

= Trapped in the Sky =

" Trapped in the Sky " is the first episode of Thunderbirds , a British 1960s Supermarionation television series . Written by co @-@ creators Gerry and Sylvia Anderson , it was first broadcast on ATV Midlands on 30 September 1965 . The plot revolves around criminal mastermind the Hood , who sabotages the nuclear @-@ powered airliner Fireflash prior to her maiden flight . Unable to land for fear of detonating a motion @-@ sensitive bomb , and threatened by radiation leaking from Fireflash 's overworked atomic reactor , the crew and passengers ' only hope of survival is the newly formed International Rescue Organisation .

While drafting the episode , the Andersons found inspiration in Gerry 's experiences as a conscript in the RAF during the 1940s , when he witnessed the fatal crash of a Mosquito fighter and the controlled landing of a damaged Spitfire . Filmed mostly in late 1964 , " Trapped in the Sky " features pioneering work from series special effects director Derek Meddings , who used a looping " rolling road " mechanism to simplify the shooting of the Fireflash rescue .

Lew Grade , head of distributor ITC , was so pleased with the 25 @-@ minute pilot that he instructed the production staff to double the standard episode running length to fill a one @-@ hour commercial timeslot . This necessitated the writing of filler scenes and subplots .

Well received on its first broadcast , " Trapped in the Sky " remains critically acclaimed and is generally considered to be one of the best episodes of the series . It was adapted for audio by Century 21 Records in 1966 , transmitted on BBC Radio in revised form in 1990 , and had its first TV network broadcast on BBC2 in 1991 . In 2015 , " Trapped in the Sky " was remade as " Fireflash " , the fifth episode of the CGI reboot Thunderbirds Are Go .

= = Plot = =

Criminal mastermind the Hood (voiced by Ray Barrett) is telepathically linked to his half @-@ brother , Kyrano (David Graham) , the manservant on Tracy Island . Abusing this connection and inflicting severe psychological trauma on his sibling , he discovers that International Rescue ? the Tracy family 's newly @-@ formed life @-@ saving organisation ? is ready to start operations . Determined to steal the secrets of IR 's Thunderbird machines , the Hood plots to have the Tracys called to a disaster situation of his own design . Travelling from his temple hideout in the Malaysian jungle to London International Airport , he plants a bomb next to the landing gear hydraulics of Air Terrainean 's new Fireflash ? an atomic @-@ powered , hypersonic airliner departing for her maiden flight to Tokyo . One of the passengers is Kyrano 's daughter , Tin @-@ Tin . In an anonymous videophone call to London Tower , the Hood warns Commander Norman of Air Traffic Control that the motion @-@ sensitive device will detonate from the impact of landing .

Fireflash is recalled and Captain Hanson and his co @-@ pilot instructed to circle the airspace above the airport . The shielding on the airliner 's atomic reactor is weakening ; if Fireflash does not land within two hours , the passengers and crew will die of radiation exposure . Air Traffic Control commandeers an Air Force jet that docks with Fireflash in flight , allowing a Lieutenant Bob Meddings to board the hold and attempt to remove the bomb . Meddings is almost killed when he falls through the unclosed maintenance hatch and plummets to the ground ; moments before impact , however , he successfully deploys his parachute and ultimately survives .

IR 's John Tracy (Barrett) , who has been monitoring radio traffic from the space station Thunderbird 5 , relays news of the unfolding events to Tracy Island . Jeff (Peter Dyneley) immediately dispatches Scott (Shane Rimmer) and Virgil (David Holliday) in Thunderbirds 1 and 2 ? the latter carrying Pod 3 ? to London . Arriving at the danger zone , Scott assures Norman of IR 's good intentions , in return demanding his word that no photographs will be taken of either aircraft . However , the Hood , disguised as one of the airport police detachment , breaks into the unmanned Thunderbird 1 and photographs the cockpit . Scott is alerted by the Automatic Camera Detector and the Hood flees , chased along the M1 motorway by the police .

