



# FIREBALL



BASED ON THE CLASSIC  
**SUPERMARIONATION**  
TV SERIES CREATED BY  
**GERRY ANDERSON**



*Colonel Steve Zodiac  
and his Fearless Crew  
Return in All-New  
Adventures!*



## "FASTEST GUY ALIVE"

*By Day, Wolff, Erwin and Brennan.*

# FASTEST GUY ALIVE

A FIREBALL XLS  
Adventure

Written by  
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# SPACE TRAVEL!

There was a time when one could almost conjure magic with the term. Take, for instance, late 1963. By then Humanity had spent a grand total of roughly 23 days in outer space. Barely scratching the orbit of Earth. And the Moon was still six years away. Astronauts and cosmonauts were the new knight-errants. Dressed in pressurized armor and riding fire, battling against the dragon of the cold wastes above us. A new chivalry was being born, giving all of us a reason to look up into the sky. It was genuine adventure mingled with unshakable hope.

This was the time when Fireball XLS premiered on television. Gerry Anderson and his production wizards had already paved an impressive path with their adventure series Supercar. But their sights were set onward and, in the early 60's, there was only one obvious direction to go.

So it was that television audiences were treated to the sight of a huge spaceship thundering down a launch rail and off into the unknown. At its helm was a clear-eyed competent professional explorer aided by a brilliant scientist, an exotically female physician and a sophisticated robot. Clearly the stuff of classic SF... the stuff of authors such as John Campbell, E.E. "Doc" Smith and James Schmitz. But it was classic SF married to the modern thrill of the new icons of spacemen rising from the Florida coast and the steppes of Russia.

These days it almost seems as if space is a familiar neighborhood. But recent events tap us on the shoulder and remind us that the danger hasn't been pushed aside. Forty years after the premier of Fireball XLS finds the universe still clutching its mysteries close. Perhaps the time for knight-errantry hasn't yet passed its prime, and we can still thrill to the idea of spaceships exploring the far reaches where, up to now, only our dreams can go.

But what Robin and Pauline and I want to do with Fireball XLS is not to simply wallow in nostalgia. Space travel is, by its very nature, involved not in looking back, but in racing forward. In the years since the television series first appeared parts of space have, indeed, become more mundane. But there's even more out there in the way of mystery. Given what we know, we feel that, more than ever, there's a place for stories that could bring back the old thrill of blast-off! There's a universe out there even stranger, and perhaps more wonderful, than the one we thought we knew back in 1963.

Welcome aboard.

The countdown is proceeding.

**Michael Wolff**

**M!M**  
**Misc!MAYHEM**

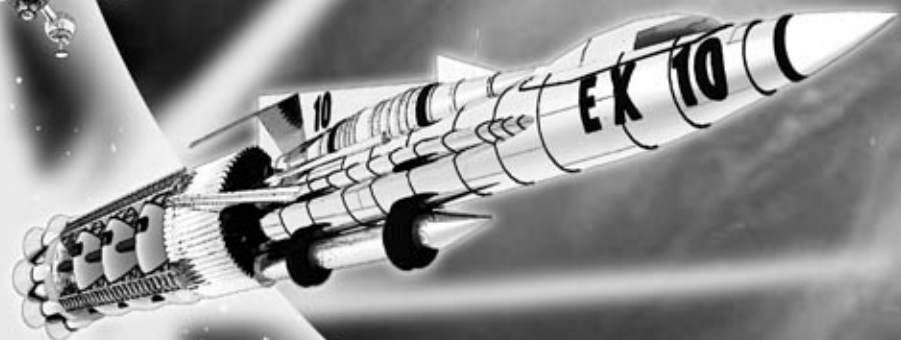
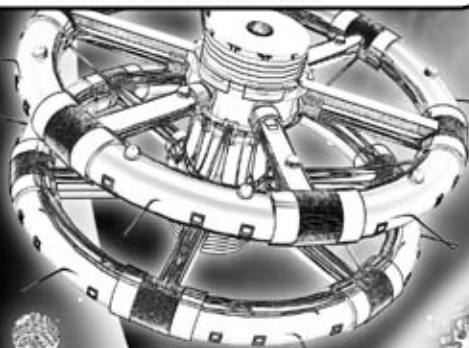
CARTON 

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2052 AD.  
EXPLORER LAUNCH CONTROL SITE,  
IN ORBIT AROUND JUPITER.

