

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE: The Most Dangerous Man In The World

A Thunderbirds story

Written by

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Chapter 1 - Disaster Strikes

Thunderbird One was on the brink of disaster! The sleek silver rocket carved the blue sky in half with a trail of dirty smoke as it plummeted towards the ocean. Its pilot, Scott Tracy, had been struggling to control the stricken craft since an explosion crippled the hydraulics. The main engine had been damaged and was on fire, the remaining smaller thrusters were on full power to compensate but made little difference as damaged control fins just flapped violently in the roaring slipstream.

The ship began to roll over, Scott pulled hard on the control stick to try and bring her back to level flight, which only resulted in slowing the rotation. Scott cursed under his breath but remained calm as he watched the sea and sky swapping places. It wasn't the first time he had been in trouble like this, memories of the crash he made in the Sahara flashed through his mind, even though the circumstances were completely different. That time he'd been attacked and damaged but seemed to have more control and opted to crash land instead of ejecting. From what his instruments were telling him, Thunderbird One was in a much worse condition than ever before, an array of flashing lights blinked for the malfunctions while alarms bleeped out warnings. Almost lost amidst the assortment of alarms was the failure of the cloaking and anti-radar devices, Scott noted this, but as it wasn't a system crucial to basic flying, he ignored it.

The roll of the craft was increasing speed steadily and Scott feared that if he relaxed the pressure on the control lever, he would never regain what little command he had. He updated his father on the situation.

"Dad, I'm still in trouble. I just can't get control of her." Scott despaired as he flicked switches. "Seems like I've tried everything."

"Scott, don't waste any more time, eject while you still can, Virgil and Gordon are on their wa...." His father's concerned voice fizzled out with a flash of sparks, the speaker crackled for a moment, then fell silent and

smoke began to swirl serenely from it. Scott raised an eyebrow and stared in disbelief at the unit.

“Father!” Scott yelled desperately in to the microphone, pausing impatiently for a reply. “Father!” Again still no response came. The radio was dead. Well, there’s not much more that can go wrong now, he thought while he scanned the console, I’d better eject before it is too late.

At the International Rescue base on Tracy Island, Jeff stood anxiously behind his desk and saw the framed image of his son struggling with the controls of Thunderbird One on the wall opposite vanish in a dazzle of interference, immediately being replaced by a motionless portrait of him regaled in his International Rescue uniform. Then the audio failed.

“Scott. SCOTT. Come in, do you copy?” Jeff waited uneasily moving to the front of the desk, “Base to Thunderbird One, please respond.” The radio remained silent. “Base to Thunderbird Two.”

The speaker came alive with Virgil’s response, simultaneously his troubled image at the controls of Thunderbird Two appeared in place of his portrait next to Scott’s.

“Ok father, I’m here. Standing by.”

“Virgil, I’ve lost all contact with Scott.”

Virgil heard more worry in his father’s voice than ever before. “I know, we have been monitoring communications, E.T.A. at danger zone in approximately thirty minutes. We’ll get there in time father.”

“F.A.B. Virgil, be as quick as you can and keep in touch, base out.” Jeff turned from the portraits and leant on his desk, closing his eyes he lowered his gray-haired head. He had a bad feeling about this.

The wildlife of the Malaysian jungle never gave the passing aircraft and trail of dark smoke a second glance, it was another hot afternoon and the only thing on their minds was sleep. A subtle breeze blowing in from the South China Sea gently swayed the forest canopy, allowing shafts of brilliant light to dart around the forest floor like randomly fired lasers. Insects buzzed and chirped idly in the shady green utopia.

Deep in the heart of the jungle stood an ancient stone temple overgrown with weeds and vines. This stone structure, seemingly undiscovered since abandonment, concealed inside it a secret base of the twenty first century.

In one chamber of this secret base stood an ornate bronze statue of an oriental man dressed in simple robes. Behind it a wall of fire flickered relaxingly throwing shadows that danced seductively around the stone walls. The statue stood on a plinth surrounded by four columns that held a tiered ornate golden roof and was circled on the floor by a rotating rack on which hung at least six masks of different guises.

Before this shrine kneeled a large muscular bald headed man with dark bushy eyebrows that sheltered his closed eyes. His oval shaped face appeared menacing with such rigid chiselled features that gave the impression he couldn't smile if he wanted to. He was dressed in armour like golden robes decorated with colourful jewels, an ivory handled sword hung from the belt. He seemed to worship the statue facing him, with hands held up either side of his head as if surrendering to an unseen enemy. He was motionless and could also have been mistaken for a statue.

A command centre nestled in one of the many chambers of the temple, lights flashed evenly in the gloomy surroundings that emitted a vague hum of electricity. An aircraft had been detected too close to the base by the radar systems that automatically sounded the alarm klaxon ringing throughout the base and interrupted the bald man's meditation.

The flames behind the statue flared up with a roar to over twice their height for a moment illuminating the chamber with a hellish red glow before

settling down to the gentle flicking as before. The man slowly opened his eyes and lowered his hands. Rising to his feet he gave the statue an unyielding glare before turning swiftly, allowing his long robes to swirl around him as he left the chamber.

The bald man entered the dimly lit command centre at a brisk pace, immediately scanning the array of monitors. His intense eyes settled into a hard stare on the radar consol while he turned the annoying alarm off, it's echo eventually died away to leave only the sound of the bleeping from the radar.

Forcing a frown he said out loud to himself in a deep voice that echoed around the room. "There should be no aircraft in this area...I wonder what it is?" Then a mixed expression of concern and puzzlement fell across his face. A moment later, the command centre was empty.

Corkscrewing downwards to the ocean, Scott had lost control of Thunderbird One, through the window he saw the world spinning as if he was on a carousel, but this wasn't fun, he knew ejecting would be a dangerous game, especially at low altitude and from a craft as out of control as this one. Scott was beginning to feel a little dizzy but had to choose the moment carefully, he did not want to eject straight down into the sea. He checked his harness.

"Well, here I go! Good luck old girl." Scott said before yanking at the red eject handle under his chair. The sophisticated survival capsule closed itself around him within seconds as the hatch directly above was jettisoned. Scott heard the deafening roar of the wind for a moment before the capsule thrusters fired. The severe force of the thrust and buffeting knocked him unconscious while being thrown clear from Thunderbird One, which carried on oblivious to Scott's absence. Seconds later Thunderbird One exploded in a huge ball of fire and smoke. Debris flew in every direction; the nose cone with part of the cockpit fuselage was the largest piece to emerge from the

explosion. It tumbled in an arc towards the sea, leaving an untidy smoke trail that very slowly dispersed in the warm breeze.

Scott had no idea how lucky he was, although that luck ran out very quickly. Shrapnel from the explosion pelted the capsule, piercing its shell in several places and damaging vital components. Scott, still unconscious, never felt the small shard of hull slice his thigh on its way through the capsule.

The capsule continued to thrust upwards to a safe height until a thruster spluttered and cut out. The capsule lost stability, and then another one failed. It began to roll out of control, spinning like a Catherine wheel until the remaining thrusters also failed then it started to fall out of the sky. The on-board computer sensed this and released the parachutes, three white bundles deployed, unfolded and filled with air immediately slowing the capsule with a jerk just in time for a few moments of quiet leisurely descent before splashing into the ocean. The parachutes fell onto the water and as if by design displayed the familiar International Rescue helping hand logo and were automatically cut free.

Scott stirring with a groan slowly opened his eyes feeling dazed and confused for a moment before an intense burning sensation in his leg snapped him back to full consciousness. It was dark in the capsule except for a few thin beams of sunshine leaking through rips in the shell wall, they danced around the interior as waves gently rocked the sphere. He could tell he was on the sea by the bobbing motion, and also by the way the capsule was slowly but alarmingly filling with water.

“Why hasn’t the life raft inflated yet?” Scott asked himself as he flicked a few switches on the control panel, the lights faded out completely, the power cells were dead.

The water continued to trickle in, Scott knew if he didn’t get out, the capsule was going to sink and he would drown. Things couldn’t get any worse, he thought as he reached up to the manual release for the emergency escape hatch and pulled at the lever, it did not turn.

"Or can they?" He said out loud and tried again with as much strength as he could muster, he groaned as the lever drained him. It was jammed.

"Damn it!" He yelled out with annoyance at the hatch and more so at his feeling of helplessness. He looked around inside the capsule for something to help get some leverage but found nothing of any use. He sighed deeply and sank into his seat.

"Virgil is on the way, I just hope I can hold on." Then the constant throbbing pain in his leg he had been trying to ignore diverted his attention, he bandaged his wound as best he could in the dim light and took a pain killer.

"At least the First Aid kit survived in one piece." He joked with himself allowing a halfhearted smile.

Scott watched the water level rise gradually. It didn't seem to take very long before the capsule was over half full of the cold salty sea, it seemed to be rising quicker with every second. He had tried his best to seal the holes in the capsule with pieces of his uniform, but there were ruptures in the shell that were not visible from the inside, his attempt barely slowed the watery invasion. Exhausted and bitterly cold, Scott was now perched on the chair with only his head clear of the water, his arms outstretched against the capsule walls to steady himself. He made another desperate attempt to open the hatch but it was still immovable. The water level rose quickly, Scott tilted his head back for a few more gasps of air before the capsule completely filled with water, and sank below the surface.

Scott, more afraid and alone than he had ever been before, held his breath.

Chapter 2 – Tragic Discovery

Thunderbird Two, International Rescue's huge green transporter vehicle raced at maximum speed across the clear blue sky over the sea, nothing else on the planet this large could move as fast and carry the kind of specialised equipment it had to for the rescues they had to perform. However, for Virgil and Gordon in Thunderbird Two's cockpit, it wasn't moving nearly fast enough on this occasion, for this time they were on the way to rescue their brother, Scott.

The thought of drowning never occurred to Scott, although he lived on an island and could swim well enough, he was never a great lover of water unless it was necessary during a rescue of course. He had always thought when his time was up it would be during a rescue. He would have preferred that rather than drowning for what seemed like a no-good reason. As the seconds ticked away while Scott held his breath, the freezing water had starting to numb his hurting, but he could feel his heart slowly pumping the oxygen deficient blood around his body. He closed his eyes and experienced a weightless sensation reminiscent of space flight, as if he was floating seemingly without a care.

His mind flashed back to the incident at Lake Anasta when he and Gordon rescued Brains from a strange man, intent on robbing the temple of its treasure, now that he didn't mind. But he was unlike his brother in that respect, Gordon was always in the pool or the ocean. He remembered joking with John and Alan on Thunderbird Five about Gordon growing gills and fins and marrying a mermaid, then teasing him about it on his return to the base. That seemed like only yesterday. Scott tried to think when he had had that conversation, but couldn't, he was finding it difficult to think straight. He didn't know which way was up now and was becoming disorientated.

Scott was beginning to lose consciousness, in an attempt to stay focused he thought about his family, that's what he would miss most, his family, not the excitement and satisfaction of the rescue but his family, the brothers and father he loved and admired. It had seemed like an eternity since the water had covered him, but it was only seconds. Scott grew wearier, he was close to letting go his fragile hold on life and breathe in a lung full of water. Then, suddenly there were three dull thuds on the outside of the capsule, and it was slowly hoisted clear of the water. Now air began to leak in to replace the water and Scott was able to blow out the stale air from his tired lungs and breathe again. He accidentally sucked in some water and choked; behind his own languished coughing he could hear the muffled whistling of engines. Thanks Virgil, but don't cut it so fine next time, were his last thoughts before falling unconscious in his chair.

