Don't Miss Mercury!

Don't pass up the opportunity to visit this amazing world, but remember to be respectful of Raggak or you might not be invited to return. *"Haldag ot Raggak!"*

The Adventures of Captain Proton

C H A P T E R T W O

DEATH OF THE PATROL

By Ray Hamil

In the last exciting episode of The Adventures of Captain Proton, Dr. Chaotica's evil plan to take over the Galaxy would have succeeded if Captain Proton hadn't intercepted his dreaded Blaster Ship and stopped the runaway flaming red sun from destroying Earth. But to save Earth, Captain Proton dove his ship into a deadly Space Vortex from which nothing had ever escaped.

Captain Proton's ship cut through the void of space with the swiftness of thought, the steering levers held under his strong hands with the control of a brain surgeon. They had been lucky to escape the deadly Space Vortex. He hated to think what might have happened if Buster Kincaid hadn't realized that their Imagizer beams could free them from the outer space vortex. He was just starting to relax when suddenly the entire ship jerked like a dog's leg in a bad dream and the world tilted sideways. Everything seemed to spin around Captain Proton like a child's top on a hardwood floor.

Another smashing jerk shook the ship as Captain Proton fought to control the spinning craft. His hands flew over the levers. Yanking!

Pulling!

Pushing!

Pulling!

He worked the control levers faster and faster. A tiny bead of sweat broke out on his forehead, but he ignored it.

"Asteroid shower!" Ace Reporter Buster Kincaid shouted as the spinning tossed him from his chair as if he was a bail of hay falling out of a wagon. He rolled with a hard thump up against the base of the Super-Destructo Beam, Captain Proton's newest and best weapon to stop the scum of the Universe.

Constance Goodheart, Captain Proton's secretary, held onto a rail as something smashed into the ship. The ship tilted sideways and she screamed.

A second bead of sweat broke out on Captain Proton's forehead. He normally sweated when Constance Goodheart screamed, because when she screamed, they were usually in deep trouble. This time was no exception.

He shoved the control lever forward, then back. Then forward again.

The ship jerked and spun even more.

Constance screamed again.

"Imagizer!" he shouted.

Buster Kincaid crawled slowly to a large button on a panel near where he had been sitting.

"Hurry!" Captain Proton shouted, fighting the control stick like it was the head of a giant snake about to bite him.

Constance Goodheart screamed once more.

Another bead of sweat sprung into being on Captain Proton's forehead.

As the ship spun sideways again, Buster Kincaid hit the button, then smashed back into the wall like a rag doll tossed there by an angry child. This time space itself was that angry child. A very large, very powerful angry child.

In front of Captain Proton on the Imagizer the images of huge chunks of pitted rocks flashed past.

Constance Goodheart stared as a huge rock brushed past the ship, then screamed.

"We're doomed!" Buster Kincaid exclaimed over the roar of rough space. "There are too many of them!"

Another drop of sweat formed on Captain Proton's forehead as a massive asteroid grazed the ship, sending it spinning again like an out-of-control merry-go-round at a carnival. Captain Proton fought the levers, righting the ship, then shoved the steering lever hard to the right to just miss another huge asteroid.

Then, as quickly as it had started, they were through the asteroid shower and back into the wonderful relief of the emptiness of open space. Captain Proton took a long, deep breath and turned to face his crew. "Now, what were we talking about?" The beads of sweat on his forehead had disappeared.

Buster Kincaid climbed slowly to his feet, shaking his head. "I really hate asteroid showers," he muttered. "I wish the Patrol would map where they are."

Constance Goodheart slowly pried her fingers off the metal bar and smoothed her skirt, then made sure her hair was in place.

Captain Proton noted all of this, but said nothing. He knew as a Captain of the ship and hero of the Incorporated Planets Patrol, that close calls were common in space. And the best way for him to handle it was as if it was an everyday occurrence. Often asteroid showers were.

"That last meteor just about smashed us to smithereens," Kincaid noted. "A few more inches and we would all be space junk floating out here."

Captain Proton shrugged. "We've had closer calls. Many actually." He didn't want to remind the intrepid reporter of their recent narrow escape from the Space Vortex after they had saved Earth from the flaming red sun.

Kincaid held up his hand. "Don't remind me."

"I wasn't going to," Captain Proton replied, smiling.

Suddenly the speaker crackled to life on the interplanetary vocalizer. "Captain Proton! Captain Proton! Come in "

"Must be Incorporated Planets Patrol headquarters," Proton explained, stepping smartly to his control board and pushing the blue button marked TALK.

"Captain Proton here," he explained, snapping to attention in front of the microphone.

"Return to Earth at once, as quickly as possible, and report to the Supreme Commander's office. Do you understand your orders?"

"I understand. Captain Proton over and out."

He turned around. "Kincaid open the Atom Attractor screens and use the Sun to increase our speed to Earth. When we're within thirty-one thousand miles we will turn the Atom Attractor toward Jupiter to help us slow down."

"No one has ever tried that before!" Kincaid said, a worried look playing across his face. "We could die!"

"We're needed on Earth at once," Captain Proton replied calmly, yet firmly, hands on his hips. "You heard our orders. Using the Atom Attractor will save us five hours and sixteen minutes."

"Understood!" Kincaid shouted, jumping immediately to work at his control board, flipping switches.

"Atom Attractor screens open and aimed!" Kincaid reported.

"Attract!" Captain Proton ordered, then grabbed the control lever and held on. He knew no one had ever tried this before. He knew the ride was going to be rougher than going through the center of an asteroid shower and the Space Vortex combined. But he was needed on Earth at once and this was the quickest way to get there.

The ship shuddered as the surge pulled the ship toward Earth. Constance held on as the acceleration tried to shove her against the airlock door.

Kincaid grabbed the edge of the panel to brace himself.

The acceleration kept getting stronger and stronger. Constance slipped off her feet but held on, almost as if she were hanging from the bar. Buster Kincaid managed to stay on his feet at his panel, but not by much.

Captain Proton stood firmly planted as if his feet were glued to the deck as he fought to keep the ship lined up at the beautiful green planet ahead of them. Earth. His home. A dot of sweat appeared again on his forehead.

Constance Goodheart hung on, her eyes wide. But she was using all her strength just to hang on and had nothing left to even scream.

"Eighty thousand miles!" Kincaid shouted, reading off the dial in front of him.

"Seventy thousand!"

"Sixty thousand!"

Captain Proton fought the steering lever as if the ship were a bucking bronco. He had ridden bucking broncos before, breaking the steeds just as he could break any ship in the Patrol. His legs spread, his feet planted firmly on the deck, he fought the ship as it twisted, bucked, and tried to shake his perfect control.

"Fifty!" Kincaid counted, his voice getting louder and louder over the rumbling of the ship as the forces of nature and the Atom Attractor tried to tear it apart.

"Forty!"

"Thirty-five!"

'Turn the Atom Attractor!"

Captain Proton ordered. "Focus it on Jupiter!"

Kincaid did as he had been told.

The ship lurched hard as the Atom Attractor beam suddenly cut off then jerked back to life pulling the ship in the other direction.

Constance screamed as she was flipped over the bar like a gymnast doing a giant swing.

