

REVENGE OF THE SUBTERRAINS

A Fireball XL5 Story
(written for a comic strip)

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“The Earth will soon be destroyed!”

The words echoed menacingly throughout the underground caverns of the Subterrains on a cold and barren world circling a small star many light years from the Solar System – Planet 46.

The Subterrains were a dying race. The last of their dwindling numbers were in conference.

Their original plan to destroy Earth had been foiled by Colonel Steve Zodiac and the crew of World Space Patrol ship Fireball XL5 and now the Subterrain Chief was imprisoned on that hated planet to safeguard against further attacks.

Three subsequent attempts to kill Zodiac in revenge had failed – but their day now seemed close at hand.

“Is the travel beam ready?” asked the Senior Subterrain.

“Yes, we are ready to reclaim our Chief from the midst of the Earthlings. Then we can launch an all-out attack on their planet and finally reduce it to space dust” replied the Scientist.

“Carry on as planned” ordered the Senior.

One minute the Subterrain Chief sat in the WSP Maximum Security Prison on Earth surrounded by all the state of the art devices of 2064 to detect any unauthorized craft approaching, guarded by a small army of wardens armed to the teeth – and the next minute he was gone.

The Subterrains watched the shape of their Chief slowly materialise before them in the Control Chamber on Planet 46.

“I knew you would find a way to rescue me” said the Chief instantly realising what had happened.

“Our scientists have finally unlocked the incredible powers held within our planet’s sacred diamonds and have built a travel beam. A device which will make us invincible” explained the Senior.

“With your safe return to us we are now ready to launch an all-out planatomic attack on Earth” said the Scientist.

“We cannot be defeated this time” added the Senior.

“Use the travel beam to capture Zodiac so that he may witness the destruction of his world at our hands” ordered the Chief.

The news of the Subterrain Chief’s escape had just been received by Commander Zero, Chief Controller of Space City – the WSP’s Pacific Island base of operations.

“Call Colonel Zodiac up on the neutron transmitter Lieutenant Ninety – I want to speak to him immediately.”

Within seconds Steve Zodiac’s voice was heard over the loud speakers in the tower control room.

“What’s up Commander?”

Commander Zero quickly explained what had happened.

“I want you to find that Subterrain Steve and have him returned to his cell on the double. With him free there’s no telling what those green fiends on Planet 46 are cooking up for us.”

Colonel Steve Zodiac turned to his robot co-pilot sitting beside him in the control cabin of Fireball XL5, currently patrolling Sector 25 of interstellar space light years beyond the Solar System. “Change course to 517 zero red Robert – and give it full boost.”

He had not needed to check the course code. It remained indelibly fixed in his memory from their first visit.

Robert the Robot repeated his orders in his electronic monotone voice and Steve got up and headed back towards the great ship's lounge to discuss strategy with his human crew members – Professor Matthew Matic the navigator/engineer and Doctor Venus the medical officer.

“They’ve obviously developed a travel transmitter of some kind – probably similar to the one used by the Nutopians we encountered a few years ago” deduced Matt as they all sat in the lounge drinking coffee from the auto-dispenser.

“Commander Zero has put the WSP on Red Alert and called all available patrol craft back to the Solar System to defend Earth from possible attack” said Steve, “and we’re going to Planet 46. It’s the only logical place to start our search – and see what the Subterrains are up to”

“The Robot Bird we set in orbit obviously hasn’t deterred them Steve” said Venus, “I wonder why they want to destroy Earth?”

“Yeah that’s a good question Venus” replied Matt. “The Chief Subterrain revealed nothing under interrogation when first imprisoned”

Fireball XL5 sped through hyperspace at full boost and reached Planet 46 within four days. Steve disengaged the ship’s nutomic hyperdrive and XL5 dropped back into normal space and was soon in standard orbit around the cold seemingly lifeless world.

In the Subterrain Base the green men dutifully prepared their travel beam. “He is here” announced the Chief. “Lock onto the control cabin of XL5 and beam Zodiac to me.”

One minute Steve was seated at the controls of Fireball XL5 – the next minute he was gone!

Venus, who had been standing next to Steve, screamed in shock – and then flicked the intercom switch next to the empty pilot’s chair.

“Matt, he just – Steve just--“she gasped.

“Now calm down Venus” came Matt’s voice over the cabin speaker. “Start at the beginning.”

“Steve was talking to me – and then he just faded away. He’s gone Matt”

“The Subterrains have got him Venus. This proves my theory of a travel transmitter.”

“...and we’ve got to get him back” added Venus quietly.

“Okay so you’ve got me” said Steve defiantly to the Subterrain Chief. “What are you going to do with me?”

“Let you watch the destruction of your world before I kill you Zodiac” came the chilling reply.

“We’re ready for you this time Subterrain. You may kill me but the World Space Patrol is more than a match for whatever you have planned.”

“Launch all planatomic missiles” ordered the Chief.

Far above Planet 46 Fireball XL5 continued its orbit.

Matt and Venus had informed Commander Zero of events only to see a wave of planatomic missiles launched and disappear into hyperspace.

Matt raced for his instruments in the navigation bay.

“They’re heading for Earth Venus – and there must be over fifty of them!”

“I’ll tell Commander Zero” said Venus.” The XL fleet should be able to stop them Matt – and Space City’s defences will take care of any that slip through. We’ve got to rescue Steve.”