...AND, WITH THE COUNTDOWN HAVING REACHED ZERO,  
MISSION CONTROL HAS ASSURED IPN THAT ALL SYSTEMS  
ARE FUNCTIONING NORMALLY.

MAJOR IRELAND HAS FIRED THE MAIN THRUSTERS  
AND EVERYTHING IS MOVING AS PLANNED  
AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS HISTORIC  
DEEP SPACE SURVEY MISSION.



CONTROL, THIS IS *EXPLORER*.  
BOOST AT *TWO PERCENT* AND RISING.  
SOLAR ESCAPE VELOCITY IN *FOURTEEN HOURS*.  
GPC IS AT *MODE FIVE*.

*EXPLORER*, WE CONFIRM.  
CHECKSUM ON GPC IS *GOOD*.

# THE FASTEST GUY ALIVE



CABIN PRESSURE  
HOLDING STEADY AT  
16.7 PSI.

TRANSMEDICAL  
MONITORING CURRENTLY  
ON STAND-BY.

CONFIRM.

FLIGHT PATH  
TRAJECTORY INSERTION  
DATABASE LOCKED ON  
MODE FIVE.

EXPLORER, WE COPY.  
MODE FIVE.

TECHNO-  
BABBLE GENERATOR  
ON FULL.

YOU'RE  
IN A MOOD.

I THINK I'VE GOT A RIGHT TO BE.

NO ARGUMENT HERE.

WHO AM I SUPPOSED TO ENVY?

I WASN'T  
TALKING ABOUT YOU,  
AND YOU KNOW IT.

MAKES ME FEEL BETTER.  
IN FACT, YOU'VE BEEN  
WAY TOO CALM.

YEAH, I SUPPOSE  
SHOOTING MYSELF INTO  
INTERSTELLAR SPACE FOR  
TEN YEARS JUSTIFIES THE  
OCCASIONAL OUTBURST  
OF HUMOR.

NOT TO MENTION ENVY.

YEAH...

...AND YOU KNOW THAT IF THIS  
MISSION HAD ROOM FOR TWO  
PEOPLE, THERE'S NO ONE ELSE  
I'D WANT CO-PILOTING.

HUH!  
CAN I GET YOU TO  
WRITE MY RESUME'?

STEVE...



...WE BOTH KNOW THAT, BY THE TIME I GET BACK, YOU'LL HAVE YOUR OWN CAREER ALL SEWN UP AND YOU'LL BE RIDING HIGH.

TEN YEARS!

AT THIS RATE, IN TEN YEARS I'LL BE LUCKY IF I END UP A BRASS-BOTTOMED TOOTIE LIKE...



LIEUTENANT ZODIAC!!

CAPTAIN ZERO!



I'M SURE, LIEUTENANT, THAT COMMANDER AUBREY WILL BE PLEASSED TO HEAR...

...THAT THE MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR EXPLORER MISSION IS PROCEEDING SO WELL...

...THAT AN EXTREMELY JUNIOR OFFICER...

...CAN TAKE TIME TO ENGAGE THE MISSION'S PILOT IN IDLE CHATTER.

YES, SIR!

"YES, SIR?!"



YES, SIR, I MEAN THE MISSION IS PROCEEDING EXTREMELY WELL, SIR!

THEN WHY HASN'T THE SAFETY OFFICER RECEIVED THE SCHEDULED UPDATE?

CUT THE LAD A LITTLE SLACK, CAPTAIN.



I JUST UNLOCKED THE FINAL FAIL-SAFES ON THE HYDROGEN FEED SYSTEM...

...AND I'M AWAITING CONFIRMATION FROM THE COMPUTER BEFORE RELEASING THE UPDATE TO STEVE.



THEN I'LL PASS THE JOYOUS WORD TO COMMANDER AUBREY THAT EVERYTHING MIGHT CONCEIVABLY BE PROCEEDING SMOOTHLY.

AND I'M KEEPING AN EYE ON YOU, LIEUTENANT.



OH, NO...

THERE YOU GO, STEVE. YOUR FIRST ASSIGNMENT AS A LIEUTENANT AND ALREADY YOU'VE GOT THE BRASS NOTICING YOU.

JIM...



I'D HELP YOU FURTHER WITH YOUR METEORIC RISE THROUGH THE RANKS, BUT RUMOR HAS IT I'VE GOT A SHIP TO FLY.

YEAH.