Virgil and Gordon both scanned the monitors and the approaching horizon for any sign of Thunderbird One or the escape capsule. Virgil again tried to make contact using the radio.

"Scott, this is Virgil, do you copy?" He waited impatiently for a reply then repeated. "Scott, this is Virgil, please respond?"

Then the radio buzzed into life.

"Virgil..."

For a split second he thought he heard the rich tones of his brother Scott and turned to the view screen.

"... How close are you to Scott's last known coordinates?"

"Father, for a moment then I..." Virgil failed to hide the disappointment that it wasn't Scott on the radio and continued. "...Only a few minutes. We're only picking up a signal from Thunderbird One's black box flight recorder and are homing in on that but there is no sign of..."

"Hey, Virg look!" Interrupted Gordon, who jumped out of his seat and pointed out of the window. Virgil banked Thunderbird Two in the same direction.

"Oh, father!" Virgil gasped as he looked in horror at the view confronting him. "We... we can see wreckage floating on the ocean. Going down for a closer look, will relay pictures from the external cameras." Thunderbird Two hovered above the wreckage.

Jeff, now joined by Brains watched the monitor with silent dread as it displayed the floating remains of Thunderbird One. A twisted and ripped section of fuselage, being washed over by waves sported the vertically written white letters B-I-R-D, drifted aimlessly in the midst of smaller unrecognizable pieces.

The hush was broken by Brains swallowing hard and asking, "Vi...Vi...Virgil, have you er, picked up the escape capsule ho...ho...homing signal yet?"

"No, but we are still scanning all wave bands." Replied Virgil agitatedly.

"I...I just don't understand it, there's er, n...n...no way the signal could fail to automatically activate, unless..." Brains hesitated.

"Unless ... Scott never ejected in time?" Jeff finished the sentence Brains didn't want to.

"Well. I suppose the er, si...signal could have f...failed Mr. Tracy we can't rule out any p...possibilities." Brains offered with a false sense of enthusiasm, adjusting his thick, blue-rimmed glasses uneasily.

Jeff placed his hand firmly on Brains shoulder and gave a gentle calming squeeze. "Now we need to concentrate on finding Scott, if he's..." he paused, feeling uncomfortable with saying the next few words 'If he's alive...he may be hurt or incapable of using his wrist communicator. Virgil?"

"Yes father." He replied.

“Launch Thunderbird Four, Gordon should be able to retrieve the black box and search for any clues to the accident while you make a visual search for the escape capsule or raft in the surrounding area.

“F.A.B. father.” They replied simultaneously.

Gordon made his way to the waiting Thunderbird Four in the pod while Virgil moved Thunderbird Two away from the debris in order to launch the small yellow submarine.

“Gordon, are you ready?” Asked Virgil.

“F.A.B. Virgil.” Gordon replied and braced himself at the controls of his favourite vehicle. This is the part of the launch he didn’t care for as it always turned his stomach when the pod fell. He heard the clamps release and braced himself. A moment of weightlessness followed before the landing thrusters kicked in, these were added by Brains to soften the blow, not only on Gordon but also on the pod and its equipment, they were an improvement. Once on the ocean the pod door opened and the launch ramp extended. A green light lit up on Thunderbird Four’s control panel, Gordon fired the launch thrusters and the sub accelerated down the ramp gracefully submerging into the oceans depths. Meanwhile Virgil prepared his search pattern and began backtracking Thunderbird One’s estimated flight path.

A helijet sped briskly just above the treetops of the dense Malaysian jungle. It slowed as it approached a large clearing in the trees in which a stone structure filled the area. It was a temple, clearly centuries old, dilapidated and in ruins. The helijet descended towards the temple, four stone slabs slid slowly apart with a rumble like distant thunder to reveal a shaft into which it vanished. The four slabs then moved back together again concealing its secret. The helijet landed in a chamber at the base of the shaft and neon lights automatically flickered on to light the area.

It was a large hangar, in which various other aircraft and vehicles were stored. As the engines were shut down, a metal globe was lowered on to the hard concrete floor and the claw that plucked it from the ocean released with a seemingly disgruntled hiss before it withdrew back into the belly of the helijet. A smaller claw beneath the cockpit opened its cold metal fingers and damp parachutes flopped to the floor.

The engine whistle died away as the turbo-fans slowed, the pilot, the bald man with thick eyebrows now dressed in military style desert garb, jumped out of the cockpit and walked around the landing strut of the helijet towards his salvaged prize. He looked remarkably haughty as he stopped in front of the sphere flaunting the internationally known IR insignia.

"Excellent!" He proclaimed loudly. "A present from International Rescue. I wonder what it is?" He then examined the capsule's smooth almost unblemished exterior, noticing several damaged areas, exposed circuitry and the emergency escape hatch. The man stepped in closer and tapped on the hatch.

"Is anybody home?" He smiled wickedly, grabbing the hatch lever and pulled. To his dismay it didn't budge, his smile vanished as he tried again with more effort, again it didn't move. Scowling he disappeared into the cockpit, then returned to the capsule with a crowbar and used it to great effect to lever open the hatch. He peered inside and his evil smile soon reappeared as he gazed upon the unconscious occupant who was slumped awkwardly across the seat.

"You know International Rescue. I have always liked your uniforms. Ha, ha, haaa." His voice echoed around the hangar and inside the capsule. Scott groaned and shifted slightly as if being gently awoke from a deep sleep. The bald man reacted by reaching for his pistol and pointing it at Scott who was now lifting his head and opening his eyes, squinting at the light and trying to focus.

"Where...am I?"

"Move, and you're dead." Said the bald man.

Scott looked round and focused on the gun barrel, then on the face of the man holding it.

"Okay pal, whatever you say, ouch." Scott winced and held his bloody bandaged thigh. "Who are you...what do you want?"

"You may have heard of me. I am known as the Hood...and I want everything!"



Chapter 3 – The Lost

“The Hood? I’ve seen you before. You...you tried to infiltrate the Zero X mission.” Scott frowned while thinking. The Hood glared.

“And I would have succeeded had you and your organisation not interfered.”

“But...but I thought you were killed when your helicopter was shot down.”

“Fools! That was just a decoy of course, while I made my escape.” The Hood responded, “Which is far more than you will be able to do my friend.”

He lowered the gun and looked at Scott who returned a puzzled stare. The Hood widened his eyes. Scott was compelled to stare back into them, although he wasn’t sure why, he tried to turn away but couldn’t. Their eyes stared relentlessly into each other’s; the situation being totally controlled by the Hood.

“You cannot resist me.” The Hood’s voice was powerful yet calming and as hypnotic as his eyes. Scott was fighting a losing battle, being physically and mentally exhausted he succumbed to the hypnotic influence with a moan and was lost. The Hood rummaged through Scott’s mind and learned more about International Rescue in just a few minutes than he had during his attempts over the years - but it wasn’t enough, a plan began to formulate in his devious mind. The Hood smiled, the smile grew and grew until he could barely contain himself and could not resist laughing out loud, pleased with the diabolical schemes running through his mind.

Over two hours had passed since Gordon and Virgil reached the scene of devastation, there had been hardly any communication between them, and none with base. Gordon had found the black box and was now scouring the seabed for wreckage to collect for clues as to why the accident happened. Virgil had completed a vast search pattern and was now solemnly collecting

the floating remains of Thunderbird One with the magnetic grabs for Brains to examine.

Meanwhile, Tracy Island seemed more peaceful than usual, Alan and Tin-Tin were with John on Thunderbird Five making repairs and installing new equipment. Due to a communication malfunction, they were not in contact with base and so were totally unaware of the events unfolding on the surface. Kyrano and Grandma were on the mainland shopping and Brains was busy in his laboratory running through the diagnostic check he had carried out on Thunderbird One that morning, checking for anything that could have led to a problem.

Jeff stood anxiously on the balcony overlooking the pool, staring out over the glimmering ocean, thinking about the last couple of hours. One moment Scott was on his way back from a straightforward rescue operation, then suddenly all hell breaks loose. Thunderbird One is crippled by an unknown malfunction and all radio contact is lost. Then the awful discovery by Virgil and Gordon that Thunderbird One had exploded or crashed in the ocean, and the possibility that Scott might be dead. That was a thought he found impossible to entertain. Then radio receiver bleeped, and he heard Virgil.

“Thunderbird Two to base.”

He rushed back to his desk and flicked the radio on. Jeff could tell from Virgil’s tone that it wasn’t good news and his heart sank a little lower. “Go ahead son.”

“Father.” Virgil swallowed hard. “Gordon and I have finished an extensive search using sonar, radar, infra-red and thermal imaging...” He was trying to keep an air of professionalism to his report but failed. “There is no sign of the escape capsule...or...or of Scott.”

Everything seemed to go quiet in Jeff's world. Grief stricken he fell back into his chair. He realised there was no hope now, not after all this time. The oceans were so unforgiving. Why? He thought bitterly.

"Dad?"

Jeff never heard the call from Virgil.

"Dad!" The call went unanswered.

"DAD!"

Jeff finally heard Virgil's call and composed himself. "Virgil." He found it distressing to talk, "Return to base...you've done your best, you both have, I'm proud of you, I'm proud of you all."

"But father, we can't just give up," Virgil pleaded, although deep down he knew his father was right but couldn't admit it.

"I'm sorry Virgil, but we have to come to terms with it, the black box should answer some questions. I know it's going to be difficult."

There was always an element danger in this job and Jeff knew this could happen one day, but he could never have prepared himself to face it, never have believed it would happen. Jeff painfully thought back to the death of his wife. He remembered the feeling of loss, the grief and the mourning. He dreaded it. He didn't want it again.

"Please. Virgil. Gordon. Don't make it any harder than it already is."

Thunderbird Two hovered effortlessly over the sea as if suspended by wire while Virgil sat silently at the controls and took a deep breath. "F.A.B. I will collect Thunderbird Four and return to base. Two out."

The Hood drove his six wheeled jeep tremendously fast through one of the many secret underground tunnels which connected his hidden base to the outside world. To an outsider it would seem a dangerous speed to negotiate

the subway, but the Hood knew these passages like the back of his hand, after all, he built them. The capsule was tied securely to the flat back of the jeep, and Scott, who was in a hypnotic sleep, was strapped to the seat inside.

After about thirty miles the tunnel sloped upwards towards the unsuspecting jungle. The jeep charged out of a camouflaged opening and flew into the air for a moment before landing heavily with a bounce or two. The jungle burst into life with startled creatures running and flying for cover from this noisy beast from beneath the ground. The jeep slowed to a restrained crawl as it weaved its way between the trees, rocks and gullies, until the forest began to thin out. The Hood could now see the ocean ahead. He glanced behind at the capsule as he dodged trees and bushes. "Don't worry my friend, you will soon be going home."

After the conversation with Virgil, Jeff had left the lounge and felt a compulsion to visit Thunderbird One's hanger. On the way he gave the impression he was walking about without purpose as he made his way through the maze of corridors and stair wells to empty hangar. He emerged into it about halfway on an inspection gantry, there he leaned on the safety rail and looked around at the empty space. The hangar was like a giant missile silo, gantries where Brains would make repairs or modifications lined the walls at various levels, his gaze dropped to the ramp that Thunderbird One had travelled countless times which led down to the launch bay. He then noticed two large doors in the hangar wall; he wondered for a moment what they were and then he remembered. He left the gantry and disappeared down some more passages.