Arriving in Thunderbird 2 , Virgil deploys three Elevator Cars , two of which will be remote @-@ controlled from his master vehicle . Fireflash will be guided into a controlled landing on top of the

cars , touching down with its undercarriage raised . Virgil and the Elevator Cars rush to intercept the inbound Fireflash on Runway 29 , but when one of the remote @-@ controlled cars malfunctions and crashes , the rescue attempt is aborted and the operation suspended while Virgil activates a reserve car . Fireflash starts a second run and successfully makes contact with all three vehicles . Applying brakes , Virgil loses control of the master car , which crashes into a trench ; he is uninjured , however , and Fireflash comes to a halt before reaching the end of the runway . The bomb is dislodged from its original position but ultimately fails to explode .

As the Hood has managed to evade the authorities , Scott leaves him to IR 's London agent , Lady Penelope Creighton @-@ Ward (Sylvia Anderson) . Chasing the enemy in their specially @-@ modified Rolls @-@ Royce , FAB 1 , Penelope and her butler , Parker (Graham) , blast him off the motorway using the car 's front @-@ mounted machine gun . Although the Hood survives the encounter , his photographs are destroyed .

Back on Tracy Island , Jeff implements " Operation Cover @-@ Up " to hide the existence of IR while Kyrano is examined by a doctor from the mainland , who dismisses the manservant 's prior nausea as a sign of stress . When the topic of the conversation shifts to the Fireflash incident , the doctor declares that he would be honoured to shake IR by the hand . With a parting handshake , Jeff grants the unknowing guest his wish , before announcing to his sons , " Boys , I think we 're in business . "

= = Production = =

Inspiration for the plot of " Trapped in the Sky " was derived from creator @-@ producer Gerry Anderson 's memories of his National Service . While stationed at RAF Manston in Kent from 1947 to 1949 , the young Anderson had witnessed a Battle of Britain @-@ themed air show coming to a fateful end : a Mosquito fighter had gone out of control and crashed to the ground , resulting in 20 fatalities . A few months after the Mosquito disaster , he saw a Spitfire with a damaged undercarriage make a successful emergency landing at the airbase . During the pre @-@ production of Thunderbirds , Anderson used his recollections of the events as the foundation of the bomb plot surrounding the Fireflash airliner . Anderson dictated the script to his wife , Sylvia , for typing at their villa in Portugal ; it was completed in four sessions during the spring of 1964 . As an in @-@ joke , the character of Lieutenant Meddings is named after Bob Bell , the AP Films art director , and Derek Meddings , the director of special effects .

= = = Filming = = =

Filming on the pilot episode of Thunderbirds commenced in the late summer of 1964 after five months of pre @-@ production . Between the scripting and filming stages , the name of the new TV series had been finalised , Thunderbirds having initially been titled International Rescue ; additionally , the fleet of star vehicles had originally been named the Rescues . Although there is no on @-@ screen title caption , the episode is referred to in all internal production documentation by the name " Trapped in the Sky " .

While preparing to film the Fireflash controlled landing sequence , Meddings was faced with the difficulty of having to build an extended , dynamic runway set in the limited shooting space available at AP Films Studios . His compact and cost @-@ efficient solution was to isolate the basic set elements ? the grass verge foreground , the sky background and the tarmac separating them ? and construct separate loops of canvas , all painted to represent one element ; these were fitted to rollers that , when run at speeds proportionate to their respective distances from the camera , simulated a continuous backdrop . This " rolling road " (or " roller @-@ road ") technique marked a progression from the " rolling sky " that had been pioneered in previous Anderson series , such as Stingray .