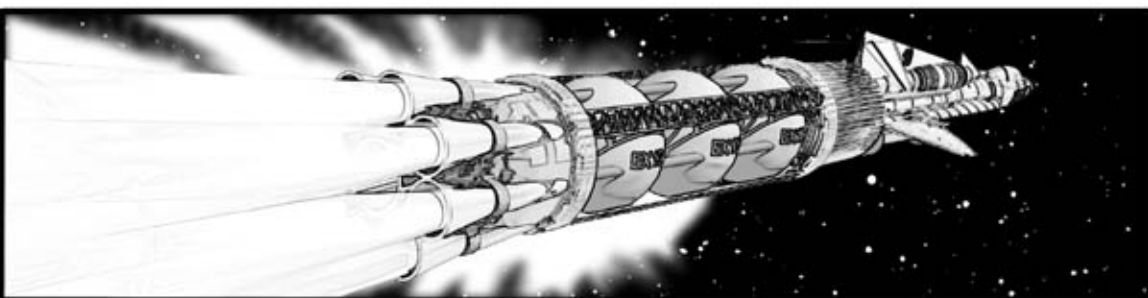
AND IT'S THREE DAYS BEFORE I ENTER THE DEEP SLEEP.



WE'LL BE WATCHING YOU.

SEE YOU IN TEN, STEVE. STAY OUT OF TROUBLE.

RIGHT.



DID YOU SEE IT, MATT?

SAW EVERYTHING JUST FINE, STEVE.

THE OBSERVATORIES PICKED UP THE HYDROGEN FLARE OF JIM'S ENGINES.



YOU KNOW YOU COULD'VE WATCHED THE LAUNCH WITH ME HERE AT THE STATION.

STEVE,  
WE'VE ALREADY BEEN THROUGH THIS.

YEAH, I KNOW...



AND, *ONE* OF THESE DAYS, THEY'RE GOING TO LISTEN TO YOUR THEORIES ON *ADVANCED AUTOMATION* FOR DEEP SPACE VEBBELS. YOU KNOW IT AND I KNOW IT. JIM'S MISSION IS *PROOF* THAT IT COULD WORK.

YEAH!  
BUT *EXPLORER'S* JUST A *SELF-CONTAINED AUTOMATON* WITH JIM AT THE CONTROLS.



THIS FROM THE *SAME* GUY WHO KEEPS TELLING ME HOW HE'S *ONE* BEAT FROM BEING DRUMMED OUT OF THE *WORLD SPACE PATROL*. I LIKE YOUR *FOCUS OF CONFIDENCE*, STEVE.



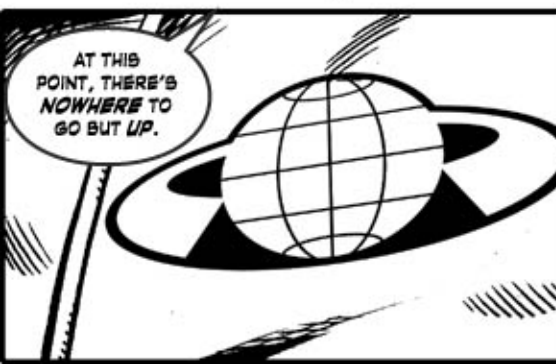
I WANT A *SELF-CONTAINED* PACKAGE THAT CAN ADAPT TO ANY SHIP IN *ANY* SITUATION.

YOU'LL GET THERE.

HEH...



I KNOW I'VE GOT *PROBLEMS*. BUT, LIKE JIM SAYS...



AT THIS POINT, THERE'S *NOWHERE* TO GO BUT UP.



2055 AD.





AND, ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD, THE EYES OF IPN ARE ON SPACE CITY AS THE FIFTH SHIP IN THE FIREBALL XL LONG-RANGE SPACE PATROL FLEET TAKES OFF ON ITS MAIDEN VOYAGE.

COLONEL ANANDA DAS IS AT THE CONTROLS OF WHAT HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS THE MOST ADVANCED VERSION OF THIS RELIABLE DESIGN.

ITS PRIMARY MISSION WILL BE THE SECURITY OF SPACE OPENING UP WITHIN THE DISTANT AREA COLLECTIVELY KNOWN AS SECTOR-25.

CLEARING SPACE CITY TRAFFIC CONTROL ZONE.

HOW'S THE RIDE, NAVIGATOR?

EVERYTHING GO-GO-GO, COLONEL.