Tall palm trees lazily loomed over the edge of the deserted golden beach and swayed seductively in the gentle breeze as the clear ocean teased the sun-dried sand every few seconds as the tide gradually retreated. The calm

was shattered by a fierce growl of a diesel engine jeep reversing towards the water ploughing the sand with its chunky tires into two deep troughs. The jeep stopped halfway into the water. With the engine left running the driver climbed onto the back of the jeep with the capsule and began to untie the securing ropes.

“Goodbye ...my friend...please, don’t be a stranger. Ha ha haaa.”

Still laughing to himself, the Hood then nudged the capsule, so it rolled off the jeep and into the water. It bobbed up and down then began to float away on the tide. Water again began to seep into the damaged capsule. The Hood watched a while before taking a small black box from his pocket and pressing one of its many buttons, it bleeped, simultaneously the computer inside the capsule sparked into life, drawing on the renewed power cells the Hood had kindly installed, and activated the life raft. The capsule broke in two and become enveloped in a yellow bubble, a flashing beacon appeared on top, and the distress signal began transmitting. The Hood smiled, jumped back into the driving seat and drove the jeep off the beach and into the dense jungle. There he stopped, turned off the engine and returned on foot to the edge of the jungle to wait.

Virgil and Gordon sat in silence aboard Thunderbird Two as they headed home. The shock of what happened to Scott was starting to take hold. They felt partly to blame. What more could they have done? They asked themselves. On one of the consoles a light started to flash and an alarm bleep grabbed their attention. Gordon punched a few keys on his terminal then turned to Virgil excitedly.

“Virgil, it’s the escape capsule distress signal. Scott’s escape capsule! The distress signal has activated.”

“Have you got a location fix for it?” Virgil eagerly asked.

"Sure have, bearing forty-eight degrees magnetic, approximately one hundred miles...wow, how the heck did it get that far away?" Said Gordon frowning in bewilderment.

Virgil had already started steering Thunderbird Two around and accelerated to full speed. "Let's just hope Scott's alright."



Chapter 4 – The Rescue

Brains responded to the signal from Virgil. “Base here, go...go ahead Thunderbird Two.”

“Brains, we have picked up a signal from Thunderbird One’s escape capsule, we are on the way to it now.”

“That’s wonderful news V...Virgil, I’ll t...tell Mr. Tracy, call back when you reach its l...location.”

“F.A.B. Brains, Thunderbird Two out.”

Brains tried to contact Jeff over the intercom and watch communicator but there was no answer. Strange, he thought. He sat at Jeff’s desk and tapped in a pass word at the computer terminal, a three-dimensional plan of the entire island came up on the monitor, Brains typed LOCATE JEFF on the keyboard, instantly the island sensors homed in on Jeff’s communicator and the plan swivelled and zoomed in around a flashing square. Brains was a little puzzled, but recognised exactly where Jeff was, so went to tell him the news.

“There it is!” Virgil called excitedly as he slowed Thunderbird Two down and hovered over the yellow survival raft bobbing on the water. “Get ready with the grab and winch Gordon.”

“F.A.B.” He replied enthusiastically. The main hatch under Thunderbird Two’s nose slid open. Gordon operated the winch control that lowered the grab, and it took a firm but gentle hold on the raft and lifted it out of the water. As it was winched aboard, Virgil resumed course for home.

“Well done International Rescue. Another successful rescue.” The Hood had observed the recovery of Scott’s life raft from the edge of the beach. He

watched until Thunderbird Two flew out of sight. Ever since International Rescue began operating all those years ago he had been impressed by the vehicles and equipment, and now he felt even more envious.

“Soon I will have your secrets International Rescue, soon. Nothing can stop me this time.” He returned to the jeep and vanished into one of his secret tunnels.

Brains stopped at a large metal door at the end of a corridor, there was no handle, no hinges, the only way you knew it was a door, is when it opened. Brains took out his security pass and slid it into a slim box on the wall and stuttered out his name. His voice matched the data base record and his card popped out as the magnetic bolts released the locks. Brains pushed the door open with remarkable ease considering its size, and went in. As the door closed automatically Brains looked up, a familiar rocket stood before him. At almost one hundred feet tall, it was very similar in design to Thunderbird One, apart from being yellow in colour and bearing the markings Rescue-1 and R-1 in various places as opposed to Thunderbird 1 and TB1. This was one of the first designs Brains submitted for Jeff, it was built as a prototype to test some of the new technology he was inventing and was therefore never used during a rescue. In its day it was faster than any craft in commercial or military use, but now Thunderbird One superseded the R-1, not only in speed but looks and efficiency. It had, however been an invaluable tool during the setting up of the organisation. Brains still had a soft spot for the machine.

“Mr. Tracy.” Echoed around the chamber.

Jeff’s walked along one of the upper gantries into view, his solemn voice echoed back. “Brains, what’s up?”

“Oh, Mr. Tracy. I couldn’t make contact on your communicator.”

“I know. I just wanted to be alone, for a while.”

Brains didn't continue on that track. "V...Virgil and Gordon called in. They received a signal from er...Thunderbird One's escape capsule!" Replied Brains.

Jeff's eyes lit up with hope, without another word he raced down from the gantry, rushed past Brains to open the large door and ran towards the lounge, Brains followed.

"Base to Thunderbird Two. Come in Thunderbird Two." Jeff said eagerly.

"Yes father." Answered Virgil.

"Virgil, what's happened?"

"We've found Scott. He's unconscious and has a nasty leg injury but apart from that he seems fine. Gordon is taking care of him now."

"F.A.B. Virgil, good work, I look forward to your return. I really am proud of you all today. Base out." Jeff slumped into his comfortable desk chair and let his head fall back, closed his eyes and let out a long sigh of relief, after a moment he looked up at Brains who was also smiling, but like Jeff had never seen him smile before.

"Th...th...this is er... fantastic news Mr. Tracy." He stuttered excitedly.

"It sure is Brains, and it's your advanced technology that helped save Scott. I can't thank you enough." Said Jeff appreciatively.

Evening had fallen over Tracy Island with the usual beautiful sunset. On landing, Scott had been rushed from Thunderbird Two into the Villa's medical centre to have his injuries attended to.

Scott had been out cold since his retrieval but was now regaining consciousness. He opened his eyes slowly blinking at the bright light then the blurred surrounding slowly came into focus. He recognised he was in

the sick room back home on Tracy Island. He struggled to raise himself from his laying position and then felt strong warm hands aiding him to sit up and saw the familiar faces of Virgil, Gordon and Brains standing around his bed. They all looked concerned but pleased. His father was at his side.

"How are you feeling son?" Jeff asked.

Scott paused and thought for a moment, he felt a dull pain in his leg and head then as he moved to get comfortable, he began to notice aches and pains all over his body.

"Ah...I have felt better. What happened? The last thing I remember is being up to my ears in freezing water."

"It's a long story; Virgil will fill you in. I'm just relieved you made it back." Jeff sighed and reassuringly stroked his son's hair. "I'll look in on you later, get some rest. Brains and I need to discuss Thunderbird One."

"How bad is she?" Scott asked Brains.

"Well Scott. I'm afraid er...she was destroyed by an explosion. We have yet to determine the origin of the er... malfunction." Brains replied.

"Oh boy. So what are we going to do without Thunderbird One? We need a..." Scott groaned and slumped from his sitting position.

"Don't worry son." Jeff said smiling. "We're not out of business yet. When you are well enough Brains wants to ask you a few questions about what happened."

"Sure, no problem."

Brains and Jeff turned and headed towards the door just as slid open and Kyrano was entering with coffee and Grandma's homemade apple pie on a tray.

"Mr. Scott, I thought you might like some ..." Kyrano never finished what he was about to say. He was only halfway towards the bed and looked at Scott, he suddenly groaned then collapsed to his knees. The tray and contents fell

clattering to the floor. Jeff was the closest and reacted quickly enough to grab Kyrano from falling down completely.

"Kyrano!"

Everyone in the room rushed to help except Scott who managed to sit up to see what was going on.

"Kyrano. What's the matter?" Jeff asked.

"Aarraagh." Kyrano groaned, pearls of sweat formed on his brow and he was tossing his head from side to side.

"Looks like he is having another of those funny turns Father." Stated Virgil.

"Yeah, it sure does. Virgil, Gordon, take him to his room please, I may have to send for the Doctor again."

Kyrano was lifted to his feet by Virgil and Gordon on either side of him and carried him out of the room. His moaning ceased as soon as he was out in the corridor.

"Say dad, what's going on?" Enquired Scott.

"I don't know. That was mighty strange." Said Jeff distractedly while stroking his chin. His mind was on other things as he looked down at the mess on the floor tiles. "Get some rest Scott." He said without taking his eyes from the floor. He sighed gently before turning to Scott. "I will look in on you later." Then Jeff left the room with Brains in tow.

Later in the Lounge Jeff sat at his desk and Brains sat opposite.

"What do you think Brains?" Asked Jeff, he was concerned about how long it would be before International Rescue would be fully operational. "How long before we can replace Thunderbird One?"

"It will take er... months to er... build a new one of course. I will have to start ordering the parts immediately."

"Yes, of course, we will have to just cope as best we can without a high-speed reconnaissance craft."

Brains rubbed his chin, frowned briefly then said. "Mr. Tracy, I have an idea."

"What's on your mind, Brains?"

"Well the er...Rescue-1 could possibly be er...made operational within a week or two, just as a...a temporary measure, but I would have to make a few er... modifications."

"Hmmm." Jeff pondered on Brains suggestion for a moment as they sat in silence. "You know Brains, that's a great idea. We'll prepare the R-1 and set it up in Thunderbird One's launch bay only to use it if absolutely necessary while we rebuild a new Thunderbird One in the main hangar as quickly as possible."

"I'll begin first thing in the morning."

"O.K. Brains, Virgil and Gordon will assist you to speed thing up, so will Alan and Tin-Tin when they return from Thunderbird Five. So how long will it take to complete the repairs and modifications up there, I don't like being off the air for too long?"

"O...Only a day at most. I spoke to Alan and John just before Thunderbird Two landed a...a...and appraised them on the situation down here. They are ahead of schedule and should be returning t...t...tomorrow."

"Good. Glad to hear something is going right. It's certainly going to be a busy for us over the next few months."

"Oh, y...yes, it sure is."

"Well, I have a little paperwork to do before calling it a night."

"Goodnight then, er...M...Mr. Tracy." Brains said as he rose from his chair.

"See you in the morning Brains."

As Brains left the lounge, Jeff leaned back in his chair and relaxed for the first time that day, he began to contemplate the troubles International Rescue was facing and before he knew it he fell asleep.



Chapter 5 – A Catastrophe

Thunderbird Five sat silently in the cold darkness of space above the Earth at one of the highest altitudes possible and in a stationary orbit approved by the United Nations. Its exact position veiled by the top-secret stealth technology invented by Brains. Safe from any known type of detection devices it listened relentlessly to the multitude of communications taking place below, assisted by several smaller relay satellites, the whole world was being eves dropped upon. The sophisticated computer listened for specific words and phrases in any language that might imply help from International Rescue was required. And all too often, it was.

Only days after the Thunderbird One disaster International Rescue receives a call for help . . .