Quickly the Atom Attractor slowed them.

Another dot of sweat formed on Captain Proton's brow, but he held on, keeping the ship flying true and straight toward the beautiful green hills of Earth.

"Perfect!" Kincaid reported as the ship finally swung into orbit.

Constance stood and applauded, even before straightening her hair and dress.

The dots of sweat on Captain Proton's forehead again vanished as if they had never been there.

A moment later they were entering Earth's atmosphere, completely under control.

Twenty minutes later Captain Proton and Buster Kincaid stood, arms behind their backs in a position of respect, facing the Supreme Commander of the Incorporated Planets Patrol.

The Supreme Commander's chamber was a massive room, with purple drapes hanging from the ceiling to the floor on all four walls. A huge table with a dozen chairs filled the center of the room. The Supreme Commander sat in the largest chair on one end of the table. Captain Proton and Buster Kincaid stood on

the far end of the table, staring at their leader over the long expanse of polished wood.

"I have bad news," the Supreme Commander reported. "Dr. Chaotica has taken over most of the Incorporated Planets Patrol ships."

"How can that happen?" Kincaid asked, clearly shocked.

Captain Proton was shocked, also, but didn't show it. He knew how evil Dr. Chaotica was. And how brilliant. Such a feat was possible for such a man.

"We don't know," the Commander replied to Kincaid's question. "But we think it was with the use of his evil Mind-Sucker Ants. One look from a Mind-Sucker Ant and Dr. Chaotica controls your every move."

Captain Proton had heard of the evil Mind-Sucker Ants, but had always thought them a myth, much like the myth of the giant Flag Men of Troon.

"What will he do with the Patrol ships?" Kincaid worried.

"Easy answer, my friend," Captain Proton replied "With the Patrol ships he can defend Planet X while he builds his Death Ray to attack Earth."

"Exactly!" the Supreme Commander exclaimed. "And I have to tell you the President of Earth is very concerned."

"Don't worry, sir," Captain Proton said firmly. "We'll save the Patrol."

"You are Earth's only hope," the Commander intoned.

"We will not fail," Proton reassured. He saluted and with Kincaid beside him they left the council chamber through a slit in the purple drapes.

Within the hour Captain Proton's ship was refueled and speeding away from Earth with Ace Reporter Buster Kincaid and Constance Goodheart standing beside Captain Proton staring into the Imagizer at the vastness of the Galaxy before them.

"How are we ever going to find the lost Patrol ships?" Kincaid asked.

"Easy, my dear friend," Captain Proton replied. "We know where they were when Dr. Chaotica stole them. We'll simply go there and trace them when we need to."

"How?" Kincaid asked, looking very confused.

"I will show you when the time comes," Proton said, laughing good-naturedly as if he had no care in the world. "But first we must make another stop."

"Where?" Kincaid asked.

"On the home world of the Mind-Sucker Ants."

Beside him, Constance Goodheart stifled a scream, then smiled at Captain Proton with a strained smile.

"Don't worry my dear," Proton assured. "I know you hate insects, spiders, and anything with more than two legs or three arms. But I will protect you."

She swallowed hard and then nodded as Captain Proton hit the Overdrive Jets and the ship surged forward into the blackness of space.

The Mind-Sucker Ants home world looked like a brown, pimple-covered lump floating in space. White-topped mountains thousand of miles high soared into space between deep valleys.

"I've never seen mountains like those," Kincaid exclaimed. "They're huge!"

"Of course you haven't," Proton snorted. "They're not mountains, they're ant hills. In the center of the largest we'll find the Queen of all the Mind-Sucker Ants."

"We're going in there?" Kincaid asked, his face as white as virgin snow in the year's first snow storm.

Constance made a choking sound, then seemed to slump like all the support had gone from her back.

Captain Proton ignored the reaction of his trusty team and aimed their ship right at the largest mountain.

"Hold on!" he shouted as the friction of the atmosphere lit the outer hull of the ship a bright red. "Kincaid, fortify the Repeller Shields. We've run into thick air here."

Kincaid jumped to do what Proton had asked, punching button on the board.

From out of the huge mountain ahead of them came a massive swarm of flying ants. Only these weren't normal ants. These were the size of a large man, with two legs and four arms and powerful wings supporting them. And the biggest, blackest, roundest eyes Captain Proton had ever seen.

Mind-Sucking Ant Creatures!

"There are millions of them!" Kincaid exclaimed.

Constance screamed, her eyes as wide as tea saucers.

Kincaid jumped to man the Destructo Beam station.

"No!" Proton shouted. "We don't harm any of them!"

"What?" Kincaid shouted. "We'll surely be destroyed!"

Captain Proton grabbed the microphone and flipped a switch. "We come in peace!" he said, his voice echoing over the land below as they sped toward the massive cloud of flying Mind-Sucking Ant Creatures.

The Ant Creatures all carried four Photon-Shooters in their four hands. Thousands of creatures times four Photon-Shooters each. No ship would stand a chance against such fire-power and Captain Proton knew it. But he pushed on.

He had to. He had to save the Incorporated Planets Patrol from the evil clutches of Dr. Chaotica and if that meant diving into a mountain high pile of Ants, than he would dive.

“They are ignoring you!" Kincaid shouted. "We're going to die!"

Constance screamed again.

"I'm going in the same hole they came out!" Proton shouted over the roar of millions of Ant-Creature wings as they surrounded the ship.

Kincaid looked stunned, then turned to Captain Proton. "They're not firing! How did you know?"

Captain Proton only shrugged.

Like a master seamstress threading a needle, Captain Proton managed to avoid all the flying Ant Creatures without hitting one and shoved the nose of the ship into the huge hole in the side of the white-tipped mountain.

Suddenly everything was dark.

Pitch dark.

Constance screamed.

Captain Proton understood her fear. Being in the dark in a cave filled with deadly Mind-Sucking Ant Creatures didn't please him much either. It was enough to give even a galactic hero like him the

willies.

Lights!" Proton ordered. "Not inside, but ahead."

Kincaid punched the button flooding the tunnel in front of them with massive high beams. The air was clear, but millions and millions of Mind-Sucking Ant Creatures filled the honey-combed walls, staring at them as they passed with huge, black eyes. Proton could feel their thoughts tickling at the edges of his mind, but none of them invaded his head. They would have been in for a fight if they had tried.

Constance took one look at the Imagizer and screamed. Then covered her eyes.

"Do you know where you are going?" Kincaid asked, gripping the rail as if he were falling.

"Down," Proton said, shoving the ship ahead around a corner in the tunnel and speeding onward.

Downward.

"Why do I feel as if we're going down to our own grave?" Kincaid mumbled, more to himself than to Captain Proton.

"A grave needs to be only six feet deep," Proton answered anyway.

"At the moment we're over three miles deep and still going."

"Wonderful," Kincaid snorted, staring at the image of millions and millions of Ant Creatures covering the walls of the huge tunnel. "Their thoughts tickle."

Captain Proton laughed. "They do don't they?"

Somehow Constance managed to not scream again. But she kept her eyes covered tight.

