

# INVASION ARCTAN

A Fireball XL5 and Stingray Story

(written for a comic strip)

Written by

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“The ice is melting all over the planet” gasped Professor Matthew Matic aboard the World Space Patrol ship Fireball XL5 now orbiting the once completely frozen world of Arctan, in a distant star system beyond the edge of Sector 25.

“...but that’s impossible Professor” said Doctor Venus standing beside him in the great ship’s navigation bay as Matt studied the image of the exoplanet on his astrascope.

“Something unnatural is going on down there” added Matt. “Arctan has not shifted her orbit and there is no increase in stellar activity. The seas and land masses should still be frozen solid.”

“That explains the distress calls” said Colonel Steve Zodiac, seated in the main control cabin, after listening to his navigator’s findings over the intercom. “Let’s hope Harry Denton and his people have survived whatever is happening down there. Are they still transmitting, Matt?”

“Yes, Steve – but the signal is getting very faint.”

“Right Venus, grab your medical bag and join me” ordered the XL5 skipper. “We’re going down to see who needs our help.”

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Fireball Junior detached from the Main Body of XL5 and was soon flying low across the mass of water that now covered over one third of Arctan.

They could see the icy shores receding at an alarming rate as they headed for the source of the distress calls – King Denton’s palace situated in one of the still frozen regions of the planet.

The whole vista was unbelievable!

Steve brought Junior into land on the exact coordinates Matt had given him – the signals having now faded completely.

Steve and Venus lifted out of the small space craft on their jetmobiles and flew down into the icy crevasse they could see nearby. Somewhere down there would be the underground entrance into the nearby Ice Palace.

It was incredible to think Denton had survived on Arctan for over half a century – assumed dead until found by the crew of Fireball XL5 less than three years ago.

The eerie silence was broken by the voice of Colonel Harry Denton. “Welcome Steve Zodiac. Thank you for answering my calls.”

The old king suddenly appeared walking towards them from one of the icy caverns flanked by a number of his strange subjects – the ice people of Arctan.

“This planet is being attacked by evil green skinned creatures” explained Denton. “They landed a month ago and killed many of my people before disappearing below our frozen seas. They are doing something to this world – it is getting hotter every day. The ice is melting. My people are dying. Please save them.”

“We can take you up to safety in XL5, until we get to the bottom of all this” suggested Steve.

“No! I will not leave my people. They are like children. They need me” replied Denton.

“Okay, we’ll try to find out what these invaders are up to and stop them if we can.”

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Within minutes Fireball Junior had lifted off and was heading out across the ever growing seas again.

Steve opened a radio link to XL5 in orbit and explained things.

“Matt, I want you to scan the oceans and tell me if you detect any power sources beneath the water.”

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“Okay Steve. Give me a few minutes.”

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“Steve, I’ve found something” came Matt’s excited voice over Fireball Junior’s radio five minutes later. “There’s something generating a helluva lot of energy down there. The readings are off the scale. Hold on – there’s more than one.”

“How far down Matt?” asked Steve.

“Almost 30,000 feet. There’s no way you can reach them in Junior.”

“We’ve gotta do something Matt” said Steve.

“Those poor ice people” added Venus.

“Matt, can we blast them with interceptor missiles – or rig up depth charges?”

“Too dangerous Steve” replied Matt over the radio. “I need to know what we’re dealing with before suggesting any action. If we don’t handle this properly we could make matters worse.”

“How much time does Arctan have before all the ice has melted?” asked Steve.

“I’d say about two months based on what Denton told you.”

“Call Commander Zero and put him in the picture Matt” ordered Steve. “We need help from the WASPs if we are going to knock out those ‘hot spots’ and save Arctans people.”

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“You sent for us, Commander” said Captain Troy Tempest back on Earth in Marineville, Headquarters of the World Aquanaut Security Patrol only four hours later.

“Yeah Troy” said Commander Sam Shore. “You and Phones better get packed. You’re off to Arctan tonight.”

“Arctan?” questioned Phones. “What has the WASPs to do with an ice planet that’s light years away?”

“The ice is melting – and Colonel Zodiac and the crew of Fireball XL5 need our help to find out why. I’ve put you two and Stingray on loan to the World Space Patrol. You leave for Space City immediately.”

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Launch Stations sounded and in minutes Stingray was heading along the Ocean Tunnel on the first stage of perhaps the furthest journey she would ever make.

The Ocean Door opened and the supersub burst out into the Pacific Ocean heading for a rendezvous with a WAAF airlift that would take her to Space City Island at supersonic speed.

It had been decided to leave Marina behind this time. Outer space was not the place for a princess of Pacifica.

Phones felt much the same way.

“If I’d wanted to be an astronaut I’d have joined the World Space Patrol” said Phones as he and Troy watched Stingray loaded into the heavy equipment hold of the fastest space ship available – the XL class Space Rescue 2.

“Where’s your sense of adventure Phones?” responded Troy with a grin.

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Two weeks later Space Rescue 2 had joined Fireball XL5 in orbit around Arctan, almost 9 light years from Earth.

Venus had spent the long wait for assistance administering drugs to the native ice people to help maintain their extremely low body temperature.

Steve had searched in vain for any sign of the alien invaders on Arctan's surface while Matt had plotted the 'hot spots' that had continued to appear below the ever melting seas.

Space Rescue 2 had brought a team of medics and much needed equipment as well as Stingray.

While the medics constructed cryogenic shelters for the ice people Steve Zodiac called a council of war in Harry Denton's Ice Palace.

