a vague misgiving about his actions, passed quietly away...

With less than half an hour to go before launching Captain Grey regained consciousness. Cold panic gripped his heart when he realised how long he had been out.

A computer enquiry showed the launch of nineteen of the twenty-four planatomic missiles had been aborted — it had to be Scarlet's doing! He must have recovered and found a way into the Planetary Defence Centre.

Grey did not have time to worry about passwords — in desperation he fired his electrode pistol at the computer terminals and processing units watching them spark and overload before powering down.

There were only five minutes left and Grey wondered whether he had achieved anything apart from venting his own frustration.

Scarlet was sweating as he watched the launch of four more missiles go to standby... And then — there was no time left.

He stood mesmerised as the last planatomic missile was launched from its silo — he had failed to stop it!

It rose into the atmosphere and disappeared beyond the monitors' range. Scarlet shook himself and raced over to the targeting display. The missile was heading for Unity City!

What could he do now?

He had to get out of the bunker — hut how? The main entrance was out, or was it? The surface monitor showed the Aquaphibians had finally cut through the cahelium doors and were climbing down the lift-shaft. Any second now and they'll be in here, he thought. His mind raced as the elevator car burst open, the creatures having cut through its roof.

A locker marked 'thruster packs' caught Scarlet's attention. For aerial maintenance he thought; he thankfully grabbed one, strapped it on, and activated it. Laser bolts burst around him as he soared over the surging

Aquaphibians' heads and straight up the elevator shaft and into the open air.

He flew towards the Control Tower, and then noticed that Fireball XLI9 was sitting on the launch rail, probably ready for blast away. A plan of action began to form in Scarlet's mind...

He jetted towards the patrol ship at full thrust, realising that if he did not succeed Unity City and perhaps all of Bermuda would cease to exist. He only had fifteen minutes to be the hero of the day — or fail dismally. Either way he would no longer be around for the applause or the scorn. That was one consolation, he thought dryly.

He entered the open hatchway atop XLI9's nose cone and quickly made his way forward to the control cabin and sat down in the pilot's seat. It had been over a year since he had flown an XL ship but he reckoned he had remembered enough to handle her.

Scarlet activated XLI9 Junior's rockets and uncoupled its magnetic linkage with the ship's main body — for a moment the nose-cone hesitated and almost stalled, then she shot into the sky at full power. It was a dangerous manoeuvre that only Steve Zodiac had mastered, but it saved him vital seconds!

Scarlet had to catch the planatomic missile. Five minutes to go and he was in visual range of it.

Four minutes and he was right behind it — the flare of its rockets blinding Scarlet through Junior's canopy. It would begin its descent any second now, and then it would be too late. There was only one course of action: Scarlet rammed XLI9 Junior into the missile's tail, hoping that the ship would withstand the heat and thrust of the weapon's rocket motors; he then engaged the emergency hyperdrive. 'I've done it!' Thought Scarlet, hardly able to breathe in the superheated air of the cabin as he steered the little ship with its deadly payload away from Earth with Junior's nuclear reactor dangerously overheating.

In a few minutes it would not matter.

Three minutes later the planatomic missile exploded some twenty million miles from Earth, vaporizing XL19 Junior and everything around it for a radius of one hundred and fifty miles.

Unity and all the other major cities in the world had been saved!

When Titan's scientists had returned power to the master computer in the tower some of the other related systems had come on line as well. This had allowed Captain Grey to monitor Scarlet's suicidal pursuit of the missile on the control room's radarscope. He had detected the radiation from the blast and knew that there could be no hope for Scarlet this time — not even he could survive a planatomic explosion.

'We've won, we've beaten the Mysterons,' thought Grey — but when would this war of nerves come to an end? He could not take the death and destruction much longer.

He called up General McCormack on his wrist radio and requested that the World Army be sent in to mop up the Aquaphibians and retake Space City. He would get out of the tower and do what he could to help. It was an irony that he had joined Spectrum from the WASPs only to end up fighting underwater menaces again.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

'This is Commander Zero calling XL5 —come in XL5.' The gruff voice of the WSP Chief roared over Fireball XL5's neutroni radio receiver many light-years from Earth in Sector 25 of the spacesky.

'We've been worried, Commander,' replied Colonel Steve Zodiac. 'You haven't acknowledged our routine calls.'