At eighteen miles deep, the tunnel-which had gotten pretty narrow and twisting-suddenly opened up into a massive room capable of holding a small moon in its space. A thousand spotlights all shown down at the center of the floor below, flooding the area as if it were daylight.

Captain Proton immediately stopped the ship and picked up the microphone. "I am Captain Proton of the Incorporated Planets Patrol. We come in peace."

"I know of you," a female voice said, seemingly from everywhere at once. It boomed, yet it wasn't loud. It was almost as if the voice had come from the inside of all their heads and been reflected off the walls and instruments of the ship. "Approach me, Captain Proton of the Incorporated Planets Patrol."

Captain Proton turned to Constance. "Don't scream when you see the Queen," he ordered. "She might take it as an insult and kill us all."

Constance swallowed, then nodded.

"I'm taking us down."

Slowly he maneuvered the ship toward the side of the massive space, lowering it on its jets

slowly so that he didn't burn anything or any Ant Creature below him. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, he had the ship on the rock surface and the jets shut off.

Open the hatch!" Captain Proton shouted. "We're going out. Unarmed!"

"Unarmed?" Kincaid asked, clearly not happy with the thought.

"Unarmed," Proton repeated. "It's our only chance of getting the Ant Creatures to help us and getting out of here alive."

Kincaid pushed the button and with a mighty clang that echoed through the entire cavern, the door of Captain Proton's mighty Patrol ship lowered, forming a ramp.

With Captain Proton leading, Kincaid to his right, Constance to his left, they walked halfway down the ramp and stopped facing the mighty Queen of the Mind-Sucking Ant Creatures.

Captain Proton was very proud of his secretary for not screaming at the sight that greeted them.

Flooded by the thousands of spotlights, the massive Queen's body was a mountain of white skin and blue veins. She was so large she easily would have covered all of New York City on Earth.

And she smelled fifty times worse than the sewers.

Captain Proton forced himself to not cough. Kincaid did cough. Constance only made a choking sound and then covered her mouth.

Thousands of Ant Creatures wearing no shoes and soft-looking robes climbed over the Queen's massive body like mountain climbers, washing, wiping, rubbing, patting, scratching. Every so often the flesh would move and one worker would lose his footing and slide off the mountain of skin and fat, landing on the hard ground of the chamber with a "Splat!" No other worker on the Queen's body seemed to notice and after a moment a clean-up team scurried out of a hole in the ground and picked up the body.

"Approach me," the female voice said, filling the chamber again and seemingly coming from everywhere.

"You two stay here on the ramp,"' he ordered.

"Thank you," Kincaid whispered; softly.

Constance only choked back a faint sob.

Captain Proton strode forward off the ship's ramp and right toward the mountain of flesh. The closer he got, the bigger he realized she was. And the worse she smelled.

Her head, if it was on the top of that mountain, had to be a thousand feet in the air. He also noticed for the first time a large line of Ant Creatures with baskets of food on their shoulders streaming toward the Queen, climbing upward steadily, pouring their food into a massive hole in the side of the flesh, and then going back down. Clearly thousands and thousands kept her fed continuously. But if she was the mother to this entire race, it made sense.

"Stop!" the Queen said.

Captain Proton stopped instantly and stood at attention, staring upward at where he guessed the Queen's head and eyes were.

"I know you are here to ask for my help," the Queen intoned, her words massive and filling.

"Yes, your Highness, I am."

"I will grant you that help," she said. "Dr. Chaotica used my people and my ships against my will to capture your Patrol Fleet. I will not stand for that."

With that sentence the entire mountain of flesh shook with what appeared to be waves of anger. Hundreds of workers on the Queen's body slipped and fell to their deaths in a massive, rapid-fire*Splat! Splat! Splat!*

Clearly the Queen was not happy with Dr. Chaotica.

"Thank you, Great Queen. With your help, we will defeat Dr. Chaotica."

"Go now," she ordered. "Before my next birthing cycle starts and floods this chamber with my young."

Captain Proton glanced around at the massive, moon-sized room and almost shuddered at the thought of that many baby Mind-Sucking Ant Creatures filling it.

"Thank you," he replied, bowed and turned for his ship.

When he reached the bottom of the ramp Constance and Kincaid both turned and went back inside. Kincaid's face was white. Constance looked as if she was going to be sick at any moment.

"Well done, crew," Proton complimented as the door slammed shut and they lifted off.

Ten minutes later he had maneuvered the ship back out of the long tunnel and into space, where a massive fleet of Ant-Creature Warships waited.

Captain Proton took his ship right up to the edge of the war fleet, paused for a moment to show respect to the commander of those ships, then turned and headed off into space toward the last known position of the Patrol ships the evil Dr. Chaotica had captured.

'They're following," Kincaid said. 'Thousands of them."

Proton only nodded. He had known they would.

"Good luck," the Queen said, her voice filling the ship as if she were speaking from every panel, every wall.

'Thank you," Captain Proton answered aloud, never taking his eyes off the Imagizer showing empty space ahead.

For the next few hours none of them said a word. It was just better that way.

How are we going to find out where Dr. Chaotica has taken the Patrol ships?" Kincaid asked as Captain Proton slowed their ship to a stop in space at the very point where Dr. Chaotica had taken them. The thousands of Mind-Sucking Ant Creature warships behind them also slowed and stopped, waiting.

"Easy," Proton answered laughingly. "We'll track them."

"How?" Kincaid asked, looking puzzled. "There's nothing out there but the blackness of space, the cold of nothingness, the emptiness of the void."

"I know," Captain Proton chortled.

"Then how?" Kincaid asked, clearly getting a little frustrated.

"Simple, actually," Captain Proton replied. He went over to a wall and tapped in three places in a precise order. A super-secret panel opened and he reached inside and pulled out what looked like a large flashlight.

"I didn't know that was there," Kincaid said, pointing at the super-secret panel.

"No one but me and the President of Earth knew it was there," Captain Proton said, looking very serious. "And if it had been opened by anyone but me, it would have exploded and destroyed the ship."

"Oh," Kincaid sighed.

Captain Proton stood there seriously, making sure his point was made.

"What is that?" Kincaid asked, pointing at the flashlight-looking device.

Proton held up the device, which seemed light in his powerful hands. But light didn't mean it wasn't important. It was. Actually it was very important, and only one of two in the entire Galaxy. "It's a Tratanium Reactionary Atomic Coordinating Kaleidoscope Energy Reducer."

Kincaid looked puzzled.

Proton laughed. "Just call it a T.R.A.C.K.E.R. for short, which is actually what it does." He handed it to Kincaid. "Replace the Energizing Coil in our Space Lights with this."

Kincaid carefully took the T.R.A.C.K.E.R. and opened a panel on his control board and put it inside.

"Ready?" Captain Proton asked.

"Ready, Captain," Kincaid replied.

"Imagizer on!"

"On, Captain," Kincaid replied.

"Space Lights on!" Captain Proton ordered.

"On, Captain," Kincaid assured.

On the Imagizer the most astonishing sight appeared. Where once had been simply open, cold, empty, space now suddenly there were bright purple lines heading off in the depths of space.

Constance gasped.

"Patrol ships all leave a trail," Captain Proton stated.