"Professor Matic has deduced that we only have five weeks left to reverse the effects of this global warming that Arctan is experiencing" announced Steve to everyone present. "After which she will no longer be an ice-world and her people will all be dead. We need Stingray to find out what's heating the water at the bottom of this planet's once frozen oceans – and if possible put a stop to it."

"Okay Colonel, I get the message" said Troy. "We'll take Professor Matic with us to analyse the situation."

"I pray that you are successful" said Denton.

Arctan's king and ex-pilot of the TA2 now looked every one of his 80 years of age.

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Space Rescue 2 lowered Stingray over the nearest 'hot spot' the following morning.

Professor Matic sat in the supersub's relaxation bay looking nervous.

"Marina's much prettier Troy" whispered Phones as Stingray dived into the icy alien waters.

"Pressure Compensators on Skipper" added the hydrophones operator after receiving a reproving look from Troy.

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30,000 feet below the surface Stingray approached the source of the energy readings – an enormous fluorescent complex resting on the sea bed.

“What do you think that device is Professor?” asked Troy.

“I dunno – yet” said Matt now sitting at Stingray’s scanners adjacent to the captain’s chair. “It’s releasing vast amounts of energy. Some form of nuclear radiation that is creating a resonance in the surrounding water. Of course! When the energy wave hits ice it must be amplifying the latent heat present a hundred fold. No wonder it’s melting so fast. Captain Tempest we need to destroy every one of those devices before they raise this planet’s temperature enough to create a ‘greenhouse’ effect in the atmosphere. It’ll be too late to save Arctan’s people after that.”

“Look Troy – Aquaphibians!” gasped Phones spotting evil looking man-like creatures swimming around the alien structure.

“They are different somehow” said Troy as he set Stingray down on the seabed – hoping they had not been seen.

“We’ve met those creatures before” said Matt. “They wiped out a whole civilisation on Zofeit. Destroy that complex Captain, before they see us. Their weapons are deadly.”

“Prime sting missiles one and two Phones” ordered Troy. “I want to hit that thing at point blank range and then get out of here before the Aquaphibians know what’s happened. Fire on my mark.”

Troy lifted Stingray’s nose so that the missiles would have a clear path to their target.

“Fire!”

The missiles left the port and starboard forward tubes of the supersub and then Stingray was off the sea bed and climbing at 600 knots before they reached their target.

Blinding flashes of light suddenly erupted from the alien structure as the sting missiles struck home – then it was gone, crushed to unrecognisable wreckage by the tremendous water pressure that could no longer be resisted.

“Phew, that was close” said Phones wiping his sweating brow now the swirling currents had subsided around Stingray after what seemed like an eternity – in reality only minutes.

“One down, five to go on latest count” said Troy drily.

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Stingray destroyed the five remaining complexes over the next eight hours. The Aquaphibians at each site seemed to have no prior notice of their arrival.

Suddenly yet another ‘hot spot’ appeared on their scanners which Stingray found still under construction – with consequently more Aquaphibians on hand.

Then Phones picked up another reading on his hydrophones.

Something large and mechanical was moving into sight from behind the complex.

It was the Aquaphibians submarine – designed like an enormous whale.

It obviously out gunned Stingray tenfold if its size was any indication.

“Troy, look out” gasped Phones.

“Prime sting missiles” ordered Troy. “Let’s hit the complex and we’ll worry about that tin can afterwards...”

Before Troy could give the order to attack the complex his luck ran out.

The Aquaphibians submarine spotted them and immediately opened fire.



Missiles exploded around Stingray as Troy took the supersub off the sea bed.

“Fire at the Complex Phones. Now!”

“...but Skipper, they’re our last missiles.”

“Now Phones” bellowed Troy

The sting missiles found their target and the Alien Complex erupted in a massive release of energy and crumpled as the others had before it.

Troy’s life or death gamble had paid off!

The Aquaphibians submarine was too big and unwieldy to accelerate away from the terrific subsea explosions as Stingray had done.

The huge mechanical whale was damaged in the blast- but not finished.

It began to head for the surface as Stingray kept hopefully well out of range – unable to now stop its escape.

The ‘whales’ speed slowly increased to an amazing rate as it continued to climb.

“Captain, get me Steve Zodiac quickly” shouted Matt as realisation dawned on him. “That thing isn’t just a submarine – it’s a space ship! The Aquaphibians will get away if Steve doesn’t stop ‘em.”

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Fireball Junior lifted off within minutes of Steve receiving Matt’s message.

Venus hoped he would come back safely.

The Aquaphibian space craft leapt from Arctan’s ocean only to be met with a volley of interceptor missiles.

The sky was lit with explosion after explosion as Steve took Junior into attack the much larger ship again and again.

The whale-ship's bulk and consequent lack of manoeuvrability in atmosphere (along with the damage it had sustained below the sea) finally led to its complete destruction.

Steve watched as the flaming wreckage of the Aquaphibians space ship fell back into the ocean.

They had won!

The combined efforts of the crews of Fireball XL5 and Stingray had saved the ice people of the planet Arctan from extinction.

With the Aquaphibian invaders defeated, and their 'hot spots' destroyed, the seas of Arctan soon froze over again and the temperature returned to normal on the ice world.

Venus carried out an autopsy on the remains of one of the space Aquaphibians and confirmed that they came from the same genetic stock as Titan's primitive slaves.

What was the connection?

Perhaps one day they would find out.

**The End**