“Yeah Venus – but we’re just as vulnerable of being snatched away as he was. I think they’re playing with us – but some how we’ve gotta fight back.”

“Let’s arm ourselves Matt – and take Fireball Junior down to the surface” said Venus bravely.

“Damn your patrol ships Zodiac.” Screamed the Subterrain Chief as he and Steve watched a large astrascope showing the planatomic missiles being destroyed one by one before they entered the Solar System.

“Set the travel beam to transport Steve Zodiac back to Earth – with a Vesivium Bomb” instructed the Chief to his minions. “There is no way your World Space Patrol can stop me this time. Ha ha ha ha ha.”

The evil laughter sent an icy shiver up Steve’s spine. How would he escape this one and save the world?

Fireball Junior landed on Planet 46 near the Subterrains known underground stronghold.

Matt and Venus quickly lifted out of the small ship on their jetmobiles and headed for the nearby caverns.

It was a grim journey through the dark tunnels retracing the route Venus had originally taken with Steve when they first landed on Planet 46 over two years ago.

The icy temperature began to get warmer – considerably warmer.

“We’ve reached the molten stream that Steve crossed Matt” explained Venus. “The heat was almost too much for his jetmobile’s thrusters and he nearly didn’t make it.”

“Look at those diamonds Venus – thousands of them” said Matt pointing at the cavern walls around them now sparkling in the glow from the lava.

“Yes Matt – and there’s the doorway!”

“We’ll take the jetmobiles over as high as the cavern roof will allow Venus. Some of the heat should have dissipated up there” suggested Matt. “If you make it across blast the doors with your jetmobile’s ray cannon. We must break in before the guards can stop us to stand any chance of rescuing Steve.”

A few minutes later the two jetmobiles landed side by side before the foreboding metal doorway into the Subterrains lair – both Matt and Venus feeling faint from the intense heat of the crossing.

“Fire Venus” ordered Matt.

“Okay Matt.”

Two blasts of high energy rays hit the doors disrupting their electronic locks.

They opened grudgingly to reveal the Subterrains vast control chamber in the middle of which stood Steve Zodiac on a raised dais handcuffed to a Vesivium 9 bomb – powerful enough to destroy a planet the size of the Earth leaving only dust to prove it had ever existed.

“Venus, Matt” shouted Steve recovering quickly from the shock of seeing his companions. “They’re about to send me to Earth. You’ve got to stop them or the world will be destroyed.”

Steve and the bomb slowly dematerialised as the travel beam operated.

Venus blasted the Subterrain Chief with one long burst of her hand held coma ray gun as Matt dealt with the other five aliens surrounding the dais.

“It’s too late Earth woman – we’ve won” gasped the Chief as he fell unconscious.

“Matt, you’ve got to do something” screamed Venus.

The Professor raced over to the travel beam controls and began punching buttons and operating levers.

“Venus – I- I think I’ve suspended the beam mid-way between Planet 46 and Earth – but there’s no way I can return Steve here without the bomb as well and I’m sure it was primed to go off on arrival”

“Can’t we separate him from the bomb, Matt?”

“Only if I knew his exact DNA code and other bio readings – maybe.”

“Okay Matt” said the space doctor. “Hold him where he is while I contact Robert and get him to transmit what you need from my medical records.”

Matt’s intuitive grasp of alien technology helped by his experience with the Nutopians travel transmitter allowed him to separate Steve Zodiac from the Vesivium bomb, once Venus had supplied him with the data he needed, and beam him back to Planet 46.

“You’ve done it Matt” yelled Venus in relief.

“Not for long Venus” said the Professor with a worried look on his face. “The bomb is coming out of suspension too. I’m not sure how long we have before it comes back and destroys Planet 46 and everyone on it.”

Venus ran over to Steve who stood looking dazed on the dais where had been handcuffed to the Vesivium bomb only minutes earlier.

“I heard what Matt said Venus” he gasped. “So come on let’s get out of here. There’s no time to rescue the Subterrains. They brought this on themselves anyway. Let’s go”

Steve, with Venus seated behind him, on one Jetmobile and Matt on the other crashed through the same viewing port the XL5 skipper had escaped by (carrying the unconscious Subterrains Chief) on his first visit to Planet 46.

They could see the faint image of the Vesivium 9 bomb slowly materialising behind them as they sped away from the Subterrains Base towards Fireball Junior.

The little craft took off within minutes and Steve opened communications with the Main Body as they hurtled away into space.

“Robert. Take XL5 out of orbit. Use full power. Now!”

One minute Planet 46 was orbiting it's small star – and the next minute it was gone.

The stupendous blast of energy released hit the Main Body of XL5 and Fireball Junior before they could engage their hyperdrives and hurled them far out into space – but thankfully they were still in one piece.

Steve and his crew recovered consciousness some time later.

“That’s the last we’ll see of the Subterrains folks” said Steve solemnly. “Let’s hope it will be a lesson to others in this universe of ours that revenge isn’t always sweet.”

“It’s a miracle we’re still alive” said Matt. “The bomb should have gone off as soon as it materialised.”

“I tried to disarm it Matt” explained Steve. “I must have delayed the detonation by a few minutes. Okay, let’s link up with XL5 and go home – and thanks to you two it’s still there.”

The End