"When looked at through a T.RAC.K.E.R." Kincaid said. "No wonder it is so super-secret."

"Exactly," Captain Proton said. "Now it's time we go get our ships' back, don't you think?"

"Ready when you are," Kincaid replied, smiling.

Captain Proton hit the Jets and turned his ship to follow the purple, lines in space.

Behind him thousands of Mind-Sucking Ant Creature Warships followed.

The purple lines in space, left by the Patrol ships after being captured by Dr. Chaotica, led directly toward the Great Comet Storm in the outer system. The Great Comet Storm is a mass of hundreds of comets, all traveling through space together, sometimes side by side, other times trailing each other in long lines, their beautiful tails spread out like fans behind them.

'They sure are beautiful," Kincaid said, clearly awed.

Constance stood, staring, her mouth open.

"They sure are," Captain Proton agreed. "Space can be a very beautiful place, there is no doubt. And very deadly." He pointed to the sixth comet in a line of ten. The purple trails left by the Patrol ships all headed there.

'To a comet?" Kincaid said.

"Makes as much sense as anywhere else," Proton stated. "Miss Goodheart, brace yourself. Kincaid, take your station. We're going in."

Kincaid stepped firmly to his station. Constance grabbed a railing.

Captain Proton thrust the ship forward directly at the hurtling comet. Behind him, he noted, the thousands of Mind-Sucking Ant-Creature Warships fanned out into attack formation a distance back.

It took only a moment before their ship burst through the first layer of dust over the comet and saw what was happening below. Dr. Chaotica had created a massive factory to refit all the Patrol ships he had captured. Most of the head of the comet was covered in Patrol ships. And hundreds of Dr. Chaotica's fleet faced them.

Dr. Chaotica's evil laughing face filled the screen. "Captain Proton! I thought I had finished you in the Space Vortex!"

"You will discover, Chaotica," Proton answered calmly, "that I do not die easily!"

Chaotica threw back his head and laughed. Then he spoke clearly into his microphone, "But you will die today. Your one ship against my fleet. You stand no chance!"

"I think you need to see what's coming through the comet's dust cloud behind me," Proton said.

Dr. Chaotica glanced to his right, then turned back to face Proton. He was not laughing. "We will see who is the master today, Proton!" Chaotica sneered. "And who will be the master of the Galaxy." With that he cut the connection.

"He didn't like the looks of our friends, I guess," Kincaid chuckled.

"Not many people would," Proton agreed.

"Chaotica's ships are getting ready to fire!" Kincaid observed.

Constance screamed.

"Don't return fire until I give the order!" Proton shouted.

A moment later the lightning-shaped beams of Dr. Chaotica's weapons lashed out at them and the Mind-Sucking Ant-Creature Warships now coming through the comet's dust behind them.

The ship rocked, but Proton kept his course, blasting ahead.

Constance screamed.

Kincaid braced himself. "Now?"

"Not yet!" Proton shouted. "We don't want to take any chances of hitting our own ships!"

"Good thinking!" Kincaid agreed.

Again Dr. Chaotica's beams rocked the ship.

"We've been hit!" Kincaid shouted.

"Fire the Destructo Beam!" Proton ordered.

Kincaid punched the button on his panel and instantly one of Dr. Chaotica's ships exploded in a bright flash of light and thunder.

"Got him!" Kincaid exclaimed.

"Great shooting!" Captain Proton agreed.

Around them the scene became something out of a nightmare. Thousands of Mind-Sucking

Ant-Creature Warships opened fire, their beams snaking out like black whips, snapping around Dr. Chaotica's ships, sending them spinning away.

After only a moment it was clear that the Mind-Sucking Ant-Creature's weapons were stronger than Dr. Chaotica's weapons. Captain Proton was very glad the Ants were on his side.

"Find Dr. Chaotica's personal ship!" Captain Proton ordered. Both he and Kincaid knew exactly what it looked like, since they had seen it just before being sucked down into the Space Vortex.

"There it is!" Kincaid shouted as another blast from a Chaotica ship rocked them. "He's trying to get away through the comet's tail."

Proton only nodded.

"He'll be destroyed," Kincaid laughed. "No ship has ever made it through a comet's tail and lived to tell the tale."

Captain Proton gave his trusted friend a frown, then turned back to his controls. "The Ant Creatures can take care of the rest of Dr. Chaotica's ships."

"Easily," Kincaid agreed.

"The Patrol ships are rescued and again Earth is saved."

"There will be cheering in the streets of Earth today," Kincaid agreed again, smiling.

"Yes, there will," Captain Proton observed, frowning as he stared ahead. "But we have one more thing to do before we can join such a celebration."

"What's that?" Kincaid asked.

"We're going after Dr. Chaotica!"

Constance screamed.

"Into the tail of a comet?" Kincaid exclaimed. "He won't survive in there. We don't need to go after him."

"Yes we do," Captain Proton replied firmly. "In case he survives He must be stopped."

"But in the tail of a comet?" Kincaid asked.

"Yes," Captain Proton answered firmly. He picked up the microphone and spoke sternly. "Ant Creatures. Continue the fight. I will go after the leader, Dr. Chaotica. And if we do not return, I want to say one thing. Earth thanks you."

Kincaid looked pale as Captain Proton glanced back at him. "Ready?"

Kincaid only nodded.

Captain Proton braced his feet and thrust the control lever forward, sending them behind the

comet and into its tail.

Almost instantly they lost sight of the battle still being fought.

"Replace the T.R.A.C.K.E.R. in the light system with a High Bean Magnifier!" Captain Proton ordered. "We need lights!"

Kincaid jumped to do as Captain Proton had ordered, but he was just a fraction too late.

"You dare follow me into the grasp of hell, Proton?" Dr. Chaotica's evil voice echoed. "You are a brave man. Too bad you have to die!"

Dr. Chaotica's evil laugh was cut off with a blast that seemed to light up the comet dust around them.

`Their ship twisted end-over-end as Captain Proton fought to bring it under control.

Constance screamed.

Kincaid was tossed against the base of the Destructo Beam.

"Get the lights on!" Captain Proton shouted as he fought the control lever.

Kincaid crawled back over to the panel and snapped on the lights, showing them what was outside.

Again Constance screamed.

"We're going into the mouth of the Giant Comet!" Kincaid shouted.

Proton said nothing as he fought to regain control, sweat pouring off his forehead like he was standing in a shower.

"The ship is not coming around!" Kincaid shouted.

"The forces of the Giant Comet have us in its death grip!" Captain Proton shouted, fighting the lever as the ship spun.

And spun.

And spun.

Downward.

Downward.

Downward.

And as the ship vanished into the mouth of the Giant Comet, the sounds of Dr. Chaotica's laughter could be heard throughout the Galaxy. Laughter that sent shivers down the backs of every good citizen. For without Captain Proton, no one was safe.

To be continued. . . .

