

HOW TERRIBLE.

SPACE CITY HAS FOUND  
A POSSIBLE ANSWER.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?



IN FOUR DAYS **EXPLORER**  
WILL MAKE ITS **CLOSEST** APPROACH TO US  
WHEN IT EXECUTES A **GRAVITY-ASSIST**  
PASS OF PROCYON.

THE **EXTREME END** OF THE  
HYPERBOLIC PASS WILL PUT THE SHIP,  
**VERY BRIEFLY**, AT A VELOCITY JUST  
SLOW ENOUGH TO WHERE ANOTHER SHIP  
CAN **HOPEFULLY** MAKE A RENDEZVOUS  
AND EFFECT REPAIRS.

**EXPLORER**

**FIREBALL XLS** IS THE  
ONLY SHIP IN THIS AREA CAPABLE  
OF REACHING PROCYON.



WHERE DO  
I COME IN?



**SPACE CITY**  
IS WORRIED THAT THE  
MALFUNCTION ON **EXPLORER**  
MIGHT EXTEND TO THE  
**LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEM**  
AS WELL.

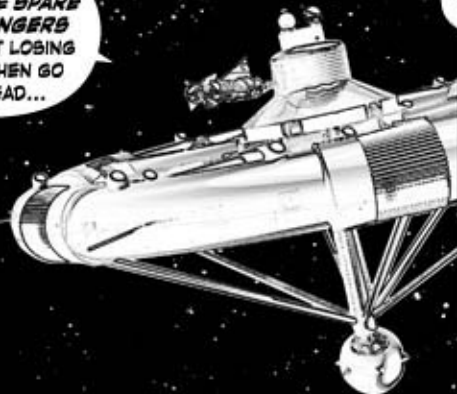
THERE'S NO  
LONG-RANGE TELEMETRY  
COMING IN, AND SO COLONEL DAB  
ON **FIREBALL XLS** HAS ASKED  
FOR A QUALIFIED MEDICAL OFFICER  
TO ACCOMPANY HIM TO PROCYON  
AND MAKE AN ON-SITE  
INSPECTION.



PACK YOUR **BAGS**, DOCTOR...

...YOU'RE GOING  
FOR A **RIDE**.

IF YOU CAN  
LOAD THE **SPARE**  
**EXCHANGERS**  
WITHOUT LOSING  
TIME THEN GO  
AHEAD...



...OTHERWISE WE'LL MAKE DO  
WITH WHAT WE'VE GOT.





REFUELING'S  
ALMOST COMPLETE,  
COLONEL. ANOTHER  
TEN MINUTES.

GRAND,  
STEVE,  
GRAND.  
AH...

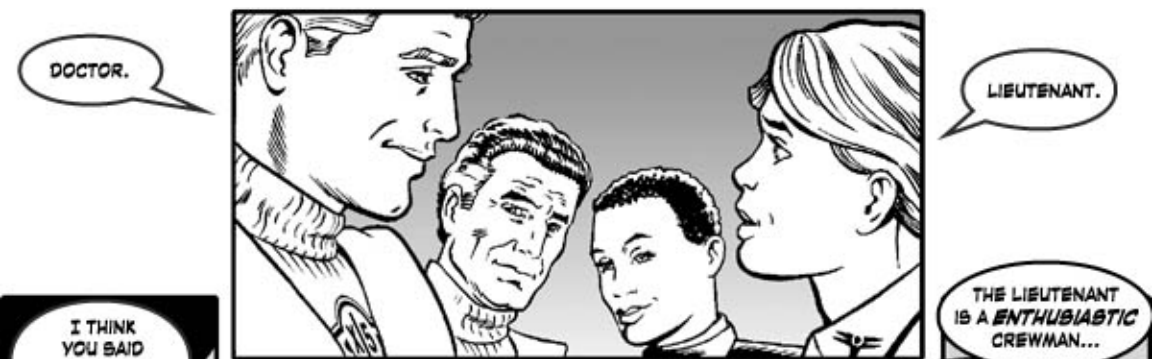
COMMANDER  
LEMAT, THIS IS MY CO-  
PILOT: LIEUTENANT  
STEVE ZODIAC.