“Au secours! Il y a eu un catastrophe. Venez tout de suite. International Rescue, répondez s’il vous plaît!”

The call for help can be made in any language and Thunderbird Five’s powerful computer translates into English virtually instantaneously and alerts John, wherever he might be on the space station. During this call he was in the observation lounge reading and so activated the terminal beside him.

“International Rescue here, what’s seems to be the problem?” Asked John. The computer translated what John said into the language which was being used. The translation from French had a slight delay but soon came via the computer’s synthesized voice in a calm un-hurried tone, totally contrary to the actual caller’s desperate blathering. John made notes as usual, even though all calls were recorded, and then contacted Tracy Island.

"Go ahead John."

"Father, I've just had a call from a diamond mine in Africa, there's been several explosions, and an unknown number of miners are trapped underground." John explained.

"Surely they have rescue equipment of their own for emergencies like this." Suggested Jeff.

"They did, but one of the explosions damaged most of it, and there are several fires out of control, the remoteness of the mine means heavy rescue gear would take at least a day to reach them. There have been thirty fatalities from the initial explosions and hundreds of people are injured waiting to be airlifted to hospitals. They estimate the trapped group have only about four hours of air left, that is if the tunnel doesn't collapse first."

"It sure sounds serious. Ok John, inform them we are on the way, and we require complete cooperation. The usual procedures." Instructed Jeff.

"F.A.B. Thunderbird Five out."

Jeff alerted Brains, Tin-Tin, Virgil, Gordon, Alan and Scott, who had almost recovered from his experience and injuries but still carried a limp from his wounded thigh. They all arrived at the lounge as quickly as they could, realising that there was no time to waste when there is a call for help. Jeff briefed them.

"So that's the situation. Brains, can the R-1 be used yet?" asked Jeff.

"N..no Mr. Tracy. It is capable of er. . . flying but needs more testing and extra equipment to be installed." He replied.

"Right. Scott. I know your French is a little rusty but do you feel up to operating mobile control from Thunderbird Two?"

"Oui Papa. I sure do." He answered enthusiastically. "Just don't expect me to run a marathon."

"Ok we won't. Virgil."

"Yes Father."

"Prep Thunderbird Two for launch, Alan will assist you on this mission."

Alan sensed Tin-Tin look at him. "Sure Dad." Then eyed her. Be careful, She mouthed to him bringing out a smile while his father continued.

"Brains, what equipment do you suggest in addition to the standard firefighting equipment and the Mole?"

"Well, M...Mr. Tracy, I think the er...Firefly, the Excavator and a R...R...Recovery Vehicle should do the trick."

"Alan and Gordon, you load the pod with the equipment as quick as you can. Ok boys, Thunderbirds Are Go!"

Within moments, Virgil had zoomed down the chute from the lounge and was in Thunderbird Two's cockpit preparing the craft for launch, he would change into uniform once underway. Scott arrived shortly after and began checking the computer systems at one of the terminals.

It took about five minutes for Alan and Gordon to get pod five ready; this pod was always kitted out for fire rescue and just needed the Mole and other vehicles to be loaded. The pod conveyer swiftly slid pod five beneath the huge green transporter, which immediately began to lower on its telescopic legs onto the pod. Once the pod was locked into position, Thunderbird Two glided on its almost invisible undercarriage towards the opening hangar door.

It continued along the runway until coming to halt a on its launch ramp, it raised the massive vehicle to the thirty-degree angle necessary for launching as the hangar door closed concealing it's secret behind a rock façade. The whole launch operation ran smoothly as usual as everyone knew where to be and what to do. Once given the all-clear from his father,

Virgil engaged the booster rockets that roared into life and Thunderbird Two gracefully glided up and off the ramp with its heavy cargo into the.

Jeff watched from the balcony as the craft gained altitude and speed until it vanished from sight. John relayed the destination coordinates to Scott who then plotted a course for the danger zone.

Virgil, Scott and Alan could see plumes of dark smoke obliterating the sunset as Thunderbird Two descended towards the danger zone. A landing area had been prepared for them well away from the helijet landing-zone so not to interfere with the evacuation of casualties.

Thunderbird Two's landing thrusters fired to slow down the huge vehicle for landing, creating clouds of dust and smoke that slowly settled. On touch down the thrusters disengaged, hydraulic rams hissed as they began to lift the main body on its powerful telescopic legs away from the pod, once clear the pod door began to lower to form a ramp.

Armed police moved in to secure the area from the uninvited. As the dust settled the sound of diesel engines awakening echoed from inside the pod and the Mole appeared at the top of the ramp, it trundled down the ramp and advanced towards the mine.

"Mole to mobile control, I'm clear of the pod and approaching the drilling coordinates." Virgil reported from the control cabin.

"Virgil, those people down there only have about fifteen minutes of good air left. Be as quick as you can. Keep in touch and good luck."

"Roger mobile control."

"Mobile control to Firefly." Said Scott with steadfast confidence; the response had an excited tone.

"Firefly here, go ahead mobile control."

“Alan, I have spoken to the fire chief, he said most of the fires are now out or under control. But there is one warehouse that contains a strong-room full of explosives, and they would prefer it not to explode but cannot get close enough with conventional fire equipment to cool the area down. Do you think you can handle it with the Firefly?” Scott asked, although he knew what the answer would be.

“Just try and stop me, be seeing you!” Alan enthused and revved up the Firefly’s power plant so much so that the wheels spun the giant tracks before leaving the pod, once outside he steered the huge machine in the direction of the blazing warehouse. Although Alan’s specialty was piloting Thunderbirds Three and driving fast cars, he knew how to handle the situation thanks to the intense training on all the rescue equipment he and his brothers had gone through.

The arrival of International Rescue had drawn a large crowd, which was not uncommon, a few even took pictures of Thunderbird Two, the Mole and the Firefly, not realising that the anti-radar and cloaking device invented by Brains was also capable of presenting cameras and imaging equipment with distorted pictures if aimed at the vehicles. Hundreds of people have been disappointed, thanks to Brains.

One particular person in the crowd knew how futile it was trying to take photographs, he had been disappointed before and also so impressed by the technology that he decided to learn the secrets, realising that there was power and money to be made. Now he was closer than ever to obtaining those secrets.

Most of the crowd that saw the arrival of Thunderbird Two had left the landing area and gone to where International Rescue was in action. Many got as close to the warehouse blaze as was allowed while the Firefly approached and prepared to challenge it. Others watched with

astonishment as the Mole, now tilted on its caterpillar tracked trolley, fired its thrust unit to aid the huge, toughened drill to screw its way in to the ground flinging great clumps of mud and dust into the air before vanishing from view.

As the Mole churned its way through the earth and rock, aided by probes and sensors and a computer that monitored its position, Virgil reported back to mobile control.

"Scott. Estimated time to reach the trapped miners is fifteen minutes, there are large hard rock deposits which may well slow me down though." Virgil reported.

"F.A.B. Virg, contact has been made with the people down there, the roof is very unstable, two have been lost in a recent cave-in, so make it as quick as you can. They are as far south as they can get to make room for your entry point."

"F.A.B. Scott. How is Alan doing?"

"He has reached the warehouse and is preparing to tackle the blaze."

A large, burly moustached policeman emerged from the remaining crowd of people gathered around Thunderbird Two and casually walked towards the open pod. He was challenged by another policeman of much smaller build, they seemed to exchange a few words before the moustached man continued towards the open pod and disappeared inside, leaving the other policeman standing motionless and bleary eyed.

Scott sat patiently waiting for reports from Virgil, Alan and the mine rescue coordinator. He did not want to pester them with unnecessary communication but decided to report back to Tracy Island.

"Mobile control to base."

"Go ahead Scott. Anything to report?" Asked his father.

"Only that everything is under control, I'll keep you informed of any changes."

"O.K. Scott, base out."

Scott stood up and limped over to the window. From the cockpit he could see the entire mine area, fires were still raging in some parts, the largest being the warehouse. He could see the Firefly approaching it and wished he were in the thick of the action with his brothers.

Suddenly the cockpit door slid open, Scott spun round with surprise. A policeman stood in the doorway. With his head dipped slightly, a peaked cap covered his eyes, a bushy moustache joining his nose and top lip. Scott didn't relax for a moment.

"What are you doing here? You have clear instructions that our craft and equipment is out of bounds to everyone . . . including the police."

"And I thought you would be pleased to see me." The policeman slowly raised his head and removed the cap. "After all, I did save your life . . . once." The rest of his face and head was now visible. He smiled.

"Who are you?" Asked Scott frowning, and yet as he asked the question deep down this man seemed familiar, he suddenly felt threatened then drew his pistol aiming at the intruder.

"I am upset that you do not remember me. I have only myself to blame." The policeman appeared unfazed by being threatened with a weapon just widened his eyes and starred menacingly at his prey. Scott began to feel drowsy and his consciousness slipping away, a blank expression fell across his face, his eyes were stuck with an emotionless stare. The policeman relaxed his eyes and entered the cockpit.

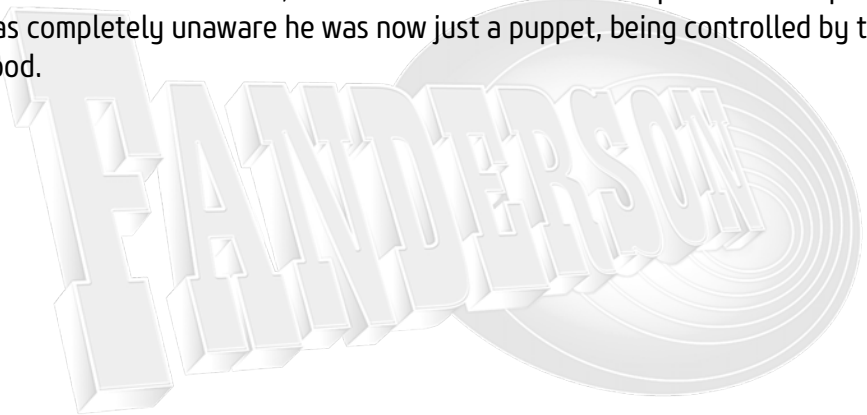
"So, you do remember me - old friend!"

Scott stood motionless staring at the now empty doorway while the intruder examined the controls and equipment. He glanced back at Scott.

“Put your gun away Scott, we are all friends here.”

Scott returned the weapon to its holster. The policeman approached, put his arm around Scott’s shoulder and leaned closer to whisper. “Scott. My old friend, I have power over you now, a hypnotic link. You are so pathetic, you have no powers with which to stop me, you will do my bidding and help with my plans to destroy your own family and International Rescue, and you will not even know it.” The Hood laughed.

Scott’s stare un-wavered, his conscious mind had been put fast asleep and was completely unaware he was now just a puppet, being controlled by the Hood.



Chapter 6 – The Danger Zone

Alan stopped the Firefly about fifty feet short of the warehouse to perform a safety check of his instruments, and then he lowered the Firefly's huge heat shielded scoop and prepared to battle the fire. His instruments reported how hot the fire was burning and he assessed that the explosives store was also heating up rapidly, the warehouse it sat in was engulfed by fire and although it still had its shape there was a danger of it collapsing.