THE CITY OF THE FUTURE

JOURNEY ACROSS the fifth dimension to the year 2000 and watch as Captain Proton traverses the world, hot on the heels of a super-villain:

Seattle of the Year 2000

SCIENTISTS HAVE USED futuristic technology to reform once-dreary Seattle into a year-round vacation destination now known as "the jewel of the Northwest." A great scaffold rises from the surrounding foothills like a mighty hand, reaching megallanium-alloy fingers into the stratosphere, and extending across Elliot Bay to the Olympic Peninsula. Even today, government scientists are hard at work creating such materials. This alloy is so strong that the engineers who designed the "Paradise Dome" were able to make its beams so thin that one can only see them from downtown Seattle using a triocular. Perhaps more amazing, a tourist flyer says that this incredible structure weighs less than the razed Empire State Building! Remember, the scientists and engineers of the future are students today, so lend a youngster a hand; he may invent megallanium tomorrow.

Within the diamond-shaped latticework of the Dome, millions of microscopic weather stators hum quietly to themselves as they emit their controlling rays into the sky. Molecule-sized fusion reactors at every scaffolding intersection power these devices, absorbing hydrogen from the atmosphere and turning it into electricity for the stators as well as for the city below. A panel of climate and crop experts carefully plan each year's weather well in advance, commanding rain when needed-usually during the early morning when few people will be inconvenienced by it, and also cleansing the air for folks before they go off to work-or summer clouds to help moderate a hot day.

Today, for instance, the winter sky overhead is clear and crisp, men and women dress in light coats, the sun is a warming disk against a blue backdrop . . . even while clouds roil at the horizons, endlessly dumping millions of gallons of rain upon regions unfortunately beyond the Dome's influence. Sorry, Olympia! Only a decade ago, Seattleites used to endure half a year of gloom, and no one but sailors would live here, which is what prompted the city fathers to implement this super-science. Now

millions of professional men and women from around the globe choose Seattle as their home, and high-tech businesses have selected this once-sodden locale as their base-something that would; never have happened if they had to worry about months of morale-crushing darkness and washed-out roads.

Fresh air passes through the scaffold as through a screen door, but the weather-stators' rays also help calm the bluster of winter storms, rendering a gale wind into a refreshing breeze.

But what is most astounding about this great Dome is that it is not the only one! Many cities possess such Domes: London (though that one is also reinforced with radar-cannon to serve as a shield against air-raids), New York City; (including Manhattan), and Mexico City are among the two dozen international cities that have built such impressive tools for the comfort and productivity of their citizens. The Reds in Moscow say the; Domes are "cradles for lazy capitalists," but rumor has it they are developing a satellite capable of controlling the weather of their entire continent! The Chinese are said to be alarmed by this possibility. Stay tuned.

Homes in the Year 2000

THE YOUNG FAMILY of tomorrow has many more housing options than we do. Great apartment spires rise from the park like downtown city blocks like mile-high sequoias, each tower housing as many as ten thousand people. The central elevator cylinder houses four glass-walled, pie-shaped elevators that automatically identify who steps aboard and whisks them silently to their front door in seconds; these shoot up and down on a cushion of nitrogen below, and they are sealed from the vacuum above by electromagnetics. This pneumatic system also helps preserve the building from fire, since nothing can burn without oxygen. In case of fire, the residents in the year 2000 always use elevators for safe escapes!

Each apartment unit is more like a house cantilevered from the central cylinder. People sometimes buy these apartments-but most commonly, they purchase linear footage along the outside of the cylinder, and then build entire homes suspended in midair as large as any mansion of our day, but with a view that would astound even those living on mountainsides. The smaller homes and apartments look much like boxes hung from one side of the shaft, but the larger ones completely encircle the cylinder like giant Life Savers.

Some of these spires reach all the way to the Dome, helping suspend it while adding rigidity to these needle-thin buildings themselves.

Naturally, many people still live in traditional homes or apartments, but Seattle walks on the forefront of domestic technology, and the residents plan to eliminate all ground clutter within the next decade.

Communication in the Year 2000

NO LONGER MUST people wait for the delivery boy to drop off their morning paper in order to read the news. All across Seattle, on every street corner, one finds the ubiquitous public viewplate. Local companies donate these telephone-booth-sized devices out of human benevolence and civic pride, a shining example of how the corporations of the future have grown more community-oriented; of course, the donating company's name is stenciled on the rear of each machine. Atop the box of the newsvisor glows a neon number, indicating to which of ten news stations (1-2 cover local news, 3-5 national, 6-8 international, and . 7-10 Solar System) the machine is tuned. These also serve as emergency booths: If one is in need of police, fire, or medical assistance, all any good neighbor need do is throw the appropriate lever on the side of the newsvisor and emergency workers will appear within minutes. These, like all public services, run on electricity generated by the Dome's miniature reactors.

However, Seattleites usually need not search for a newsvisor if they need to place a call. All Americans (and, in the year 2000, people who once considered themselves Canadians now proudly call themselves Americans, as well-except for former province Quebec, which now calls itself the nation of Canada) wear teleradio sets. Men normally wear the miniature boxes on their wrists, since they serve double-duty as wristwatches; while women normally wear more aesthetically designed sets in the form of pearlescent pendants or polished hairclips. These teleradios perform all the functions of present-day telephones, yet also work like radios in that the user can place a call to a colleague aboard an airplane or even a family member living on the Moon! One Seattle company makes a special teleradio that acts as a message-recorder, a daily meeting-calendar, and an automatic letter-writer, but it is not very popular as most people will never entrust electronic brains with managing their careers.

Transportation in the Year 2000

LIKE MOST PEOPLE, Captain Proton rides the free civic trolley. Every First-World city operates two air-trolleys per major street, and several run twenty-four hours a day. Gone are the days of gridlock now that urban dwellers have forsaken their commuter automobiles. Employees arrive at their workplaces on time every day and spend much less time getting to and from work and home, since the air-trolleys possess exclusive access to the first-level air lane above the antiquated roads. Delivery vehicles may still cling to the pavement and creep to their destinations at forty miles-per-hour in town, but air-trolleys whoosh from block to block in seconds, stopping at raised platforms to drop off and collect passengers. The flat-bottomed, spheroid air-trolleys are powered by miniature fusion reactors of their own, and carry hydrogen fuel in tanks below the seating area. They stay aloft by inhaling cool air and superheating it. expelling it below decks in rocket fashion without producing the lung-clotting exhaust our present-day, gasoline-powered engines do. Atomic power is clean power!

Some people-usually the young-race through town using the public air lanes above the trolley lane. They drive personal air-cars shaped like UFOs, smaller than the Chevrolet you have in your garage but ten times as fast. These colorful vehicles can be seen in the skies all across the world, carrying tourists who prefer to travel privately or only with loved ones and who don't mind spending the extra time watching the scenery pass below. A typical air-car can cruise at half the speed of sound while consuming

less than a pound of hydrogen per hundred miles; only specially armored, commercial cruisers are sturdy enough to withstand the crushing blow that accompanies breaking the sound barrier.