The crash of the left @-@ side remote @-@ controlled Elevator Car was originally a gaffe , caused when the wire pulling the scale model across the " rolling road " unexpectedly snapped . So satisfied was Meddings with the realism of the shot that he asked the Andersons to re @-@ write their script

to accommodate the error . This was later supplemented with new footage of the rogue Elevator Car colliding with a parked aircraft , starting a fire on the tarmac ; in the episode , the stationary vehicles are left to burn since , as stated by Commander Norman , " Fireflash is carrying passengers ? they 're not ! "

During the Tracy Island briefing scene , Alan Tracy 's voice is audibly lower and deeper than in later episodes . Since voice actor Matt Zimmerman had yet to be added to the regular cast at the time of dialogue recording , Ray Barrett (who voiced John and the Hood) supplied the character 's single line (" OK , father ") . Despite his absence , Zimmerman is listed in the closing credits of " Trapped in the Sky " . A second continuity error occurs during the concluding scene . When Jeff initiates the " Operation Cover @-@ up " security protocol to erase all sign of International Rescue 's presence for purposes of the doctor 's visit , the portraits on the wall change from photographs of the Tracy brothers in uniform to a different set in which civilian attire is worn ; however , in a subsequent shot , the edge of a blue uniform is still visible .

= = = Post @-@ production = = =

Barry Gray 's arrangements for the episode 's opening and closing theme music ? based on the signature " The Thunderbirds March " , which accompanies the stock launch sequences of Thunderbirds 1 , 2 and 3 ? are unique to " Trapped in the Sky " . As an end theme , " The Thunderbirds March " was a last @-@ minute substitute for " Flying High " ; this was a lyrical track , sung by Gary Miller , which was conceived to serve as a counterpoint to the instrumental opening music . It was judged by Anderson and Gray to be tonally unsuitable and was replaced two weeks before the first broadcast of " Trapped in the Sky " in September 1965 . Gray recorded the incidental music in December 1964 , at the Olympic Studios at Barnes , London , with an orchestra of 30 instrumentalists .

Thunderbirds was originally due to have a 25 @-@ minute episode running time ; this was doubled at the instruction of Lew Grade , Anderson 's financial backer at distributor ITC , after a preview screening of " Trapped in the Sky " . Praising the plot and special effects , Grade commented , " That 's not a television series , that 's a feature film ! " With the budget per episode also increased from £ 25 @,@ 000 to £ 38 @,@ 000 , the pilot and eight other unfinished episodes were extended and re @-@ edited to run for 50 minutes (filling a one @-@ hour commercial timeslot) . In the case of " Trapped in the Sky " , new footage was filmed during the shooting of " Operation Crash @-@ Dive " , which features the return of Fireflash and was written as a sequel to the first episode . Among the newly added scenes were the subplot concerning Meddings ' boarding of Fireflash , as well as the first rescue attempt involving the Elevator Cars .

= = Broadcast = =

" Trapped in the Sky " was first broadcast on ATV Midlands at 7 : 00 p.m. on 30 September 1965 . An alternative , two @-@ part format debuted on 20 October for the episode 's Granada Television première . The episode was networked nationwide for the first time on 20 September 1991 , after BBC2 acquired the broadcast rights to the series ; it achieved ratings of 6 @.@ 8 million viewers when it was repeated by the channel in 1992 . On 18 December 1994 , " Trapped in the Sky " was transmitted in a re @-@ edited format as the first episode of Turbocharged Thunderbirds ; broadcast on UPN in the United States , the programme combined footage drawn from the 1960s series with new , live @-@ action scenes . The episode was broadcast in surround sound for the first time on BBC Two on 3 September 2000 .

Additionally , the episode has re @-@ appeared several times in condensed audio form . The first adaptation , with narration from Shane Rimmer (in character as Scott) , was originally released as the mini @-@ album Thunderbird 1 (MA 108) in April 1966 by Century 21 Records . With an introduction by Gerry Anderson and additional narration by Rimmer , Thunderbird 1 was broadcast on BBC Radio 5 as the first episode of a radio series in November 1990 . Most recently , " Trapped in the Sky " was adapted for Penguin Audiobooks .

