



THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO!

The Go! Team

Weta legend Sir Richard Taylor is resurrecting International Rescue

WETA WORKSHOP wouldn't have existed if *Thunderbirds* hadn't existed," says Sir Richard Taylor, executive producer of ITV's upcoming *Thunderbirds Are Go!* TV series. It turns out that the Oscar-winning boss of one of the biggest visual effects and make-up outfits in the world – the powerhouse team responsible for creating Middle-earth and Pandora – is something of a fan.

"I was born in the UK and enjoyed the show on my black-and-white TV there until I was four years old, then we moved to New Zealand. Thankfully, the one channel in New Zealand still showed *Thunderbirds*. So it felt like it came with me," he recalls.

"It was the fact that you could live in a model-made world that was the big thrill for me.

"The first thing you encounter walking into Weta Workshop is a shrine to the →

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TRACY ELEMENTS

Relaunching International Rescue



SEAL OF APPROVAL

1 "I felt I couldn't do anything without first meeting Gerry and getting his blessing," Taylor explains. "I flew to London to visit him at Pinewood Studios where he was working on *New Captain Scarlet*, and he graciously gave me several hours of his time. At the end of the day he told me, 'If you want to give it a crack, you go for it.' Anderson's son Jamie agrees that Taylor and Weta Workshop are the only company in the universe that Gerry would have approved to remake *Thunderbirds*. "He was very proprietary over his creations," he says. "The fact that he gave Richard his blessing is a good sign of that."

5! 4! 3! 2! 1!

2 "The *Thunderbirds* ships can't be the same as the

originals, sadly," explains Taylor. "ITV needs to be able to respect and celebrate the original vehicles and series, so our design challenge was to make them appealing to a new, youthful audience and keep them respectful of the original design aesthetic. I grew up loving *Thunderbird Four* and I still have a slight obsession with it. I'm very happy with how it looks, as well as the rest of the *International Rescue* craft."

GRAND DESIGNS

3 Other design challenges included recreating Tracy Island. "I bought 4,000 miniature trees from China!" Taylor admits. "We've got a few things the original team never had; bulk volumes of polystyrene and super glue. And laser cutters!" The hangar bays for the rescue craft posed

their own set of problems. "We're working in a different scale than they did," Richard says. "We can't just go out and buy a lemon squeezer to chuck onto the wall - we had to sculpt one in a smaller size!"

SYLVIA SERVICE

4 Richard's date at the 2001 London premiere of *The Fellowship Of The Ring* was *Thunderbirds* co-creator and voice of Lady Penelope, Sylvia Anderson. "My wife Tania was pregnant at the time and couldn't travel, so I had two spare tickets. Out of the blue, I called and invited Sylvia on a whim. She had no idea who I was, but she and her daughter Dee joined me for the premiere. It was phenomenally thrilling to have a date with Lady P!" In the new series Rosamund Pike voices the FAB pink *International Rescue* agent.



Thunderbirds," he continues, "and you have to bow to the shrine!" he laughs. Indeed, there's a large display of *Thunderbirds* miniatures in the workshop, crafted by Weta's head model maker David Tremont.

The journey to remaking *Thunderbirds* was a long one. Taylor first entertained the idea while in the UK for the premiere of *The Fellowship Of The Ring*, and made enquiries with then-rights holder Carlton. A year later, Taylor met with Gerry Anderson as he prepared *New Captain Scarlet* for broadcast, and obtained his blessing to try a remake of *Thunderbirds*. A successful proposal was made to Carlton, but within a month the company had been bought and everyone involved had been let go by new owners ITV.

The rights were sold to Working Title films for their 2004 live-action movie, and remained unavailable for several years. Taylor and his old chum Peter Jackson, himself a massive fan of the original series, continued to make occasional enquiries, going as far as making a CGI character test to show ITV.

In the meantime, Jackson eventually agreed to direct the three movies in the *Hobbit* cycle, reducing his availability for *Thunderbirds* to zero. Taylor had started Pukeko Pictures with

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SCI-FACT!
Thunderbirds Are Go! was also the name of a 1966 Thunderbirds film.



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Tracy Island is as deceptively peaceful as ever.

children's author Martin Baynton to develop Baynton's book, *Jane And The Dragon*, for television. The series was successful and led to another project, *The Wot Wots*. This put Taylor and Pukeko Pictures in a unique position to acquire the rights to Anderson's most popular series when the rights reverted to ITV and producer Giles Read approached them to create a new series.

Why make a new series and face harsh comparison with the well-loved original?

"I have mixed emotions about it, being such

a fan of the original show," he says. "I felt a real desire to have young children see the show again. I had no ability to get the original show in front of children; I don't own it, I can't distribute it. The only way I could have children impacted by this world was to make another series."

So what will be different about the new version of *Thunderbirds*? No puppets. While the ships and environments are being made with real models, the Tracy clan and other characters will be computer generated. The

use of stringed marionettes was financially impractical, and wouldn't result in enough usable footage to be shot on a daily basis.

"We found that children today just wouldn't engage with characters that didn't have complex facial expressions," Taylor says. "Our show is competing with the *Star Wars* animated series, *Ben 10*, *Max Steel* and other programming that features more sophisticated performances than marionettes could give."

Will the iconic theme music remain the same? Almost, according to Taylor. Ben Foster, music orchestrator for *Doctor Who*, is scoring the new series and is very heavily influenced by Barry Gray's original music.

Thunderbirds Are Go! will consist of 26 half-hour episodes, in contrast to the hour-long episodes of the original series. Again, the decision was made to conform to modern children's television formats of half-hour segments in order to keep the action moving quickly for younger viewers.

In addition, the Tracy clan is a bit younger in the new series, an effort to appeal to that younger crowd of viewers. And of course, no one will be smoking cigarettes onscreen, as in the classic show. Taylor hopes to send a more positive message to the kids watching.

"I hope that young people reconnect with the aspiration of rescue, of people selflessly putting themselves at risk to help others. It's cool that in the show, they don't get a medal for doing it, they don't wave to the crowd, they disappear again, and it's uncelebrated heroism. I hope that theme is resonant and creates a spark in our viewers." **SFA**

Thunderbirds Are Go! comes to ITV in 2015.