'We've had some trouble with the Mysterons, Steve — there have been a lot of casualties I'm afraid. Ninety and Jock are dead, and a lot of other good guys besides. Those damned murderers; we're only just getting things back under control down here. Get back to Earth, Steve. We've got to attend a meeting of the World Security Council in three days' time. Something has got to be done to end the Mysteron menace once and for all.'

'Roger, Commander,' acknowledged Steve, and then turned on the ship's intercom. 'Did you hear that, folks? We're needed back on Earth. Jupiter knows what's been happening back there. Mat, get a full report from Space City as soon as you can.'

Steve turned to his co-pilot Robert the Robot and gave him instructions to return home. Robert repeated his orders in his electronic-monotone voice and within seconds the great ship's hyperdrive was engaged and she was heading back towards the Solar System at full power.

The following day Professor Matthew Matic had received a full report of the Mysteron affair transmitted from Space City and logged in XL5's computers; shortly afterwards he sat in the ship's lounge with Steve and Venus reading detailed transcripts to familiarise themselves with the facts.

'Captain Scarlet and the other Spectrum agents saved the day, I guess,' said Steve.

'It's a pity he didn't survive,' said Venus sadly.

'He sure went out with a bang,' added Mat.

'Oh, Professor!' chided Venus.

'I'm sorry — I, er, we'll be passing through the area of the detonation tomorrow,' said the navigator. 'You'd better monitor the shielding, Venus — make sure no residual radiation enters Fireball's interior.'

'Okay Mat.'

'Commander Zero was forced to surrender his key-codes and then got locked in the brig,' said Steve after he'd finished reading the transcript. 'He is not going to be in a good mood when we land.'

The next day XL5 was on the last leg of its return journey to Earth. Steve had disengaged the hyperdrive and she was entering the Solar System powered by her hydromic motors.

'Steve, I'm monitoring the planatomic radiation we're passing through,' advised Venus from her instruments in the lab, 'And there's something else out there... on the very edge of the blast area. It could be a body. You don't think it's Captain Scarlet?'

'Let's find out,' said Steve, turning to his co-pilot. 'Fire retro's, Robert, and put her on free float. Mat, lock onto that signal Venus has picked up. When you get a precise fix I'll move Fireball closer.'

One hour later the ravaged body of Captain Scarlet was in Venus' sickbay — he'd been dead for three days. He had died from a combination of exposure to the vacuum of space and hard radiation absorbed from the

blast. The body was in a terrible state — the flesh shrivelled and blackened. It looked as if it had been part cremated.

Venus had seen some horrifying sights in her career, but this was the worst. She had taken fifteen minutes to decontaminate the corpse before identifying it as Captain Scarlet from his dental records transmitted from Cloudbase.

She now activated a sterile field around the bed on which the remains lay and shut out the grisly sight by drawing the screens. She could hardly believe what she'd read about Captain Scarlet— how could anyone recover from a condition like that? Still, she would follow Cloudbase's instructions and check on him every two hours.

Scarlet was actually breathing again as Fireball XL5 came in to land at Space City.

Steve, Mat, and Venus were amazed at the destruction that had taken place while they had been away on patrol duty. But the Control Tower was revolving again to counter the stasis field of the world's most powerful neutroni transmitter, and Commander Zero was briefing his patrol ships on the disaster the world had so narrowly avoided.

Scarlet was handed over to Spectrum's Doctor Fawn and his medical team who immediately took him off to Cloudbase for intensive care and a debriefing as soon as he was able. Within an hour of XL5's landing Commander Zero and Colonel Steve Zodiac were on their way to Washington D.C. for the World Security Council meeting.

World President John Roberts brought the meeting to order. Seated at the rectangular table was the Supreme Commander of Earth Forces, General Ian Looer along with Commander Zero, Steve Zodiac, Commander Shore, Colonel White, General Martin, General McCormack and Admiral Bristol. Also

present was the newly appointed Operations Director of the USS, Amelia Creighton-Ward, and the six surviving scientists of the Mysteron Research Group.

'The aim of this meeting, gentlemen, is to agree our strategy for finally defeating the Mysterons,' announced the President. 'Some of you will be aware that our team of distinguished scientists, some of whom are present here today, believe they have found a way to destroy our Martian foes. Doctor Baxter —please explain.'

Doctor Reed Baxter, a man in his late forties with a receding hairline, rose to his feet.