A PLEASURE,  
LIEUTENANT. I ONLY  
WISH WE COULD MEET  
UNDER LESS HECTIC  
CIRCUMSTANCES.

OH...



AND THIS IS  
DOCTOR  
VENUS,  
WHO WILL BE  
ACCOMPANYING  
YOU ON THE  
MISSION.



DOCTOR.

LIEUTENANT.

I THINK  
YOU SAID  
TEN MINUTES,  
STEVE.

THE LIEUTENANT  
IS A ENTHUSIASTIC  
CREWMAN...



AND WE  
CAN HAVE A GET-  
TOGETHER ON  
THE WAY TO  
PROCYON.

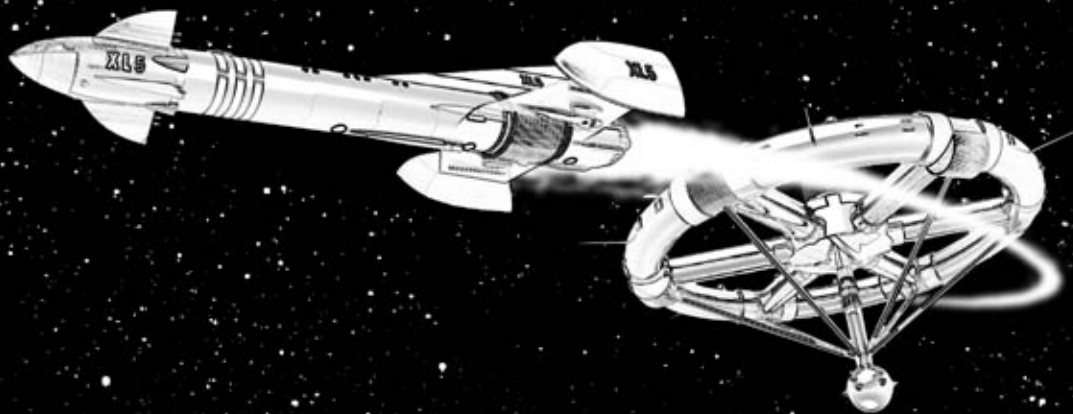
HELP  
DOCTOR VENUS  
GET SQUARED AWAY  
ON BOARD NOW.

YES, SIR!

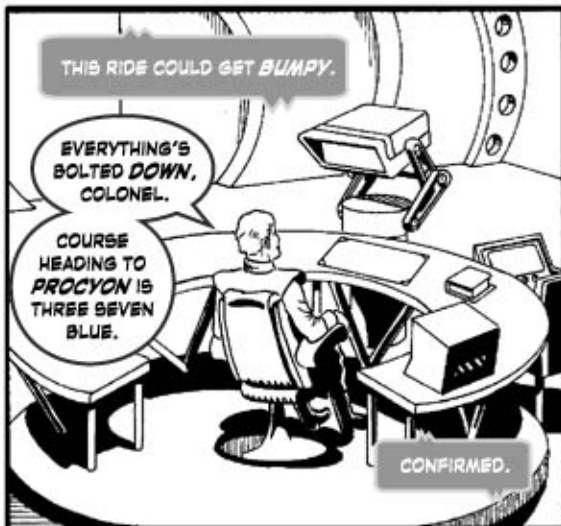


...ALWAYS WILLING  
TO TAKE ON ADDITIONAL  
RESPONSIBILITIES.

SO I SEE...



ALL RIGHT, STEVE,  
I'M GETTING READY  
TO APPLY **FULL BOOST**.  
EVERYTHING SECURED  
BACK THERE?