Those who must reach their destination as fast as possible can choose from many alternatives, though the costs rise as fast as the desired speed. Anyone can afford to fly aboard a strato-plane, and Captain Proton does just that in order to track the villain to Kansas City. He spends less than six hours in the air and the ride costs him the equivalent of any air ticket. Along the way, he sees the great Midwest Floating Fields. The Fields fill tens of thousands of square miles of sky, glinting with robotic workers; gone are the days of toiling in the mud and wasting beautiful scenery for growing crops! Now the very air itself provides the world with nutrition. Great clouds of foodplants waft through the skies over our heartland, safe from insects and storms, tended and harvested by gentle robots. These farm-clouds actually obstruct the sun less than the typical summer puffballs while providing the same, much-welcomed shade. In fact, water-vapor clouds often form the heart of the Floating Fields, which absorb them. The Fields greatly reduce unwanted rain. Never mind those short-sighted complainers that Captain Proton witnesses at the airport; who really likes to be rained on, anyway?

When Captain Proton realizes his quarry is one step ahead of him and is en route to Hong Kong, he spends about five times as much to ride a jump-rocket. This trip only lasts an hour, but he lands with a sore back from the acceleration. Now the super-villain leads him on an underwater race back to Seattle, and Captain Proton pays double air- fare to ride a high-speed, luxury submarine liner which uses ocean water to power its fusion reactor and jet through the hollow center of the doughnut-shaped vessel. This ride lasts eight hours and is a bit rougher than the air trips.

Weapons of the Year 2000

AFTER CAPTAIN PROTON and the super-villain disembark at Pier 104 back in Seattle, the villain's henchmen open fire with handheld atomic ray guns. These are no bigger than the revolvers of our day, but their mini-reactors can unleash power equal to modern-day cannon! Atomic ray guns can also be designed as artillery for use in eliminating machines and buildings, but these use reactors to fire uranium slugs or spray jets of million-degree fire. Of course, such artillery is much larger and restricted to military use.

Captain Proton easily outwits these henchmen using a Solaradium shield to reflect the atomic energies of their ray guns back at those very ray guns, melting them right out of the men's hands. Before they get done dunking their red hands in the water of a multicolored fountain, Captain Proton has them securely fastened to one another with spider cord, a super-light, unbreakable rope he picked up at the submarine gift shop. But their leader has vanished.

Captain Proton picks up the villain's scent . . . and discovers the man has launched into space! Captain Proton must spend ten times a normal airfare to hire a ride to Earth Station Ten aboard a common ground-to-orbit rocket. These atomic-powered craft are shaped like bullets, but bullets that can carry a dozen people-and their fifty pounds of luggage each-to the wheel shaped Earth Stations in less than ten minutes. These four thousand orbiters serve as way stations to the rest of the Solar System, hotels for the wealthy, retirement homes for the frail (who exalt in the low-gravity sections), and scientific laboratories. But, perhaps most important, they house the Earth's Planetary Defenses. Each Station

contains one atomic laser powerful enough to instantly melt the largest interplanetary-battleship into slag, as well as several hundred smaller lasers, individually manned, suitable for combating whole fleets of fighters and other small craft. But wait; the magic of year-2000 super-science doesn't stop there! All four thousand Stations can merge their mega-lasers into one huge pulse they call the "Equalizer." No evil world in this Galaxy or any of the other visible galaxies can hide from Earth's defenses! Humanity is forever safe from unwanted aggression of any scale.

Captain Proton Saves the Future

YET CRIMINALS and madmen will always abound, so we will always need men like Captain Proton. Witness this: Shortly after his arrival on Earth Station Ten, he tracks down the super-villain to the heart of the orbiter. There Captain Proton discovers the dead bodies of five brave soldiers whose job it was to operate the mega-laser; they float in zero-gravity, necks broken by the villain's pulse gun that was undetectable to the spaceport authorities. These weapons are very rare anywhere but in the hands of the world military, using an atomic-powered gravity lens to thrust a crushing shockwave from their disklike forward projector. Some-such as the villain's-are small enough to be shaped into a ring yet can capture enough gravity power to break any bone in a man's body.

Captain Proton quietly works his wav across an auditorium-sized room lined with humming atomic generators. At the center of the room stands the mega-laser itself; its synthetic-ruby cylinder is as tall as the Statue of Liberty and as wide as a city bugs and over its controls stands the evil genius, his devious plan about to be executed. Just as the generators start to hum louder, just as a faint glow begins to appear at the core of the giant ruby, Captain Proton seizes the moment to launch himself from a wall across the empty space and capture the villain using magneto-cuffs, inescapable handcuffs of the future.

His job done, Captain Proton brings the villain to Earth Security, where the man will face justice.

After it all, Captain Proton looks out a station porthole upon the Earth's blue sphere rolling through a field of stars, and he recalls the adventures of this day, all the places down there he visited, and marvels at this grand world and all its technology that he takes for granted. This was only one day in an astounding life.

Captain Proton smiles a wise yet wistful smile, knowing that the very super-science that nearly destroyed the world today also saved it. Deranged minds will always fail when confronted by such minds as our hero has, and super-science is only as powerful as the man who wields it!

SCREAM AND SCREAM AGAIN

by Lester Lee

The ray of light came in through the window like a river of warmth, flowing over Constance Goodheart and her perfectly clean desk like high clouds over distant mountain peaks, like the laugh over a lover's lips, like the water of her bath around her body the night before. The light soothed her, made her smile

just as her bath had done. She loved baths, she loved warm light. Sometimes the thought of taking a bath in the sunlight made her shiver with pleasure. Often when tied up and threatened by Weapons of Death and Destruction by some evil villain Captain Proton was fighting, she thought of warm baths in the bright sun. The thought often kept her from screaming.

So as the warm ray of light bathed her and her perfectly clean desk, she didn't think of mountain peaks or lover's lips, but instead thought of taking a real bath, and the thought made her shiver as it always did.

She smiled, her eyes closed. Daydreaming was always better with her eyes closed. Captain Proton had told her that once, and since then she had always closed her eyes in her best daydreams. Sometimes she could bring on a really, really good daydream simply by closing her eyes. But she didn't use that power often. But in the warm ray of light, a daydream seemed natural, so she closed her eyes.

It wasn't until the warmth of the light dimmed and the memory of warm water eased into the back of her mind that Constance Goodheart, secretary to Captain Proton, again opened her eyes.

At first she thought she'd been taken to another room, much bigger than her office, with the strangest-looking furniture. But she hadn't felt anything move her. Even the really nifty Move-lt-Around-Ray that the people of Voy had invented still had a sensation of tingling when used. She had just been warm, her eyes closed, daydreaming, thinking of a bath. She hadn't felt any tingling, she was sure.

Shivering, maybe, but not tingling.

Now she was sitting on the edge of what looked to be a huge chair, her feet dangling off the ground. She remembered sitting like that when she was a little girl. She had hated it then. She didn't much like it now, either.

Then she realized it was her chair she was sitting on. And her huge desk that seemed to stretch out in front of her like a vast plain of smooth wood, empty and shining. She had a thought: Something had caused her office to get much, much bigger.

Or she had shrunk.

It took her a moment before that second thought sunk completely in. She was proud of her full-sized, robust figure. Her worst nightmare was shrinking.

And the more she thought about shrinking, the more panicked she got.

Finally, it had to happen. Welling up out of her like an exploding volcano, she tipped her head back, took a deep breath, and screamed.