= = Reception = =

" Trapped in the Sky " received a positive , contemporary critical response from L. Marsland Gander of The Daily Telegraph , who commented , " It is a show that has to be seen to be disbelieved . " Writing for the same newspaper in 2011 , Simon Heffer remembered his enthusiastic impressions of watching " Trapped in the Sky " as a boy in 1965 , and how it endeared him to the rest of the series : " ... I had just watched the first episode of Thunderbirds . I felt as though the whole landscape of what passes for my imagination had been changed ... It caused an excitement of the sort that is possible only for the very young , and it lasted for days . Indeed , every Saturday night was a renewal of the miracle . " Co - creator Sylvia Anderson observes that , by necessity , the pilot episode comprises many examples of exposition for the purposes of introducing the primary characters and vehicles . However , she considers the roles of Lady Penelope and Parker to be " brief but effective " .

The episode was listed as a series highlight in issue 61 of Cult Times , published in 2000 ; writer Mike Fillis referred to " Trapped in the Sky " as " riveting " , and its bomb plot premise as " very topical " . A BBC retrospective praises aspects of the episode 's futuristic design , describing Fireflash as a " beautifully envisioned , Concorde like craft " , and London Airport 's Air Terrainean lounge , where the character of Tin Tin is first seen , as " like a set from a Dean Martin movie " . Model maker Martin Bower , who contributed to the special effects of the Andersons ' later series , Space : 1999 , comments positively on the " realistic " design of the Elevator Cars , writing that they are " to me , among the most memorable of vehicles " .

In 2004 , " Trapped in the Sky " was re - issued on Region 1 DVD as part of A & E Video 's release The Best of Thunderbirds : The Favorite Episodes , whose content was selected based on the results of a fan poll hosted on the A & E website . Reviewing the product for DVD Verdict , David Gutierrez awarded " Trapped in the Sky " a grade of 95 (out of 100) , commending the episode for the rescue itself (considered " amazing ") and adding : " Television rarely has moments as exciting as the Fireflash attempting a forced landing . " Stuart Galbraith IV of the DVD Talk website characterised the plot as " sort of an airborne version of Speed " . In a BBC Online review of the 2003 Thunderbirds soundtrack album , Morag Reavley commented positively on composer Barry Gray 's incidental piece " Fireflash Landing " , stating that it is one of several " catchy , pulse - quickening tunes " that " come fast and furious " .

Vincent Law of the Andersonic website argues that the episode 's status as series pilot is not detrimental to the writing of the plot , which employs a theme ? suggested to be common to many Anderson - produced series ? of " advanced technology , upon which the characters are reliant , going awry . " Among Law 's criticisms is the characterisation , which is considered , at times , to test the limits of credibility ; one example offered is the lack of emotional response from Tin Tin to the precarious position of the sabotaged Fireflash . On the subject of dialogue , he gives a summary of " limp and routine at times ? lots of ' left left , two degrees ' ? and overall much less witty than Stingray . " Law concludes that " Trapped in the Sky " overall is " a great opener , arguably the best episode of the series . "

Dr Phillip Atcliffe , an aerospace engineering lecturer at the University of Salford , has praised " Trapped in the Sky " for its depiction of commercial hypersonic flight . While discussing on the development of the Lockheed Martin SR - 72 reconnaissance plane in 2013 , Atcliffe made reference to the episode and commented that the time necessary for the fictional Fireflash to fly from London to Tokyo (two hours at a reported Mach 6) would be " surprisingly accurate " in reality . He also expressed the view that the altitude at which Fireflash is stated to be travelling ? 250 ,000 feet (76 ,000 m) ? would be optimal for a passenger aircraft travelling at hypersonic speeds .

= = 2015 remake = =

In 2015 , " Trapped in the Sky " was remade as " Fireflash " , the fifth episode of Thunderbirds Are Go . Recurring plot elements include the character of Captain Hanson and the rescue involving the

Elevator Cars .