To prevent it falling in on the Firefly he decided to use the cannon to fire a nitro-glycerin shell at the wall facing him, it exploded on impact and the wall disintegrated into a pile of rubble, the rest of the structure began to fall apart until the whole building became a mass of burning ruins. This had the effect of reducing the intensity of the heat and ferocity of the flames but not the danger from the explosives. Alan had to take the Firefly into the heart of the fire and shift the burning debris away from the explosive store with the large heat-resistant scoop on the front of the vehicle. He engaged the drive and began the hazardous journey into the inferno.

Virgil reported back to mobile control. "Scott, the rock down here is not as tough as expected, I'm well ahead of schedule. I'm only a minute or two from the trapped miners."

There was no response from Scott.

"Mobile control, please come in." The radio remained silent. "Alan, are you receiving me?"

"F.A.B. Virgil." Replied Alan.

"Scott is not answering, I'm concerned?"

"Yeah, I heard, I'm sure he's okay, probably some kind of interference." He suggested.

"I guess so, I'll see you soon, Mole out." Virgil's worry was not put to rest but there was nothing he could do about it at the moment; there were trapped people depending on him and International Rescue. But he would keep trying to get through, Alan was probably right and with all the upheaval on the surface it's not surprising that there are communication problems. Then there was an awful grinding noise, and the Mole juddered to a halt.

"Damn! I spoke too soon." Virgil muttered. He flicked the microphone on. "Scott, in case you can hear me, I have found some tough rock down here and will have to back track slightly to set a new course, estimate now about ten minutes before I make contact with the miners. Virgil out." He reversed the huge drilling machine while calculating a new heading, all the time with an ear listening out for a reply from Scott, but none came.

The Firefly coped extremely well considering the circumstances, the heat was probably the most intense it had ever faced, Alan had used more foam to douse the fire than anticipated, if it ran out there was a real danger for him and the vehicle from the extremely high temperatures. He cleared a path through the white-hot ruins towards the explosive store, which was in sight now.

Alan began clearing the flaming rubble away from the still intact strong room as sweat ran down his face from the intense concentration and the harsh conditions outside. The cooling heatproof suit and the heat-resistant cabin didn't seem to help but he still appreciated them being there. Outside was what he imagined hell to be like. Flames roared into the darkness without mercy in what seemed like every direction. He could see parts of the Firefly glowing red-hot. An alarm went off indicating that the foam supply was getting low. Just a few more minutes, Alan thought, ignoring it. He pressed on still using more of the foam regardless of the danger. The store was almost clear of the fire now but was smoking ominously. Alan

aimed the foam nozzle to try and cool it a little and pressed the release button. Nothing happened; the foam had finally been exhausted. Ooops, he thought, I'd better clear the rest of this rubble away, but I guess the danger has past now.

Suddenly the store exploded. The Firefly was hurled backwards through the air like a tin toy and sent crashing into an abandoned fire truck smashing it to a mangled pile of junk, then rolling over a few times eventually losing momentum and landing on it's side scarred and smashed. One of its caterpillar tracks ripped clean off and the roof of the drivers cabin had been crushed down a couple of feet in one corner. The heat shield although mostly intact was scorched severely and warped at the edges and only supported by only one of its hydraulic arms which was leaking fluid from busted pistons.

The explosion left a large crater where the warehouse once stood and extinguished the bulk of the fire. Unfortunately, the tremor it created caused all the unstable tunnels and shafts to collapse.

Thunderbird Two rattled from the explosion but was not close enough to suffer any damage. It did however wake the seemingly comatose Scott.

"What the hell was that?" Scott said to himself, feeling as though he had been awoken from a deep sleep, he leapt from his chair to see what had happened, on looking from the cockpit to his horror he could see the crater where once stood the warehouse, while burning and smoking debris was dropping on to the surrounding area, then he saw the Firefly on its side, smashed and smoking. He immediately tried the radio.

"Alan! Alan! Are you ok? Please respond."

The radio buzzed and crackled but there was no response from Alan, but it instead burst to life with Virgil's concerned voice.

"Scott, what's going on up there? The whole tunnel has collapsed down here; it was lucky I reached the trapped miners when I did."

"Okay Virgil. Good work, the Firefly is damaged, and I can't get through to Alan, I'm going to see how he is."

"F.A.B. Scott, I'll be back up in about twenty minutes. Take it easy bro."

Scott left the cockpit and went down to the recovery vehicle in the pod, once inside it he headed as fast as he could towards the crippled Firefly.

As Scott approached the Firefly, he could see Alan inspecting the vehicle in his heat-protective suit. He looked round when he noticed the recovery vehicle approaching, he saw Scott at the controls and smiled. Scott gave a sigh of relief and pulled up next to him.

"Are you okay Alan?" Asked Scott as he opened the cab door and carefully descended the ladder to the ground.

"Just a few bumps and bruises." He turned to look at the Firefly then back at Scott. "But I think I've broken the Firefly though."

"Yeah, sure looks that way, I guess dad will make you pay for it out of your allowance." Scott joked.

Alan chuckled. "Gosh, I wouldn't be surprised."

They both laughed and started to connect the recovery vehicles tow cables to the Firefly.

When Scott and Alan returned to Thunderbird Two with the wrecked Firefly in tow Virgil had already unloaded the rescued miners and stowed the Mole back inside the pod. Scott drove the recovery vehicle straight into the pod then he and Alan jumped out.

"The situation is well under control now Scott, our services are no longer needed." Virgil explained, "The fires are almost all out and the last of the helijet ambulances are just leaving." The wrecked vehicle caught Virgil's attention. "Say, Alan, what have you done to the Firefly? Brains has already got his work cut out working on the R-1 and Thunderbird One."

"Darn it!" Scott stood there shaking his head.

"What's the matter Scott?" Asked a concerned Alan.

"I guess now I will have to help with the repairs now my leg is almost healed."

"I should think so too, you have skived off long enough in the sick room, having Tin-Tin wait on you hand and foot." Virgil teased and noticed Alan's head turn at the mention of her name. "Alan was starting to get jealous and I'm sure he was going to do himself an injury just to get some attention."

"Very funny Virgil. Tin-Tin and I are just good friends...unfortunately!" He added under his breath with an air of disappointment.

"What was that?" Asked Scott.

"Oh...nothing."

"I'm sure she will be impressed with your story of how you survived getting blown-up and the destruction of the Firefly, you have some bruises now for her to play nurse with."

"Ok Virgil, that's enough, you know how sensitive Alan is." Before Alan could get a syllable out of his half-opened mouth Scott continued. "We had better get moving back to base. I am whacked."

"I guess it must be your advancing years brother." Alan mumbled silently.

The three brothers headed to the pod lift to take them up to the cockpit. Virgil remembered the communication problem. "Say, Scott. What was with the radio blackout at mobile control?"

"What do you mean? All the frequencies were clear the whole time."

"Probably interference of some kind as I said it was." Alan, a pace behind, added unequivocally.

Scott and Virgil took a sideward glance at each other. "Well done Alan. I knew we brought you along for a reason." Virgil teased.

Alan was aware he wasn't going to be taken seriously when these two brothers were in this kind of temperament so remained silent but curled his lip with annoyance. They seemed to get great pleasure from seeing him blow his top but he wouldn't give them the satisfaction this time. They glanced behind waiting for his reply but he just gave them a wry smile and tilted his head, he turned and flicked the switch that closed the pod door before joining his brothers in the lift.

Moments later the gathered audience, now moved away by the police for their own safety, watched in admiration as Thunderbird Two lowered to the ground and locked the pod securely into position. The crowd looked on in awe as the huge craft fired its thrusters and gracefully rose into the air emerging from the billows of smoke and dust before roaring up into the darkness and out of sight leaving behind four scorched circles of earth and the indented impression from the struts and pod. Heading for home and a well-earned rest, Scott, Virgil and Alan sat quietly in the cockpit all were satisfied that they did everything they could on this rescue.

They were not the only satisfied occupants aboard Thunderbird Two, The Hood was also pleased, because from that chance encounter with Scott so close to his own base, everything was now proceeding according to plan.

The carefully placed explosives at the mine, International Rescue arriving right on cue, meeting Scott again and the best part of all - stowing away on Thunderbird Two and being taken back to the heart of International Rescue - Tracy Island!

Yes he was so happy hiding in the winch control room that he couldn't help but smile and let out a deep chilling laugh knowing that it could not be heard. And, thanks to Scott's unknowing help, the internal sensors had been disabled and now the Hood had a free run of the craft, as long as he wasn't actually seen by anyone of course. But he was more than content to just stay hidden and wait.



Chapter 7 – Desperate Intruder

Everybody on Tracy Island had been under more stress than usual since the incident with Thunderbird One. They were all working flat out to get the R-1 ready and any time to relax was welcomed. Strangely since the loss of Thunderbird One every now and then he would suddenly collapse or have a dizzy head and then recover just as quickly. He had no explanation for it, nor did the Doctor who had flown over especially to examine him and found him to be in pretty much perfect health with no sign of any ailment or disorder of any kind. This wasn't the first time it had happened to Kyrano but it had been a long time since his last attack, and he noticed the recent bouts were of far less intensity than any previously experienced. So, when Kyrano had some time off from his duties he could be found relaxing beside the pool, this is where he was when Thunderbird Two returned from the mine disaster.

Thunderbird Two made a routine landing, Scott, Virgil and Alan disembarked and headed towards the lounge for debriefing. As they reached the monorail that would whisk them up to the villa, Scott stopped suddenly in his tracks, turned and began limping back towards the hanger.

"I have forgotten something, I will catch you up." He said brusquely.

"He'd forget his head if it wasn't glued on." Alan said loudly making sure Scott could hear and expected a rebuke but didn't get one. He and Virgil both giggled.

"OK Scott, don't be too long now, you know how father gets about punctuality." Before Virgil had finished the sentence Scott had already vanished out of sight.

"What's got into him?" Said a puzzled Alan.

"I've no idea." They paused for a moment and looked at each other, shaking their heads they boarded the monocar.

Until the return of Thunderbird Two Kyrano had been calm and at ease, but now suddenly there was a feeling he had not felt for a long time. It was different to what he had felt over the last few days, a shiver ran up through his spine and set his neck hairs tingling with anticipation. The previous occasion this had happened he also passed out. He attempted to concentrate and stay focused. Now he had the same kind of dizzying sensation but found he was able to control it.

Unknown to Kyrano, his family had a dormant telepathic ability that his half-brother discovered. He saw it as a gift to use as a means to an end. He embraced and honed the talent and at the same time began investigating voodoo and the dark arts.

Through his concentration Kyrano unintentionally drew strength from his own telepathic source. This was enough to resist being rendered unconscious. He battled mentally with the overwhelming influence invading his essence.

"I must warn...Mr. Tracy." He muttered in distress. Kyrano struggled to his feet trying to steady himself on a table next to his chair but tipped it up sending his glass of juice and newspaper onto the floor, he fell sprawling to the ground. He managed to get to his feet and staggered up towards the lounge as quickly as he could while his whole body tingled. On reaching the top of the sweeping steps to the balcony he was stopped in his tracks by a disembodied voice that spoke to him.

"Don't waste your time Kyrano. I have won this time!"

He looked around, expecting to see the person who spoke the words, but there was no one in sight, and realised the voice was only in his mind. He recognized the voice instinctively as his long-lost half-brother. This was the

first time Kyrano had been conscious when this man had communicated with him and then unexpectedly, memories from his previous blackouts came flooding back, he was remembering things that had been locked away not by him but by his half-brother, the man who had cheated him out of his rightful inheritance.