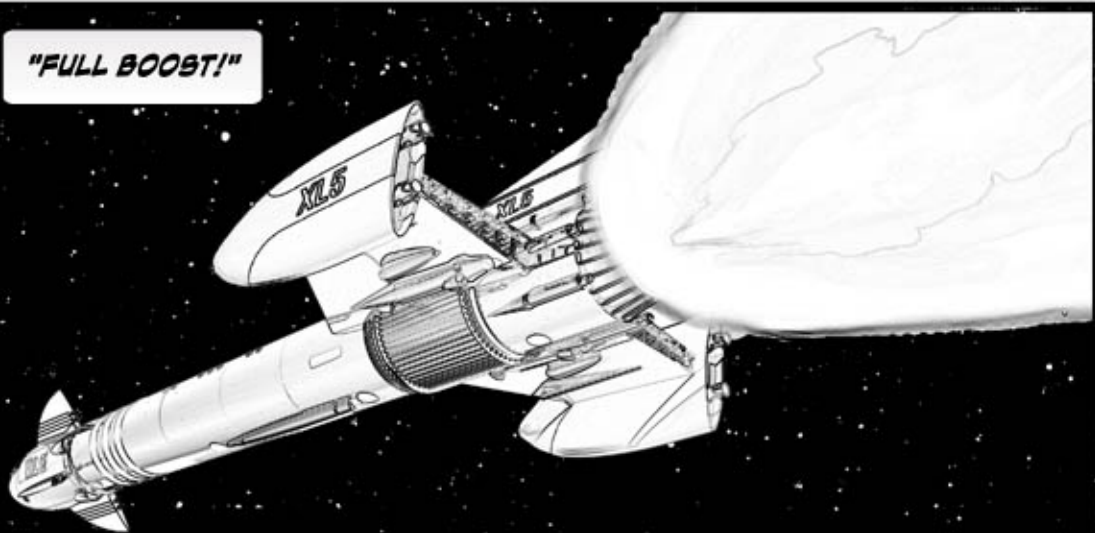
THIS RIDE COULD GET **BUMPY**.

EVERYTHING'S  
**BOLTED DOWN**,  
COLONEL.

COURSE  
HEADING TO  
**PROCYON** IS  
THREE SEVEN  
BLUE.

CONFIRMED.

**"FULL BOOST!"**



DAYS LATER.



DOCTOR?  
HAVE YOU BEEN  
SETTLING IN  
OKAY?

YES, LIEUTENANT.

I'VE  
BEEN REVIEWING  
THE **TRANSMEDICAL**  
**SYSTEMS** ON BOARD  
**EXPLORER**, TRYING  
TO GET A HANDLE  
ON POSSIBLE  
**PROBLEMS**.

I'M SORRY I  
HAVEN'T BEEN MORE  
**HELP** DURING THE TRIP OUT HERE,  
BUT RUNNING THE ENGINES THE WAY  
WE'VE BEEN DOING CALLS FOR  
**CONSTANT SUPERVISION**.

THAT'S QUITE  
ALL RIGHT.

I WANTED TO  
LET YOU KNOW I'M QUALIFIED  
IN FAULT DETECTION AND ANALYSIS.  
I WAS PART OF THE **EXPLORER**  
LAUNCH CREW.

I  
**APPRECIATE**  
THAT,  
LIEUTENANT...

...BUT I'VE  
BEEN ABLE TO  
**MUDDLE THROUGH**  
IN YOUR ABSENCE.

FOR INSTANCE, MAJOR  
IRELAND'S **LIFE SUPPORT**  
**SYSTEM** IS **CRITICALLY** LINKED  
TO THE FLIGHT CONTROLS.

BY CAREFULLY  
BACKTRACKING THROUGH  
THE DESIGN AND **COMPARING**  
WITH IT THE FAULT REPORTS  
**SPACE CITY** HAS BEEN  
RECEIVING, I CAN DETERMINE  
IF HE IS IN ANY **IMMEDIATE**  
**DANGER**.

I WAS  
ONLY OFFERING TO  
**HELP**, DOCTOR.

I ASSISTED IN  
THE **INSTALLATION**  
OF THE **TRANSMEDICAL**  
MODULES...

...AND  
I WAS PART  
OF THE **DESIGN**  
TEAM FOR THE  
MODULES.

OR WAS IT  
YOUR **IMPRESSION** THAT I AM  
BARELY OLD ENOUGH TO BE TAKING  
YOUR **TEMPERATURE**...

...MUCH **LESS**  
CONTRIBUTE TO  
THIS MISSION?

OH, NO!



**APOLOGIES, LIEUTENANT.**  
COMMANDER LEMAT WARNED ME THAT  
YOU 'GOLDEN BOYS' ON THE FIREBALLS  
WERE ACCUSTOMED TO RESULTS.

COFFEE?