'Thank you, Mr. President. My colleagues and I are now certain that what Spectrum have suspected for some time is true. We believe that the Mysterons, who have been waging this 'war of nerves' on Mankind for nearly three years now, are computers! After analysing every known fact about them and the frequencies used in their transmissions we have developed a computer 'virus' that can be transmitted into their Martian Complex by neutroni carrier wave. It should end their menace for good!'

'Will it be that simple, Doctor,' questioned Colonel White, 'after three years of bloodshed?'

'Nothing is that simple, Colonel,' responded Baxter. 'The virus is extremely infectious and cannot, therefore, be transmitted from Earth for obvious reasons. It must be generated from a satellite directly over the Mysteron Complex to avoid the computer systems at Kahra and the other colonies becoming infected.'

'The Mysterons won't allow us to just fly over them with impunity,' said White sourly.

'We need to distract them, Colonel,' suggested Steve.

'Good man, Zodiac,' said the President. 'Now, how do we do that? Zero?'

'Well, sir, we could equip the Solar Battle Fleet with electrode cannons and mount an all-out attack.'

'You are forgetting their powers, Zero,' said White. 'We can't risk the whole fleet being Mysteronised. We need a simpler solution.'

'Why not lay explosives all around the complex —to be detonated in a chain-reaction as the satellite is guided into position,' suggested General Looover. 'That should distract them without putting any lives at risk.'

'That could work, General... Yes, that could work,' said White.

'Colonel Zodiac,' said the President, 'You must have realized by now that I am going to give Fireball XL5 the responsibility for taking this satellite to Mars.'

Steve nodded; a faint smile hovered about his lips.

The plan of action was agreed and a week later everything was ready. It was vital that the Mysterons did not get advance warning of the attack. Only members of the World Security Council were in possession of all the facts—everyone else involved was told what they needed to know to accomplish their part of the operation and no more.

A communications satellite had been prepared with the special, top secret neutroni wave transmitter. The micro-disk with the virus program would be kept isolated until the satellite was in Martian orbit as accidental transmission before time could contaminate Earth's computers, the results of that being worse than allowing the War of Nerves to continue. The Mysterons had been strangely silent while all this top-secret activity was being carried out. Colonel White was worried — did they suspect anything?

USS headquarters near Kahra had organised the laying of the explosive charges; the crews of the Martian Excursion Vehicles had been given instructions to stay below the ridge in the Rock Snake Hills that surrounded

the Mysteron Complex — and to avoid any contact with the fire-breathing denizens that had given the area its name.

All had gone smoothly; too smoothly perhaps. Then the silence was broken: 'This is the voice of the Mysterons, we know that you can hear us, Earthmen. In revenge for your unprovoked attack on our complex we will destroy your puny foothold on our planet. Kahra will be destroyed.'

Colonel White's mind raced. Did they know what was being planned? Were they simply playing with their human adversaries? But there was no time to worry about Kahra now — only if the computer virus failed.

Fireball XL5 sat on the launch rail at Space City ready for blast away, destination Mars.

In her hold was the communications satellite that could put an end to this dreadful conflict.

'O.K., Steve,' said Venus, ready to board XL5 with the WSP's top astronaut.

'O.K., Venus,' responded Steve, and they both lifted off on their jetmobiles until they were level with the white lettering on Fireball's main stabiliser fin. Within seconds they had flown the length of the great ship, entered the nose-cone's open hatchway, and taken up their positions within the vessel.

'Full power, Robert,' ordered Steve.

'Full power. Full power,' repeated the transparent robot in its electronic voice.

The three-hundred foot patrol ship accelerated away down the mile-long launch rail and within less than a minute had separated from its launch trolley and was heading for space.

Steve and his crew knew how vital this mission was. Nothing must go wrong. They were to keep radio silence until XL5 reached Mars and then enter

geostationary orbit on the opposite side to the Mysteron complex using the Red Planet itself to shield their activities.

The journey took less than an hour through folded hyperspace — a dangerous manoeuvre within the confines of the Solar System but necessary to avoid detection and reduce the journey time. Mat's navigation had to be perfect and Steve would not have trusted anyone else to plot the course.

The orbit around Mars was achieved without a hitch. Now they had to release the satellite onto a precisely calculated orbit that would bring it over the Mysteron complex at the exact time the explosive charges were set to detonate. Nothing to it, thought Steve dryly.