One after another, incidents of betrayal emerged. The sabotage of Thunderbird One's anti-photographic equipment and the information he had leaked which put the organisation, his new family and even his own daughter in danger. As the realisation that he had been instrumental in betraying Jeff Tracy and International Rescue he felt a sudden surge of shame and guilt. He didn't think he could live with himself after this but gathered his thoughts and carried on towards the lounge with renewed determination to put right his wrongs.

Jeff and Brains were discussing the rebuilding schedule for Thunderbird One when Kyrano burst into the lounge, crashing into an ancient vase sending it toppling to the floor and smashing to pieces. The two men, deep discussion jumped round to see Kyrano in the doorway steadying himself against the frame.

"Mr. Tracy, I am so sorry, we are in trouble, there is a desperate intruder...on the island...in the base...here...you have to warn...your family." The agitated Kyrano spurted as he dashed to Jeff's desk.

"Hey now, hold on. Calm down Kyrano." Jeff said coolly. "What do you mean exactly?"

"My half-brother. He is evil, he has been using me to obtain information about this organisation, and he is here Mr. Tracy, inside the base somehow. I don't know where, but I felt him, he made contact with me, he said he has won this time." Kyrano sat down, feeling sapped and ashamed.

Jeff turned to his monitor and checked the security systems.

"Everything checks out here Kyrano. Brains, could anyone have got into the base without us knowing?"

"Mr. Tracy. We have the be...best security technology in the world." Brains boasted confidently. "I don't see how it is possible to er...get on to the island without tripping one of the alarms."

"Kyrano, could this be some kind of trick? Could this brother of yours be trying to use his influence on you." Suggested Jeff.

"Maybe, I just don't know, it felt so intense as if he were right beside me." Kyrano groaned and flopped into the chair, Brains rushed to him.

"Mr. Tracy, he is exhausted, h...h...he needs to rest."

Jeff sat back in his chair and gazed at the monitor displaying the security system, contemplating for a moment how secure they really were. As the monitor showed various levels, hangars and rooms he could see two flashing lights approaching the lounge, then Virgil and Alan walked in.

"Where's Scott got to boys?" Asked Jeff.

"He just popped back to the cockpit." Said Virgil.

"Said he'd forgotten something, and he wouldn't be long." Added Alan.

Jeff looked back at the monitor and tapped into the keyboard LOCATE SCOTT. The three-dimensional plan zoomed in to Scott's location. He appeared to be in the main laboratory above Thunderbird Two's hangar. There was another flashing light indicating that another International Rescue operative was there, it was Gordon.

"Scott, this is your father please respond." There was no reply, the two flashing lights in the laboratory didn't move.

"Gordon. Can you hear me? What is going on down there?" Silence gripped the room as they waited for a reply that never came.

"What's going on dad?" Asked Virgil.

"I'm not sure. Looks like something mighty odd is happening. I'll try the internal vid-monitor system." Jeff clicked a couple of keys and the base plan vanished to be replaced by an image of the lab. The group in the lounge had gathered around Jeff's desk to see what was going on. To their astonishment they saw Scott at a computer terminal busily typing away, in the background Gordon was lying face down on the floor.

"Hey Scott, what are you doing there?" Enquired his puzzled father. "And what's wrong with Gordon?"

Scott didn't acknowledge his father in any way but just carried on with what he was he was doing. Brains, Virgil and Alan stood beside Jeff, and all eyes were focused on the monitor. They watched in surprise as a heavy built bald man dressed in a policeman uniform entered the picture and stood beside Scott. The man looked directly into the camera and smiled.

"Who the hell is that?" Jeff exclaimed.

The monitor then went blank as the power to the villa was disconnected, the lights faded, and the radio fell silent. Emergency lighting flickered on.

"Mr. Tracy!" Kyrano cried out. "That is him...my half-brother."

"Huh. What's going on father?" Alan asked apprehensively.

"We are in trouble boys, we had better get down to the Lab, looks like you're right Kyrano, there is an intruder on the island." Jeff stood up, opened the top draw to his desk and pulled out a pistol. "Alan, arm yourself and stay in the villa to look after grandma and Tin-Tin. Kyrano. Can you come with me to the Lab?"

Kyrano nodded. "I think so...Yes, I'm sure I can."

Alan immediately protested. "But fath..." He was not given the chance to make a case.

"It is not up for discussion." Jeff said decisively.

Alan understood and said no more.

"Virgil, Brains, head down to Thunderbird Two's hangar. Keep in touch via your wrist communicators. Now GO!"

Scott had disabled all the security on the base and cut off most the island's power, and was now downloading the technical data and blueprints of all the International Rescue vehicles and equipment on to disk for his master. Scott removed the disk from the computer and handed it to the Hood.

"Thank you, Scott, you have done well. Now, what is the quickest way off this island?" The Hood liked the sound of his own voice even though it was not necessary to talk; the telepathic link enabled the Hood to give commands and here Scott's replies silently. He soon found out more information than he had hoped for.

"So, you do have a temporary replacement for the magnificent Thunderbird One, the R-1, that will do nicely."

Scott led the way like a limping zombie out of the lab followed by the Hood and towards the monorail which would take them up to Thunderbird One's launch bay.

Jeff and Kyrano arrived at the laboratory on the monorail, which was still functioning on emergency power. Jeff disabled it with a security code so it could not be used by the intruder, then they made their way cautiously through the darkened corridors to the lab. They found it empty except for Gordon slumped on the floor. They both rushed to his side.

"Gordon, are you ok? Wake up." Jeff said while turning Gordon onto his back, his eyes began to open.

"Hey, what goes on?" He asked dazedly.

"I believe he was knocked unconscious hypnotically, Mr. Tracy." Kyrano surmised.

"And you would be right my brother." The voice echoed from behind them, and as they turned, Scott and the intruder stepped out from the shadows of the dimly lit corridor into the doorway of the laboratory. "At last, I have succeeded. I have here all your secrets, Tracy, ha, ha, haaa." The Hood boasted and held up the disk.

Jeff was enraged, he clenched his fists forgetting he held a pistol and stepped forward. "Why you..."

Scott raised his arm; he was holding a gun and aimed it at his father's head. Jeff stopped dead, stunned by what he was seeing.

"Scott, it's me, can't you see or hear me? What's got into you?"

Scott was transfixed; he looked right at and through his father.

"I have only to think the command to make him fire and he will obey without question." The Hood explained using Scott as a shield.

"Brother, why?" Kyrano interrupted. "It does not have to be like this, give up your ruthless and violent ways."

"No Kyrano!" Shrieked the Hood. "I crave power and wealth, and this is the only way to get what you really want. And now I have it." He said slowly and let out a chilling laugh before continuing. "Why not come with me brother, together, with our united power, we can rule the world." He bellowed theatrically.

"NO! What you want is wrong."

"I didn't think so. You are weak and from what I have seen these self-indulgent do-gooders have poisoned your mind. I see you are a lost cause Kyrano...you will perish along with these fools. But as much as I would love to stay and chat, I do have a Thunderbird to catch. Ha, ha...huh."

Scott began to sway slightly he blinked, and his gun arm dropped a little.

"Nice try . . . Kyrano," said the Hood before the sound of a gunshot echoed from the laboratory through the corridors.

Chapter 8 – Abduction

Gordon followed the Hood and Scott at a distance, worried not just for his own safety but also for his brother. While tracking them he contacted Virgil and Brains.

“Virgil, do you copy?” He spoke softly into his wrist communicator.

“Gordon, was that a gunshot? What’s going on?” Virgil replied.

“This intruder has got Scott under some kind of hypnotic control, he injured Kyrano when he tried to break the spell. I’m following, it looks like they’re heading for the R-1 in Thunderbird One launch bay, send Brains over to the lab, then meet me at the south end of corridor B5.” Gordon said quietly so not to advertise to how close he was behind.

“F.A.B. Gordon, Brains suggests we use a tranquilliser on Scott.” said Virgil.

“Maybe, but whatever we’re gonna do, we’d better do it quick!”

Gordon cautiously followed Scott and the Hood through the maze of corridors and stairwells hidden under the island until they reached and entered Thunderbird One’s launch bay

Kyrano was conscious and sitting in a chair in the laboratory, the injury looked worse than it was, the bullet had just grazed him. Jeff sat beside him, looking concerned.

“Kyrano, what happened?” Jeff asked.

“Well, Mr. Tracy, I thought I might have the ability to break the hold he had on Scott. I am sorry Mr. Tracy.” Kyrano’s head dropped.

“Kyrano, thank you, I know you did your best it was a brave attempt. Are you OK?”

"I feel as though a coconut had fallen on me." He replied.

Brains reached the computer room within a minute of the gunshot. "What's going on? Where are they now Brains?"

"Virgil and Gordon are closing in on them in One's L...launch bay, I suggested using a tranquilliser on Scott to in... incapacitate him."

"They won't have time to get any, if I take the monorail, I may be able to cut them off before reaching the R-1. I just hope I can get there before it's too late! Take Kyrano to the sick room as quickly as you can." Jeff was about to leave the laboratory but turned in the doorway. "Oh yeah, leave your wrist communicator on receive and listen in on what's going on, we may need to call on you any moment." Then on the way to the monorail he contacted Alan. "Alan, seal the villa off from the base."

"F.A.B. father." He said with an intimation of disappointment.

Virgil met with Gordon outside the launch bay entrance Scott and The Hood had already gone through. It was Thunderbird One's launch bay now home to the prototype R-1. They slowly pushed the door open; the well-maintained door never once squeaked on its hinges. The two brothers went into the huge hangar ever so quietly, one went left, the other right, Gordon let go of the door, then they heard the patter of footfalls on the metal grills above them, they both looked up. They saw Scott and the intruder ascending and were about halfway up to the cockpit gantries, which were connected by metal stairs that skirted up the walls of the hangar. Just then the door closed shut behind them with a loud click that echoed through the quiet hangar, they both spun round startled and looked at the door then each other, an even louder bang echoed around the hangar as a bullet ricocheted off the floor by their feet. Instinctively they leapt for cover. The closing door alerted the Hood to their presence, and he'd ordered Scott to shoot at them. Virgil and Gordon had guns drawn and peered from behind

their shelter up at the Hood, who was keeping Scott between him and them. Scott fired a few more rounds at them.

"What now? They are almost up to the cockpit; we can't let him get away." Gordon said desperately.

"I know Gordon, but what can we do?" Replied Virgil.

Before he could answer his wrist communicator sparked into life.

"Virgil." It was his father. "I am on my way."

"Where are you? They are nearly up to the cockpit, but we are being pinned down by Scott."

"I know. I'm on the monorail above you."

Gordon and Virgil looked up and saw their father pressed against the window of the red monorail car as it silently whizzed along on the single track and exited through an opening in the wall.

"Try and stall him."

"How?"

"I'm sure you'll think of something."

"Okay dad."

"You fools." Yelled the Hood, "You cannot stop me now, so say goodbye to your brother."

With that remark Scott fired a couple more shots in the direction of his brothers, ricocheting off the walls and floor.

"Right, there is only one thing for it, I'm going to have to shoot Scott!" Virgil announced to Gordon.

"Are you crazy?" Gordon was stunned.

"Just in the leg, we gotta stop Scott from boarding the R-1. It's the last thing that creep will be expecting us to do." Explained Virgil.

"It's the last thing I expected us to do!" Said an amazed Gordon and then asked. "Are you sure you can do it?"