I  
NEVER SAID  
YOU WERE  
UNQUALIFIED.

I HOPE NOT...



BECAUSE  
I BELIEVE I'VE FOUND  
A PROBLEM, AND...

KIDS, I NEED  
BOTH OF YOU IN THE  
NAVIGATION BAY.



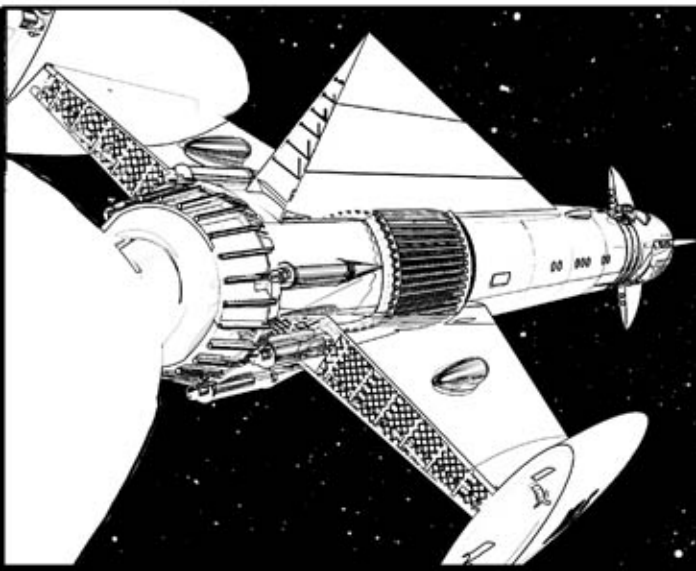
THERE IS  
**ONE** THING, DOCTOR.  
THIS IS THE **FIRST** CHANCE  
I'VE HAD TO ASK YOU  
SOMETHING I'VE BEEN  
WANTING TO KNOW.

IS 'VENUS'  
YOUR **FIRST** OR  
**LAST** NAME?

SPA  
LABORATORY  
XL5  
NO ENTRY



YES!



**PROCYON**  
(ALPHA CANIS MINORIS) . . .  
11.25 LIGHT YEARS FROM EARTH.



I'VE FINALLY LOCATED *EXPLORER*.

WE'LL BE REACHING HER ALMOST ONE-EIGHTH AU FROM PROCYON-A...

...TWELVE MINUTES AFTER IT'S REACHED PERIHELION.

WHICH DOESN'T LEAVE US MUCH TIME.



*GETTING* HERE ALMOST TORE US APART.

EVEN SO, WE'LL ONLY GET ONE CLEAR CHANCE AT *EXPLORER*...

...BEFORE IT BEGINS REGAINING SPEED THROUGH THE GRAVITY ASSIST OFF OF *PROCYON*.

AND NOT MUCH OF A CHANCE AT THAT.



ALL I NEED IS ENOUGH TIME TO GET ON BOARD...

SORRY, STEVE. WE'LL ONLY BE WITHIN EFFECTIVE RANGE OF *EXPLORER* FOR 9 MINUTES.

THAT'S THE BEST WE CAN DO.



WE CAN'T MANOEUVRE THE *XLS* INTO A BETTER PARALLEL COURSE WITHOUT LOSING THE SPEED EDGE WE ALREADY POSSESS.



WHEN WE'RE AT OUR CLOSEST POINT WE'LL ELECTRONICALLY 'SLAVE' *EXPLORER* TO OUR GUIDANCE COMPUTER AND MAKE THE NECESSARY COURSE CORRECTION BY REMOTE CONTROL.

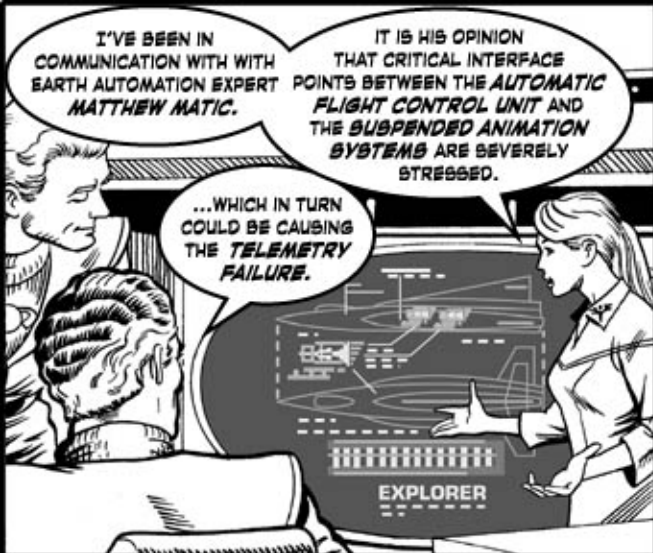
COLONEL...