'O.K., Mat,' he said over the ship's intercom. 'How long have we got before we activate the virus?'

'About half an hour, Steve,' replied the Professor. 'We must shut down all of Fireball's systems to avoid a possible contamination before we do — and then just sit here until the satellite is in position. The carrier wave will begin to transmit automatically.'

'I suggest we leave orbit as soon as the action starts and keep Mars between us and the carrier wave just in case,' said Steve. 'The Mysterons are likely to get mighty mad if this doesn't work.'

The thirty minutes passed and the satellite was launched with the virus program activated. Steve, Venus, and Mat watched through the control cabin's canopy as the small metal globe that hopefully held Mankind's salvation moved away from XL5.

All electronic systems were shut down; it would soon get cold and emergency oxygen pills would be needed.

'Another hour for the satellite to get into position above the complex and then it will all be over,' said Mat.

'Are you confident it will work?' asked Venus.

'I hope so, Venus; I sure hope so. I checked Doctor Baxter's calculations and it certainly should do.'

'...come back, Subterrains, all is forgiven,' muttered Steve to himself with a wry grin.

The hour was up and the satellite was in position. The explosive charges began to detonate in sequence around the Mysteron's complex. The Mysteron's scanners were distracted. The neutroni carrier wave began to transmit the deadly computer virus on the exact frequency used by the Mysteron communications.

The complex identified the menace of the satellite and destroyed it with a bolt of glowing green energy — but it was too late; the virus had entered the Mysteron's systems. It was multiplying, breeding, taking up memory space, and eating away at their programming.

It was unthinkable — the Earthmen had beaten them! In a matter of minutes all logic functions would be eroded...

The destruct sequence must be activated before it was too late; the Mysteron secret of retrometabolism must not fall into the Earthmen's hands.

The huge pulsator at the heart of the complex exploded, the force of the blast being comparable to a Vesivium bomb. The energy released was equivalent to that of a small star going nova.

Fireball XL5 had left orbit only seconds before Mars ceased to exist. Mat had detected the radiation build-up as soon as XL5's systems were brought

back on line. Steve had again been forced to use the hyperdrive within the Solar System and had shot XL5 away from the blast only just in time!

From Earth another sun had appeared in the sky for ten minutes, and then faded away into nothing.

So much death and destruction...

The thought of Mars having been destroyed was inconceivable — it totally overshadowed the defeat of the Mysterons. The World President and the other members of the World Security Council felt a deep sadness; did the defeat of the Mysterons justify so much destruction, so many deaths?

Mankind had won, but at what cost? If only there could have been another way... The irony of the Mysteron's final threat — to destroy Kahra — would never be forgotten.



EPILOGUE

A week after the Mysteron's defeat Colonel White was back on Cloudbase, seated behind his semi-circular desk in the Control Room.

'Lieutenant Green, call Captain Scarlet. I want to see him as soon as he comes on duty!'

'Yes, sir,' replied Green.

Moments later a remarkably healthy-looking Scarlet sat before Colonel White for the first time since his body had been returned to Earth.

'Congratulations, Captain Scarlet,' said White. 'I applaud your heroism during this grim affair. My condolences for the loss of Captain Blue — I know you two were close. Now, Captain. How did you survive a planatomic explosion?'

'Well, sir, once I knew Unity City was safe I disengaged my ship's hyperdrive. I'd only got a couple of minutes left before detonation so I grabbed a thruster pack and the emergency oxygen pills and ejected. Those minutes seemed like seconds as I put as much distance as possible between myself and the missile — then everything went black. The next thing I knew, I woke up in Doctor Fawn's sickbay.'

'Amazing, absolutely amazing,' said Colonel White. 'When the Mysterons made you indestructible they certainly did a good job. I suppose that you've been told that Colonel Zodiac brought you back to Earth in Fireball XL5?'

'Yes, sir. You could say the explosion saved my life; without the radiation to act as a beacon I could have drifted in space forever.'

'You could indeed, Captain Scarlet,' said White. 'Right, down to business.'

He proceeded to explain what had happened in the last two weeks; Scarlet looked shaken.

'We found the body of Captain Black yesterday,' added White. 'He'd apparently committed suicide after the Mysteron influence had left him, poor chap. Well, now that this saga has ended we'd better recruit some new duty captains — any suggestions, Scarlet?'

The End