"I think so, but it would help if you could distract him, while I get lined up for the shot."

"Oh . . . great, I knew there was a catch! Are you ready?" Gordon nervously asked.

"Yep. As I'll ever be. Go!"

Gordon jumped out into the open.

"Hey you!" He shouted as loud as he could.

Indeed, this caught the Hood's attention and Scott began firing a salvo of bullets in Gordon's direction as he darted for cover. Virgil took aim and fired, his aim was true and the bullet ripped into Scott's healthy thigh. The shock sent a spasm through his body and his gun hand twitched sending a stray bullet into a fuel container which exploded in a ball of flames close to Gordon and Virgil, they leapt away from the flaming liquid as it edged its way towards them.

Scott fell on to the hard metal gantry and yelped in pain. A fire alarm siren began to ring out and the sprinkler system began to douse the flames. Smoke and steam mushroomed upwards.

The Hood took a step back to the hangar wall, he was totally surprised by this, now his hold over Scott was gone, the sudden pain had broken the spell, even if it hadn't Scott couldn't continue unaided. His leg was bleeding profusely, at that moment Scott became completely aware and knew only that he was in pain and had no idea where he was but he had a gun in his hand, he looked around to see The Hood with a startled expression, and he trained the gun on him.

“Scott, are you OK?” Virgil called out above the wailing siren.

This slightly distracted Scott, The Hood seized the opportunity and kicked the gun from Scott’s hand, and it slid along the gantry floor and stopped teetering on the edge of the fifty-foot drop and just out of Scott’s reach. The Hood pounced at Scott and gripping his neck tightly, began to twist it. Scott was strong enough to resist this big man and they wrestled briefly before Virgil fired a warning shot just above The Hood; things were going wrong for him now, but at least he still had the disk. He pushed Scott to the floor, grabbed the pistol and started to run up the remaining flights of stairs to the R-1 cockpit. Virgil and Gordon were both charging up the stairs and shooting at him directly now, but unable to get a clear shot on target.

The Hood reached the gantry level with the cockpit door and found it was already open and he went in closing the hatch behind. Panting heavily, he fell into the pilot’s chair and placed the disk in the chair pocket. Outside Virgil and Gordon had reached the wounded and bemused Scott. Gordon raced on up to the cockpit and tried to open it, but it had been locked from within. The R-1 began to vibrate, the Hood was preparing for lift off, and there was only a matter of seconds before it soared up and out of the hangar and the gantry was not the best place to be during a launch.

“Gordon! Help me with Scott, we’ve gotta get out of here now or we’ll be burned to a crisp!” Virgil yelled. Gordon was already on his way down to help. After getting Scott to his feet, they dragged him up as fast as they could to the exit at the next gantry, all the time the R-1 was powering up, the sound was becoming deafening. Its engines ignited just as they got to the exit, the hangar began to fill with smoke.

The Hood sat at the controls of R-1 preparing for lift off. He watched on a screen the view of the swimming pool sliding to one side to make room for the rocket to exit.

"Impressive! It is a shame I have to leave. Goodbye International Rescue, your secret, however, is not safe with me, ha ha ha." Laughing happily to himself and overjoyed that he had finally succeeded in his mission to obtain International Rescue's secrets, the capture of this ship was an unexpected bonus. He engaged the throttle to maximum, the vehicle shook quite violently for a few seconds, and then the engines powered down and cut out.

"What is happening?" He scanned the instrumentation for indications of any failure.

"What is wrong with this infernal machine?" He shouted and thumped the console with his fist. A voice from behind made him jump.

"I guess it doesn't like the uninvited!"

"What!" The Hood spun round to see Jeff Tracy standing there. Before the Hood had a chance to do or say anything else Jeff threw a punch that hit the Hood squarely on the jaw, knocking him sprawling over the console nudging the controls to re-ignite the engines before falling to the floor. Immediately the cockpit began to vibrate as the engines began powering up. The Hood seemed to be out cold so Jeff turned to the control console to disengage the engines but before he was able to do so he was grabbed from behind and held in an arm lock.

"You and your family are far too selfish, keeping all this power to yourselves." The Hood whispered into Jeff's ear as warm blood from his cut lip dripped onto Jeff's neck. "You, Tracy, and your organisation are finished." He spat the words out with a cold hatred.

Jeff's arm was being twisted so far, he was convinced it was going to break any moment, with steely resolve and went through his options all the while the engines increased their power.

"You are a very sad and misguided man." Jeff replied through gritted teeth as he rammed his free elbow hard into his captor's ribs. The Hood grunted

from the attack but didn't loosen his grip. Jeff tried again but to no avail except enraging the Hood further who then retaliated with a swift butt into the back of Jeff's head. Jeff reeled from the powerful blow and fought to stay conscious; he had to act fast if he was going to survive this confrontation. He lifted both legs and kicked hard against the control console pushing himself and the Hood backwards. The Hood lost his balance and fell back against the inner hull smashing his head hard, releasing his hold on Jeff and they both fell to the floor.

The R-1 began to lift off. Jeff, shaken from the brawl got to his feet and looked at the readout on the console, he pressed a couple of buttons and tried to shut down the engines. It was too late, they didn't respond.

"Oh no!" he said out loud. "Virgil!" he spoke into his communicator. "Virgil, do you read?"

"I read you father, what the heck is going on?" He replied.

"The engines won't cut off, I'm taking off!" Jeff yelled.

Immediately the R-1 began to climb upwards towards the daylight. Looking on in surprise through an observation window were Gordon and Virgil with their mouths open in amazement as the R-1 vanished in clouds of swirling smoke and roaring flames. Brains appeared behind them.

"Virgil, I...I'm not sure if the R-1 is capable of l...landing yet." He declared. The brothers both spun to face the young genius.

"Maybe we should get Thunderbird Two launched, father may need help." Gordon suggested.

"Right." Brains and Virgil agreed.

With that Virgil and Gordon ran off in the direction of Thunderbird Two's hanger. Brains knelt down beside Scott see how he was. As they raced

around a corner out of sight Virgil turned and shouted out to Brains. "Make sure Scott is seen to, we'll be in touch."

"F.A.B." Brains replied.

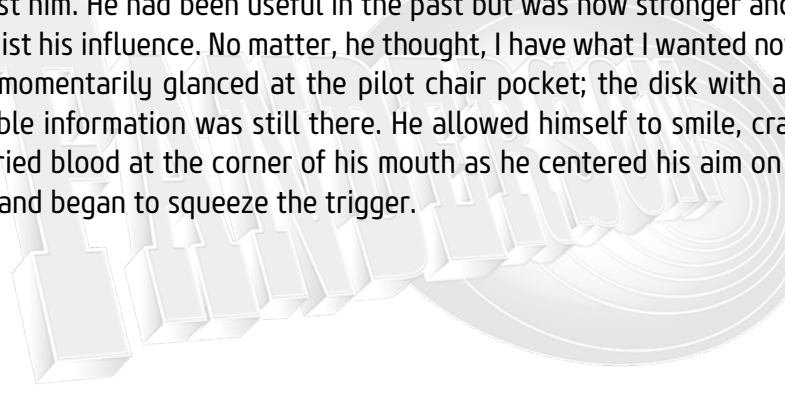
As R-1 soared up out the depths of the base into the warm glow of the dusk, Jeff struggled against the g-forces to get into the pilot seat and strap himself in. Once there he attempted to take control of the ship. He had piloted the R-1 before but it was several years ago and at first the controls were very alien, but he soon remembered the essentials. First of all, he had to change from vertical to horizontal flight. Normally this was an easy procedure, but the engines were stuck on full throttle and Jeff had to fight with the controls to prevent the craft from blasting straight out into space. Once the R-1 may have been able to go into orbit, but Jeff was not sure if Brains had checked if it was space worthy. He didn't want to take that chance.

The R-1 reached well over fifty thousand feet before Jeff had leveled its flight. The engines continued to accelerate the ship and made it even more difficult to maneuver. Jeff drew upon every ounce of strength to maintain control and a level flight. His focus was on survival and how best to achieve it from this situation. For the moment he had forgotten about the reason he was in this dilemma.

That reason had stirred and regained consciousness on the floor of the cockpit outside of Jeff's eye line. The Hood shook his dazed head and focused on his surroundings, taking in the situation and began formulating a plan. The R-1 rocked about as Jeff wrestled with the controls. The Hood looked up and saw that his assailant had forgotten about him, even his pistol was still in his holster. Foolish mistake, he thought as he reached for it. I will not fool about with hypnotism or mind tricks; I will just simply shoot you Mr. International Rescue and fly this vehicle away to make my fortune.

Slowly he brought the pistol up and aimed it at Jeff, his arm wavered as the craft jumped about. The Hood got to his feet and steadied himself against a bulkhead with his free hand. Jeff was busy communicating on the radio and didn't see or hear any of this as his focus was on the job in hand and the sound from the engines drowned out any noises the Hood might have made.

The Hood again aimed at Jeff's head, he only needed one good shot and had to make sure he was on target, the last thing he wanted was another hand-to-hand fight. He had never been one for brawling but rather preferred to terrorise from a distance, a safe distance. The situation had gotten out of hand on the base, he was confident about dealing with the Tracy's and almost did had it not been for his traitorous half-brother, Kyrano, turning against him. He had been useful in the past but was now stronger and able to resist his influence. No matter, he thought, I have what I wanted now. His eyes momentarily glanced at the pilot chair pocket; the disk with all the valuable information was still there. He allowed himself to smile, cracking the dried blood at the corner of his mouth as he centered his aim on Jeff's head and began to squeeze the trigger.



Chapter 9 – Final Showdown

Jeff had limited control over the R-1 and it was shaking less now but was still on full thrust. He noticed the temperature gauge was well into the red zone and was not sure how much more the craft could take. He gritted his teeth with sober determination and tried again to throttle back and slow the ship down. Once again there was no response to his attempt.

“Brains!” He yelled into the communicator. “Brains, do you read me?”

“Yes Mr. Tr...Tracy. What is your situation?”

“Not good, the power plant is seriously overheating and I’m unable to slow it down. It will be impossible to make any kind of landing like this. Do you have any suggestions?” Jeff called out above the roar of the engines and wind.

“Mr. Tracy, what does the fu...fu...fuel gauge read?” Brains asked.

Jeff scanned the array of dials and gauges and found his target. “Brains, it doesn’t seem to be working it reads zero.”

“Oh my!” exclaimed Brains.

“Father.” Virgil spoke up after listening in to the communications. “Gordon and I are on our way in Thunderbird Two, but you are going too fast, we can’t catch up with you.”

“I’ll see if I can turn back towards the island and slow down.”

“F.A.B. father.”

Jeff began to ease the controls into a turn. The R-1 responded slowly and began to bank gradually round. Suddenly the engines cut out and the craft lurched violently, a gunshot rang out. Jeff felt a burning sensation on his left wrist as the console in front of him exploded in a brilliant flash of sparks and flames. Jeff instinctively raised his arms to shield himself from the

shrapnel and glare. He spun round to see an annoyed looking Hood who was again aiming the pistol squarely at him, balancing like a surfer to stay upright as the R-1 rode the turbulence. Jeff looked down at his arm, his communicator was shot, and blood was dripping from his wrist, unfortunately it had deflected the bullet into the console.

"You damn fool!" Jeff yelled looking back at the Hood.