THAT WON'T WORK, COLONEL DAS.



DOCTOR?

IT'S WHAT I WAS GOING TO EXPLAIN TO LIEUTENANT ZODIAC. I'VE LOCATED A PROBLEM.



I'VE BEEN IN COMMUNICATION WITH WITH EARTH AUTOMATION EXPERT **MATTHEW MATIC**.

IT IS HIS OPINION THAT CRITICAL INTERFACE POINTS BETWEEN THE **AUTOMATIC FLIGHT CONTROL UNIT** AND THE **SUSPENDED ANIMATION SYSTEMS** ARE SEVERELY STRESSED.

...WHICH IN TURN COULD BE CAUSING THE **TELEMETRY FAILURE**.

EXPLORER



SO IF WE ATTEMPT REMOTELY CONTROLLING THE SHIP...

...IT COULD CAUSE A FULL SYSTEM SHUTDOWN, AND PUT MAJOR IRELAND'S LIFE IN SERIOUS **DANGER**.



SO WE'VE GOT **NO CHOICE** BUT TO TRY A MORE **HANDS-ON** APPROACH.

NO CHOICE AT ALL, COLONEL.

BUT WE'LL ONLY HAVE **NINE MINUTES**.

MAYBE **NOT**.



I MIGHT BE **CRAZY**, BUT I THINK I CAN BUY US SOME **EXTRA TIME**.

C'MON.



WELL, STEVE, YOU'RE **RIGHT**. YOU'RE **CRAZY**.

BUT IT JUST MIGHT BUY US THAT **EXTRA TIME**.

I **KNOW** IT WILL.

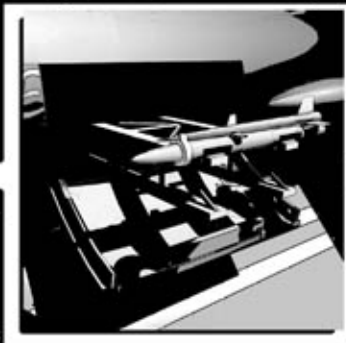
TAKE OUT THE WARHEAD OF AN **INTERCEPTOR MISSILE** AND THAT LEAVES **JUST** ENOUGH ROOM FOR ME TO **SQUEEZE** IN.

YOU FIRE ME **AHEAD OF X15** WITH **SAFETIES OFF** AND **ENGINES ON FULL**.

I SHOULD REACH **EXPLORER** AS MUCH AS **THREE MINUTES** AHEAD OF YOU.



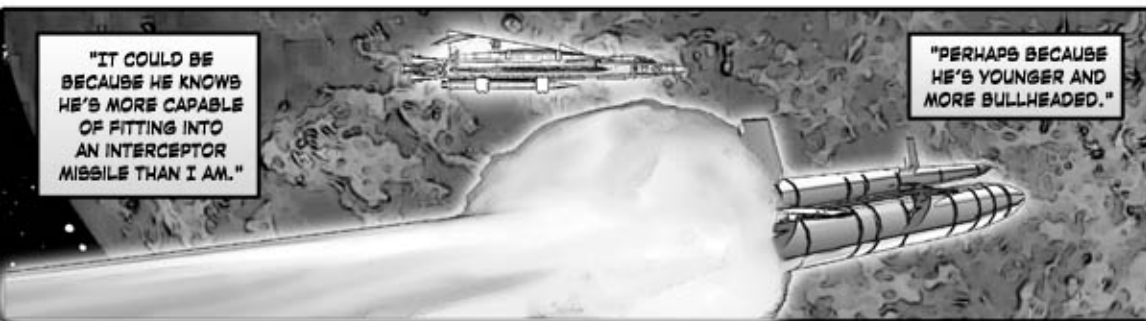




"COLONEL DAB...  
WHY IS HE DOING THIS?"