I'LL HAVE THAT SOLAR ESCAPE TRAJECTORY PLOTTED AND READY IN A FEW MINUTES.

WE'VE GOT TIME, STEVE. SAY GOOD-BYE TO EARTH.

IT'LL BE A WHILE BEFORE WE GET BACK.





BROUGHT  
THE *COFFEE*,  
STEVE?



OH!  
*BORRY*,  
COLONEL...

I JUST COMPLETED THE CHECKS  
OF THE FUSION BALANCE GOVERNORS  
AND *CONFIRMED* OUR RESPONSE  
INTERVAL WITH THE BEACON  
AT *COMPANION-2*.

I'VE ALSO  
DOWNLOADED  
THE NAVIGATIONAL  
UPDATES FROM  
*SPACE CITY*...

...AND  
COMPUTED POSSIBLE  
RENDEZVOUS VECTORS  
WITH *FIREBALL XLS*  
IN THE EVENT IT BECOMES  
*NECESSARY*...



DID YOU  
POLISH THE  
*DOORKNOBS*?

THE  
*DOORKNOBS*,  
SIR? I DON'T...

STEVE.



SIT  
DOWN.

COLONEL...



YOU'RE A  
*GOOD OFFICER*,  
STEVE. YOU'RE TURNING  
INTO A *FIRST-RATE*  
*ASTRONAUT*.

AND I  
*APPRECIATE* THE FACT  
THAT, IN THE WEEKS SINCE  
WE'VE LEFT *EARTH*, YOU'VE  
PRACTICALLY *REBUILT XLS*  
FORTY-TWO TIMES...

...ADJUSTING  
THINGS THAT I  
DIDN'T EVEN  
*KNOW* WE HAD  
ON BOARD.

SIR...

BUT YOU'VE GOT TO LEARN THAT BEING A WBP ASTRONAUT MEANS MORE THAN JUST KEEPING THE SHIP WORKING.

OUT HERE WE'RE NOT JUST ENGINEERS, NAVIGATORS, AND PILOTS.

OUT HERE WE'RE *DIPLOMATS*. SCIENTISTS. HEALERS. MEDIATORS. *POLICEMEN*.

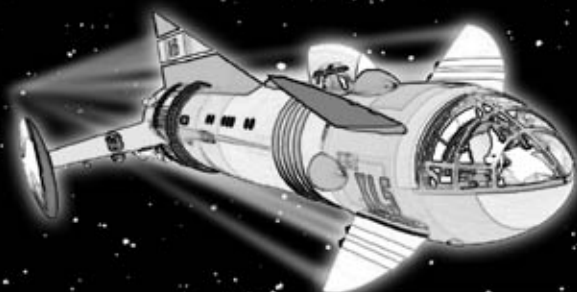
*WARRIORS*, IF NECESSARY.

"WE'RE *AUTHORITY AND ORDER*, STEVE."

"WE'RE *EARTH*."

"HOPEFULLY ITS BETTER NATURE."

"OUT HERE WE'RE A SYMBOL OF WHAT OUR WORLD DEEMS *HOLY*. TO WHAT HUMANKIND ASPIRES TO *BECOME*."



"SIR, I'M NOT SURE I --"

THEN TRY THIS ON FOR SIZE -- THE *XL-5* IS A VITAL TOOL, BUT IT'S JUST A TOOL. ITS FUNCTION IS TO SERVE THE *LARGER GOAL*--

AND WHAT IS THAT, SIR?

BRINGING HUMANITY TO THE STARS.

AND THAT'S HUMANITY IN *EVERY* SENSE OF THE WORD

SO, ALL YOU *REALLY* NEED TO DO IS FOCUS ON WHAT'S *ULTIMATELY* IMPORTANT...