"What have you done?" The Hood said as he leant back against the bulkhead. "Restart the engines at once or I shall shoot you."

Jeff looked at the charred and smouldering control panels, his eye caught sight of a button not too badly burnt; it was the escape hatch release. He turned back to face the Hood.

"You are the fool here; your ambition and greed has doomed you. Look, see for yourself, the controls are smashed, and we have run out of fuel, there is no hope for us now."

"You are trying to deceive me." He took a cursory glance at the smoking panel. "Surely there is an escape pod like Thunderbird One had?"

"This is an old prototype, unless you have a parachute there is no escape!" Jeff sounded resolute.

"Then you will die first." The Hood announced taking aim.

Jeff glared at the madman as he pulled the trigger.

"Father! Father!" Virgil called anxiously into the communicator, but there was no reply.

"What the heck is going on?" Gordon puzzled.

Inside Thunderbird Two, Virgil and Gordon could now see the R-1, there was a trail of smoke venting from the ship. The trail formed a gentle curve of white against the darkening crimson evening sky. They could see the

engines had stopped and it seemed now to be heading down towards the sea.

"There's no reply, I don't think he is even receiving." Virgil said.

Thunderbird Two had caught up since the R-1 engines had cut out but was losing ground now that the R-1 was in a nosedive. Thunderbird Two continued to pursue at full throttle but even diving with the help of gravity they could still not catch up.

"What are we gonna do, Virgil? What are gonna do?" Gordon said turning to his brother. "We only have a couple of minutes at most before the R-1 hits the water."

Virgil's breathing was fast, his eyes darting over the controls and dials and back to the small ship moving further away. Options raced through his mind faster than his ship was traveling while his grip on the control stick tightened causing the blood to drain from his knuckles, his heart thumped hard against the inside of his chest. His eyes lit up for a split second.

"I know! There is only one thing for it. Hold tight Gordon, we need to lose some weight so I'm gonna drop the pod."

Gordon tore his eyes away from the shrinking R-1 ahead and spun his head in Virgil's direction, his mouth dropped open and before he could say anything he could here hydraulic pistons hissing and the scream of metal scraping metal as the pod fell away from the main body of Thunderbird Two.

The pod tumbled downwards like a gigantic green brick to splash into the sea at a tremendous speed throwing up a splash of white water. The incredibly strong pod was smashed to pieces on contact with the sea, as was all the crucial rescue equipment within. Thunderbird Two now substantially lighter began to accelerate towards the R-1.

Jeff stared down the barrel of the pistol the Hood was holding, he had already pulled the trigger, the muted click came as a surprise to them both. Jeff breathed a sigh of relief and saw a look of panic in the Hood's expression, he pulled again on the trigger...click, and again...click...click.

"It's over." Jeff said complacently and reached for the emergency hatch release and pressed the button. It glowed red then the bolts securing the hatch began to blow out. The Hood quickly turned to see what the noise was. He saw the last of the eight bolts exploding with puffs of smoke but was rooted to the spot and anticipated being sucked out of the hatch in an instant of it opening. He waited and watched and like Jeff didn't breathe for what seemed like minutes, and it was soon apparent that the hatch was jammed. They breathed again, the Hood in relief, Jeff in disappointment.

"Ha ha ha." Echoed around the cockpit as he turned to face Jeff. "Getting rid of me is not going to be as easy as that." He said while glaring at Jeff.

"We are both doomed now anyway, nothing can save us. At least I can die with the satisfaction that you will not be able to threaten innocent lives or International Rescue again. My family will continue the work I started, but you die with nothing."

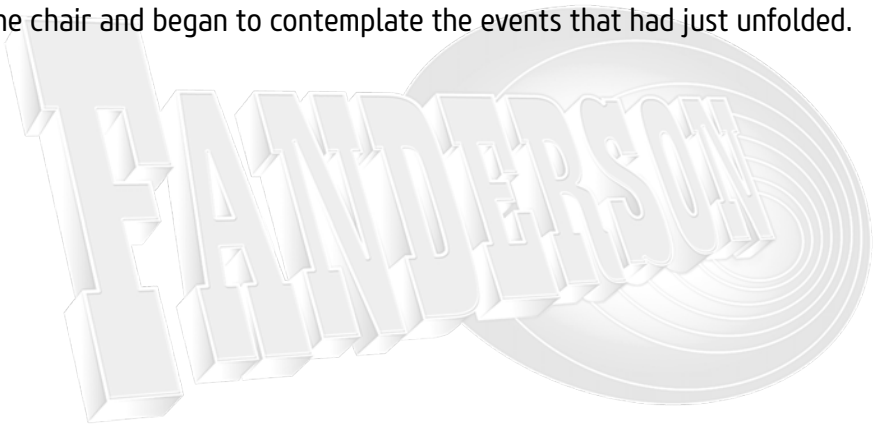
"Self-righteous words my friend, but...huh" The Hood's words trailed off as he was interrupted by loud thuds on the exterior of the ship that caused it to shudder. Jeff and the Hood both looked around the cockpit in wonder, then out of the blue a hiss sounded behind the Hood and the escape hatch blew open. The cockpit became a swirling torrent of wind and debris that Jeff had to shield his face from. When he turned back, the Hood was nowhere to be seen inside the cockpit.

The whirlwind inside the cockpit died away and the R-1 slowed down and eventually came to a swaying halt. Through the open hatch Jeff could see the water lapping smoothly a hundred feet or so below reflecting the orange of the evening sun. The R-1 had been plucked out the air and

prevented from crashing into the ocean by the timely arrival of Thunderbird Two.

Through one of the small observation portholes Jeff could see a large white number two on a green background and Gordon looking down from one of the observation windows waving excitedly, he waved back at his son and gave the OK signal. Thunderbird Two turned slowly and set course for home with the R-1 securely in the grab hanging from its nose.

Jeff then remembered the disk and he felt about in the pilot chair pocket but it had gone. He looked around the cabin but could not see it among the debris scattered on the floor. Jeff's heart sank and he slumped back into the chair and began to contemplate the events that had just unfolded.



Chapter 10 – Epilogue

The debriefing had gone smoothly, everyone on the island was still reeling from the previous day's unpleasant incident and were all subdued. They were all very quiet and there was none of the usual friendly banter and cheeky comments that were commonplace at the meetings. All except Scott and Kyrano attended, but they were able to take part in the meeting over the internal vid-phone system. At the end of the meeting everyone left to get on with the restoration of the International Rescue to full working order.

Jeff was left alone sat at his desk in the lounge; a hot black coffee Tin-Tin had made for him cooling slowly in his hands. He looked down at his new watch communicator on his right wrist then to his bandaged left arm. Aching from head to toe from the recent fracas he still felt tired after a restless night being tormented by the dreadful events of the previous day.

He, they, had all known there were people out there who would stop at nothing to get hold of the information and technology they possessed on Tracy Island and if that disk got out in the open it could be the beginning of the end for the organisation he had spent much of his life building.

But it wasn't the time and money he had given that was the issue here, it was all the lives that could be in danger, not just from the potential killing power of the advanced technology but also if International Rescue were put out of action, how many innocent lives would be wasted because they were not around to save them, all because of one man's greed.

A shudder coursed through his body at the thought, setting his back and neck hairs on end. He closed his eyes and took a sip of coffee from the mug, which warmed him, perfect he thought. On his desk was a rubber mask, it featured a dark moustache and eyebrows and an attached false hairpiece, there were openings for the eyes, nose and mouth. It was a brilliant mask in every way, the detail, the colouring and the texture were all perfect, it was obviously an expensive item; it had to be good to fool people close up.

It was similar in design and manufacture to one they had found after rescuing two trapped actors, they had been secretly filmed after and the anti-photographic equipment had been sabotaged. Thunderbird Two and the base were searched after the incident yesterday for fear that the Hood may have sabotaged something while aboard, and this mask was discovered close to where he must have stowed away.

The Hood. Scott had recalled that name and other memories from his capture and Kyrano confirmed that this was the name he was known as. Very appropriate, thought Jeff, a master of disguise, never the same man twice. How would they fight this kind of determination? Or indeed this kind of desperation?

Maybe they wouldn't have to. But Gordon never found a body during his search this morning, but he didn't find the disk either. This worried Jeff. He was sure the Hood could not have survived the fall, the cold of the night pacific, even the sharks and he would have been miles from land without any kind of floatation device. The fact that no body was found did worry Jeff a little, although with all the currents in the area he could well have been swept down into the depths and lost forever and at the same time while Jeff knew little about this man, realised he was ultra intelligent and resourceful, he was surely a formidable adversary.

As a precaution Jeff had sent out reports to all the International Rescue agents along with photos of the Hood they had captured on the base surveillance and the possible disguises he may use along with a warning about his hypnotic powers. If this man ever surfaces again they would have to strike first. It wasn't what Jeff liked to do but this was a special case, not only was an enemy of the Thunderbirds but he obviously had a criminal record and was probably wanted by Interpol and every major Police Force in the world. He could well be the most dangerous man in the world, Jeff thought and took another gulp of his coffee, and allowed the rich aroma to stimulate his senses.

The Thunderbird One incident still remained a mystery, was it the Hood that had caused the crash or something unassociated. Brains was so busy with the repairs and rebuilding schedule Jeff didn't feel it right to pressure him into investigating that just yet, unfortunately it would be too awkward to bring in external crash investigators, although a few IR agents who had the right qualifications could be drafted in to help out.

Jeff's injuries paled in comparison to his son, Scott's, after the battering he took during the crash and the mental assault inflicted by the Hood, then to top it all being shot by Virgil. It was a risk to do that, but it worked, it gave Jeff time to get to the R-1 cockpit and also snapped Scott out of the Hoods spell. Scott was now confined to the sick room until he was well enough to help out, even though he insisted he was capable of doing something. He was strong willed and determined like his father; neither of them liked being treated like an invalid.

But Virgil had really impressed his father over the last few days. He had always been a quick thinker and extremely creative, and the solutions to some of the problems he faced were inspired, if costly. The pod and its equipment would be replaced soon enough, and his quick launch technique will not be employed again. Instead of taxiing to the launch ramp, once clear of the hangar he blasted off along the runway not giving the old palm trees time to drop out of the way and up rooted half a dozen of them while leaving scorch marks halfway up the runway. Jeff chuckled to himself thinking about that. He also never realised Virgil was such a good shot either.

The coffee in Jeff's hands was cooling now almost beyond the enjoyment threshold. He brought it to his lips and downed the remaining dark liquid placing the empty mug down on the corner of his desk.

Kyrano was also recovering in the medical room, it seems his recent attacks were unintentionally caused by the Hood's hypnotic suggestions deep in Scott's subconscious mind. He seemed to emit a telepathic aura that affected Kyrano, who then became conditioned to it and slowly was able to

defend his mind against it. Then when the Hood arrived, he could actually stay conscious during the Hood's mental attack, it was also the key that unlocked the past. The incidents when the Hood had used Kyrano to infiltrate the organisation. Kyrano was confident now that his half-brother would not be able to use him like that again if he survived. Although from the way Kyrano had spoken, Jeff was sure he was not convinced of his half-brother's demise. What was it Kyrano said? 'He seems to have a strong instinct for survival.'

I guess one day we might find out what happened to that disk or even the Hood, but until that day comes, we will continue with what we set out to do, to help those in danger or distress in whatever way possible. Thunderbirds are still go!

To be continued?



The End