"I COULD GIVE YOU  
DOZENS OF REASONS,  
DOCTOR."



"IT COULD BE  
BECAUSE HE KNOWS  
HE'S MORE CAPABLE  
OF FITTING INTO  
AN INTERCEPTOR  
MISSILE THAN I AM."

"PERHAPS BECAUSE  
HE'S YOUNGER AND  
MORE BULLHEADED."

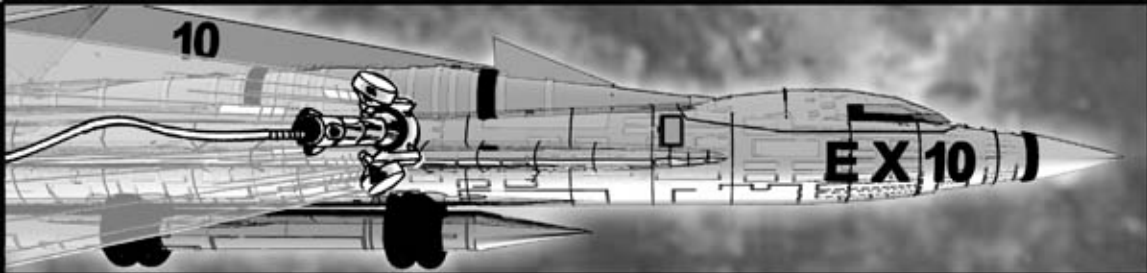


"IT COULD BE BECAUSE I'M THE  
COMMANDING OFFICER OF THIS SHIP,  
WHICH MAKES STEVE EXPENDABLE IF  
IT BECOMES NECESSARY.  
HE KNOWS IT AND I KNOW IT."

"IT COULD BE BECAUSE  
HE'S JIM IRELAND'S FRIEND."



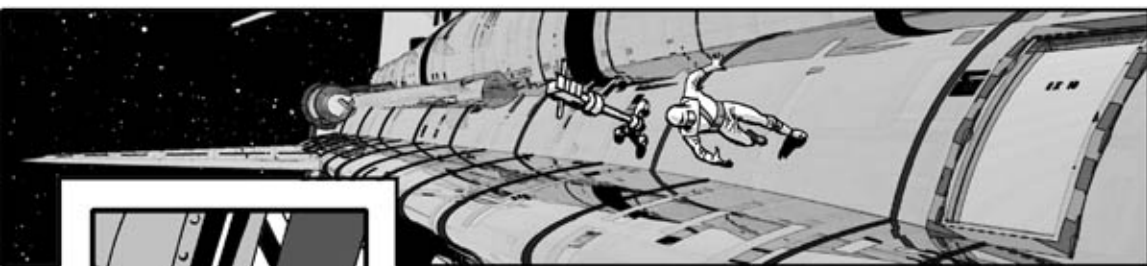
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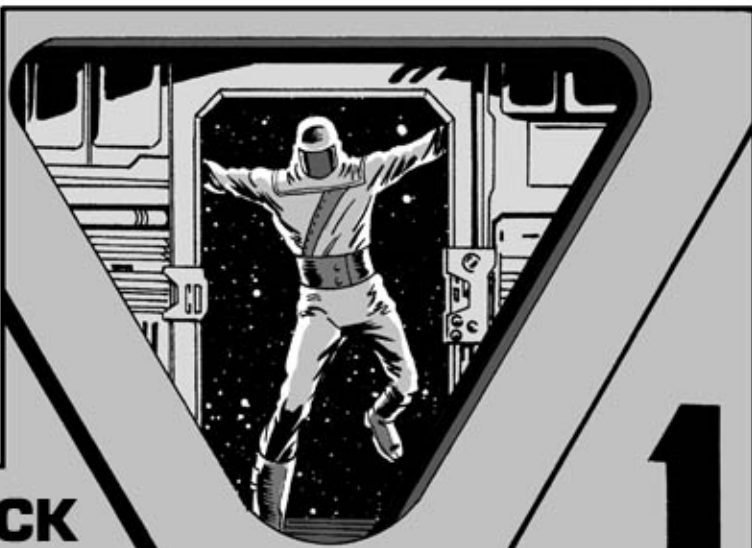
"IT COULD BE  
BECAUSE HE'S  
WORLD SPACE PATROL."