The sound sort of half-echoed around the seemingly huge room. Usually her screams filled all of a space and made people turn. Now her scream was as small as she was and actually didn't fill much of anything, sounding almost hollow in the echo. Had someone put a dreaded scream-dampening-field over her office?

No, she decided. That couldn't be the cause. The scream was small because she was small.

What had happened to her? What had caused the shrinkage? Was she still shrinking?

That thought made her scream again, another pitiful excuse of a sound, and it didn't make her feel even the slightest bit better.

She looked around, gazing out over the top of her desk like peeking over the edge of a window. It had to be her office that was growing.

That was it. The office had grown. An Expando-Ray could do that. It would have taken some time. Maybe her daydream had lasted longer than she had thought. They did that sometimes.

She looked down at herself. Her dress still fit just as it had this morning. Therefore, she couldn't be shrinking. The office had to be growing.

She nodded. She had the answer.

But why? And how? Now that she thought about it, Expando-Rays make a loud roaring sound when used. She hadn't heard any roaring sound. So what could have happened to her office, her desk, her chair to make it swell up like this? Was it something she'd done? She'd never had that effect on furniture before.

Maybe it had been the warm beam of light?

But the light coming in the window had only been focused on her, not the entire office. So it couldn't be the entire office. It had to be only her. She was shrinking, dress and all.

With the thought of the comforting bath and swelling furniture now pushed far away, she screamed again.

The sound echoed again, quickly muffled by the seemingly immense size of the room. Why couldn't someone hear her? Often her screams made Captain Proton come running. When the beam of light came though the window, he'd been in his office, doing important Galactic Hero work, getting ready for their next mission. His door was closed. So why couldn't he hear her scream?

She screamed again.

Nothing.

She forced herself to take a deep breath. Captain Proton, her boss, had told her when in a tight spot, always take a deep breath. It cleared the head, made things not seem so bad, he had told her. Actually, it gave her more air for another scream, so she screamed again.

No one came running. The door to Captain Proton's office remained solidly closed. Maybe he had been hit with a warm ray of light and been shrunk, too.

And if that was the case, then he would just now be defeating the bad guy who did the shrinking and would soon come and restore her to her full-sized beauty. He'd saved her a hundred times before, he'd do it again if he just knew she was tiny, too.

As soon as he took care of the bad guy.

She screamed again, really, really loud this time, putting everything she could behind it.

She listened to the echo. Captain Proton did not come running and she couldn't hear any sounds of a fight going on in the other room.

She took another deep breath and this time didn't scream. Captain Proton was right. It did clear her head. Not as well as thoughts of warm baths and bright light, but almost. She was about to jump down from her chair and go to her boss' door, when another thought hit her: What if moving made it worse?

Captain Proton often told her to just stay in one place. When in danger, moving around made things worse. He never had said what the "things" were exactly each time, but she hadn't asked either. What if she jumped down from her chair and shrank some more? That might be a "thing." Then where would she be?

She had been kidnapped by the most evil villains of the Galaxy, tied up in spaceships and castles, threatened to be shot by death rays and poison-tipped darts. Danger and getting tied up was part of the job description working as the secretary for the galaxy's top hero. But never had she been shrunk. Her dress had been shrunk once, but both Captain Proton and Buster Kincaid, ace reporter, swore they had averted their eyes at the appropriate time in the rescue.

But now she was the size of a large baby, dressed in a tight dress, with the shrunken body of a woman. She needed help and she needed it fast. But unless she had no other choice, she would stay put, on her own chair, just to make sure she didn't make "things" worse. Right now she still had another choice.

She screamed again. Really long and loud this time, putting all her small lungs behind it, and aiming the scream as best she could at Captain Proton's office door.

A moment later the door slammed open. "Constance, don't you understand I'm trying to-"

She sort of waved and smiled at him over the top of the desk like a child waving at a parade.

"Oh, no!" Captain Proton shouted. "The Balloon People! They're already here. I didn't expect them from the Cloud System for at least another day."

She wanted to ask him:*What Balloon People?* And if he knew she was going to get shrunk, the least he could have done was warn her.

But she didn't get the chance. At that moment, riding on the warm beam of light, a dozen Balloon People smashed through the window and floated down into the office, scattering like leaves in front of a high wind, ending up in all corners of the room. Constance used to love playing with balloons and in the leaves when she was a child, just about the size she was right now. Except back then it was natural to be this size. Right now she didn't want any balloons or leaves. And she wanted to be bigger.

Each Balloon Person was about the size of a good, overripe melon, had four little legs, two fat arms carrying tiny guns, and an ugly, smiling face indented in the side of the balloon. Some were red, others blue, a few green. The leader of the Balloon People seemed to be the yellow one with the pink ribbon who sneered at her.

She screamed.

"Stay down!" Captain Proton shouted to her, then dove for his office door, rolling on the floor and coming up kneeling, his trusty twin ray guns in both hands.

Down? Down where? What did he mean by that? She was only two feet tall. How much more down could she get? She screamed again and then ducked as Captain Proton started firing.

Pop!

Pop!

Fizz! Fizz!

The Balloon-People were firing back. She hoped Captain Proton could stay out of the way. Those Fizz-weapons didn't sound good.

Pop! Pop!

Fizz! Fizz!

Captain Proton was such a good shot. It was one of the many things she admired about him.

Pop! Pop!Pop!

Seven Balloon People no longer had their air. How many more could! there be left?

Fizz! Fizz!

Four Balloon People hovered over her head, pointing weapons at her.

She screamed, expecting to be fizzed at any moment.

Instead, they all sort of floated down beside her and grabbed her with their rubbery-feeling little hands. Then they tried lifting her.

Pop!

They had shrunken her so they could kidnap her!

She screamed again.

Pop! Pop!

Two more Balloon People ran into the point of Captain Proton's ray guns.

The four Balloon People who had their little rubbery paws on her tried to lift her.

She screamed.

They didn't budge her. Luckily she'd had a full lunch instead of just a salad.

Suddenly, as if from the land of the giants, Captain Proton loomed over her and the four Balloon

People who were trying to lift her.

"Get your hot air off my secretary!" He exclaimed, pointing both ray guns right at the four Balloon People.

They let go of her and started to rise toward the ceiling, trying to draw their Fizz-Guns as they went.

"Drop those weapons! Float right there!" Captain Proton ordered. "Or join your gas god on the other side of the rubber!"

They stopped and dropped their weapons. One hit Constance on the head and she screamed.

"Reverse your Shrinking Ray!" Captain Proton demanded. Now!"

"Or you'll do what?" the Balloon Person with the ribbon snorted, floating over beside his four remaining Balloon People.

Captain Proton flipped one ray gun into his holster with a twirl, and with his now free hand grabbed the leader of the Balloon People. Quickly he rubbed the Balloon-Leader on his pants leg, up and down, up and down, real fast.

"Ow! Hey, that tickles. Ouch! Not so hard!" the Balloon-Leader shouted.

Then, just as quickly as he had started, Captain Proton stopped rubbing the Balloon-Leader and turned and stuck the Balloon-Leader to the wall.

Instantly Constance knew what her boss had just done. When she was a kid she had rubbed balloons on her dresses and then stuck them to walls. It had always been lots of fun. It must still be fun because Captain Proton was smiling.