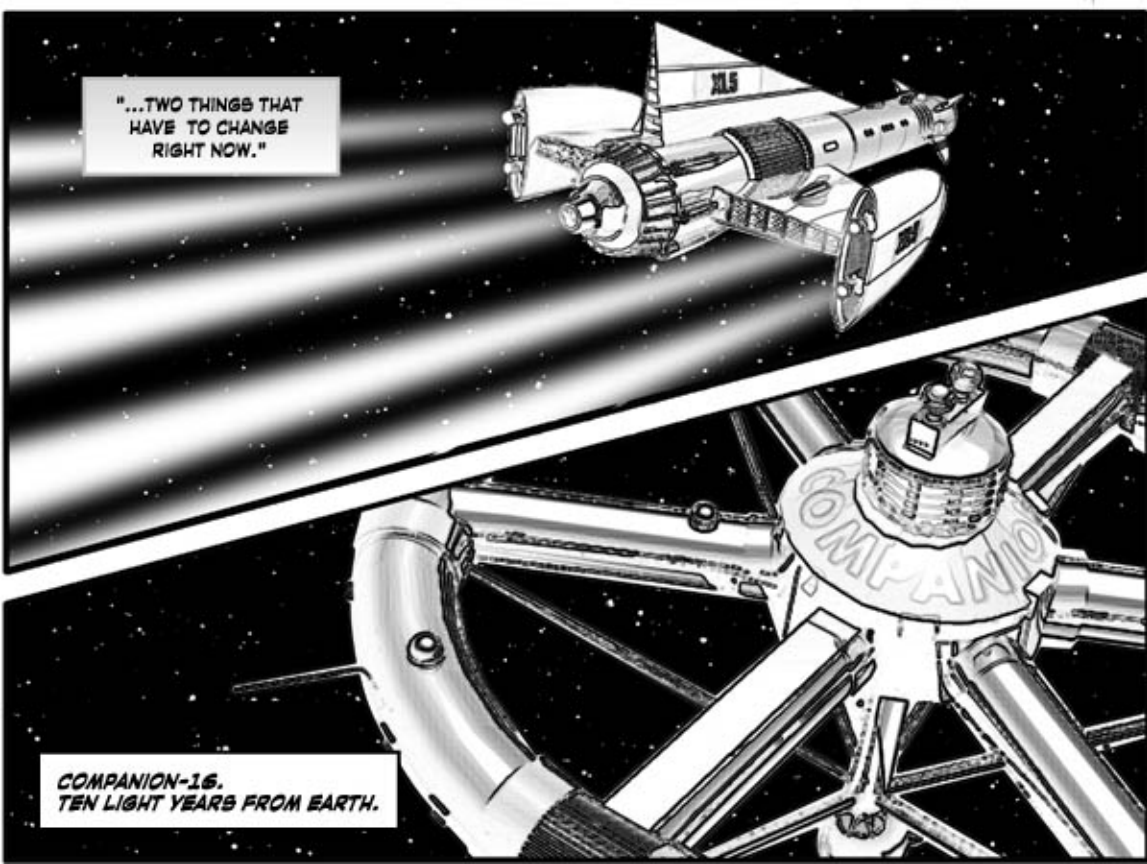
...SUCH AS MY COFFEE.

YES, SIR!

BOY'S GOT SOME ROUGH EDGES BUT HE MAKES FANTASTIC COFFEE.

DEFINITELY COMMAND MATERIAL.

SPACE CITY TO FIREBALL XL5.



YES, COLONEL DAB, I SHOW YOU ON APPROACH AT THE MAXIMUM RANGE OF MY INSTRUMENTS.

WE'LL HAVE EVERYTHING READY WHEN YOU ARRIVE.

THANK YOU, COMMANDER. WE'LL BE ARRIVING IN SEVENTEEN HOURS. XLS OUT.

DOCTOR VENUS, PLEASE REPORT TO THE COMMAND DECK.

COMMANDER?

A FIREBALL PATROL SHIP FROM EARTH WILL BE ARRIVING IN SEVENTEEN HOURS. THERE'S AN EMERGENCY...

ONE OF THE CREW IS INJURED?

NO.

A PROBLEM HAS DEVELOPED WITH THE EXPLORER MISSION.

SPACE CITY REPORTS THAT A SEVERE FAULT HAS DEVELOPED IN THE AUTOMATED CONTROL SYSTEM.

FIVE MONTHS FROM NOW A SCHEDULED COURSE CORRECTION WILL NOT TAKE PLACE.

IN THREE YEARS EXPLORER WILL GO RADICALLY OFF COURSE UNLESS THE PROBLEM CAN BE CORRECTED.

CAN'T MAJOR IRELAND REPAIR THE TROUBLE?

MAJOR IRELAND WENT BACK INTO SUSPENDED ANIMATION EIGHT DAYS AFTER SENDING HIS LAST REPORT. HIS NEXT SCHEDULED REVIVAL WON'T OCCUR UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE...

...AND THE EMERGENCY REVIVAL SEQUENCER ISN'T RESPONDING TO COMMANDS FROM EARTH.