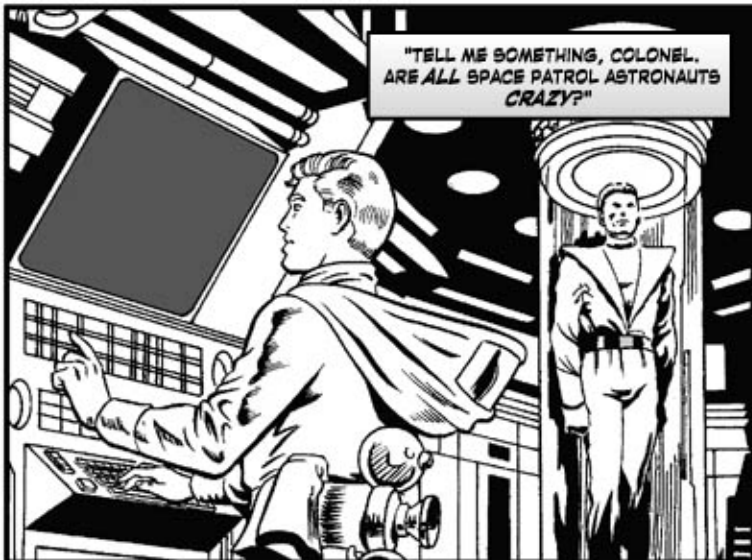
"PICK YOUR REASON,  
DOCTOR."



**AIRLOCK**



1



"TELL ME SOMETHING, COLONEL. ARE ALL SPACE PATROL ASTRONAUTS CRAZY?"



"I HEAR YOU'RE STUDYING FOR A DEGREE IN PSYCHOLOGY, DOCTOR. YOU TELL ME."



"SOME OF US JUST HAVE AN ITCH TO GO FARTHER. FASTER."

PRIMARY GUIDANCE PROGRAM  
CORRUPTED  
PRIMARY GUIDANCE PROGRAM  
CORRUPTED  
PRIMARY GUIDANCE PROGRAM  
CORRUPTED

\*\* GUIDANCE SYSTEM/  
MANUAL SELECT\*\*



TIK  
TIKKA-TIK  
TIK-TIK-TIK  
TIKKA-TIK



"STEVE'S AMBITION HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO STAY AHEAD OF THE OTHERS."

PRIMARY GUIDANCE PROGRAM  
CORRUPTED  
PRIMARY GUIDANCE PROGRAM  
CORRUPTED

\*\* GUIDANCE SYSTEM/  
MANUAL SELECT\*\*

SECONDARY GUIDANCE  
PROGRAM ESTABLISHED  
AS DEFAULT.

GUIDANCE SYSTEMS RESET



"THIS MIGHT BE JUST THE HEAD START HE'S BEEN LOOKING FOR."



"I'VE JUST TURNED HIM LOOSE, DOCTOR."

"IT'LL BE INTERESTING TO SEE HOW FAR HE GOES."

2058 AD.

TODAY MARKED A GALA OCCASION AT SPACE CITY AS LIEUTENANT COLONEL STEVE ZODIAC BECAME THE WORLD SPACE PATROL'S NEW SENIOR ASTRONAUT, GAINING A PROMOTION TO FULL COLONEL AND REPLACING GENERAL ANANDA DAS WHO'LL BE ASSUMING COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION DUTIES.

IPN

COLONEL ZODIAC IS SHOWN HERE RECEIVING NOT ONLY HIS COMMISSION BUT ALSO FORMAL COMMAND OF THE FIREBALL XL5.

IPN OFFERS ITS OWN SINCERE CONGRATULATIONS TO COLONEL ZODIAC, HAVING WITNESSED THIS YOUNG MAN'S REMARKABLE CAREER SO FAR, AND WE CAN ONLY GUESS AS TO WHAT SORT OF ADVENTURES AWAIT HIM IN THE YEARS TO COME.