"Hey!" Balloon-Leader shouted. "Let me down!" The little guy kicked his feet and waved his hands, but it didn't do any good. He was stuck on the wall right beside the Incorporated Planets symbol.

Bring my secretary back to normal size and I'll think about it," Proton replied. "Otherwise I'll stick all of you on the wall and dig out my darts. I was the Incorporated Planets dart champion. I never miss."

The four Balloon People who were floating above her seemed to vibrate with that threat. Their little rubbery faces seemed to pucker, as if they were losing air.

Their leader struggled and struggled, but didn't come unstuck. Finally he sighed, "All right, Captain Proton!" The Balloon-Leader pulled out what looked like a lollipop and spoke into it in his native language.*"Hiss-hiss. Hiss-sss-hisss-hisssss."*

Instantly the warm beam of light was focused on her again.

She screamed.

"Hold on Constance!" Captain Proton warned.

His voice calmed her and she tried to relax with the light. But this time she didn't close her eyes.

Slowly, as if she were getting closer to something in the distance, the room around her got smaller and smaller until finally she was sitting normally at her desk. She glanced down at her dress. Luckily it was still perfectly sized. Pieces of rubber littered the office, and small burn marks surrounded Captain Proton's office door from the Great Balloon Gunfight.

Captain Proton reached out and grabbed two of the remaining four Balloon People. "Constance. Get the other two."

He started rubbing them on his legs.

Constance stood and looked at the remaining two Balloon People who had looks of intense fear on their rubbery little faces. Carefully, she reached out and grabbed them, making sure to not poke them with her long fingernails. She didn't want to pop one of them and get Balloon guts on her dress.

"Rub them on your skirt," Captain Proton said. Then he turned and stuck the two he held on the wall beside their boss.

She rubbed the rubbery little Balloon People on her legs.

She wanted to scream, but didn't. She stopped rubbing and handed them, disgusted, to Captain Proton, who quickly gave them a hard rub and stuck them beside their friends. Rubbing balloons as an adult just wasn't as much fun as she had remembered it.

Then, hands on his hips, Captain Proton faced the wall full of Balloon People. "Well, are you ready to negotiate for entry into the Incorporated Planets?"

"We are," the Balloon-People leader said. "You have proven you can beat us. We will gladly join an organization that is more powerful than we are. Safer that way."

"Good," Captain Proton replied, nodding. "I'll get the treaty for you to sign."

He turned and marched back into his office.

Constance watched him go, wishing that someday he would finally get around to asking her to marry him. She sighed and sat down on her chair, staring at the Balloon People on the wall. It had all been a test. Her shrinking had been just part of a big entrance exam for the Balloon People. She sure wished Captain Proton had warned her. But there must have been a reason that he hadn’t. He always had a good reason and it was always right.

"I feel myself slipping," one Balloon Person said.

Constance frowned at the five Balloon People stuck to her office wall.

"Yeah. I'm slipping too." another agreed.

The leader of the Balloon-People looked at her and then winked. "Guess you'd better rub us again."

"Please." another whispered.

At that moment one of them fell off the wall, floating down and toward her, smiling. She jumped back, sliding up on her desk to get away from the evil creature.

It floated toward her.

She backed up, sliding across the top of her desk.

It kept coming.

The only thing she could think to do was scream.

Behind her, in his office door, Captain Proton laughed and the evil Balloon Creature frowned and floated back toward the wall with the others.

Once again Captain Proton had saved her.

A typical day in the life of the secretary of the Galaxy's most famous hero.

THE FORGOTTEN AND LOST RACE

by Don Simster

Buster Kincaid glanced around, his sharp ace reporter eye catching every detail, every odd piece of information. He very seldom missed anything when it came to details. And right now, there was a lot to observe. He and his friend, Captain Proton, along with Captain Proton's beautiful secretary, Constance Goodheart, were tied to wooden posts in a clearing in the middle of a massive jungle deep inside a planet covered in ice. A splinter had cut into his hand. A detail, not important, but painful.

Around them fifty members of the Lost Race sat, their breathing sticks making bubbles in what they called their Pool of Life. The Lost Race looked almost human, except for a few important details. First off, they breathed only water. They could move around in the air, but always seemed to have a strawlike hose or stick in water to breathe.

They wore skin-tight suits with different colored circles on them to indicate some sort of rank Kincaid had yet to figure out, even with his sharp eye for details. The Lost Race also had no eyelids and huge black eyes that made it seem as if they were always staring and must have made it really tough for them to go out into bright light Right now all fifty of them were staring at their three prisoners across the Pool of Life.

Sweat ran down Kincaid's face, back, and arms. The jungle around them was an impossible jungle. They had been on a mission to the ice-covered planet called Red Mountain. The planet had that strange name because of the one red-coned mountain that stuck above the plane of ice that covered the rest of the planet. The desert planet of Phoenix Prime needed water and Captain Proton had volunteered to explore Red Mountain to see if the ice there would help them.

But just after landing, things had gone wrong for them. Constance had slipped into a giant crevice in the ice, and when Captain Proton and Kincaid had lowered themselves down on ropes to save her, they had discovered warm air coming from a vent in the ice at the bottom of the crevice.

Captain Proton had decided they would explore the vent, but halfway down they all slipped and

slid down into this huge warm ocean, where the Lost Race people captured them and tied them up in this jungle near what they had called their Pool of Life. All and all, it had not been a good day.

"What are they going to do with us?" Kincaid asked Captain Proton.

Proton only shrugged against his bonds. "I don't think it will be anything good for our health. But I'm still struck by how human they look. Does that seem odd to you?"

"I think getting killed by them down here in this jungle under all this ice is odd," Kincaid replied. "I don't have any idea what to think of them. Why did you call them the Lost Race when we were captured?"

Captain Proton shrugged. "I read an old book once where humanlike creatures were living underground. In the book they were called the Lost Race."

"As good a name as any, I suppose," Kincaid replied.

Captain Proton only nodded sagely. Kincaid knew that when Proton did that, he was going deep in thought and shouldn't be disturbed.

Constance sobbed, slumped against her post. She had stopped screaming ten minutes ago. Kincaid figured she had just worn herself out. Captain Proton never seemed to notice her screaming, for some reason. Kincaid grew tired of it quickly, but had never said a word. At least not yet. Maybe someday he would.

Kincaid tried to work against the ropes holding him, but only managed to shove the splinter deeper into his arm. He just hoped he would live long enough to worry about getting that splinter out and asking Constance to stop screaming so much.

"It seems things are changing," Captain Proton said softly as all fifty of the Lost Race stood as one, the spots on their body suits making it a very odd sight.

"When they untie us," Captain Proton whispered, "I'll create a diversion. I want you two to run, get back to the surface and the ship, go for help."

"But Captain," Kincaid objected. "We'll never make it back with help before they kill you!"

"A chance I'll have to take," Captain Proton replied, stiffening his shoulders as two of the Lost Race moved to each pole and began to untie them.

Captain Proton waited until it was clear that they were all untied, then he lurched against his two captors, knocking them both into the Pool of Life with a mighty shove.

Kincaid instantly smashed his boot down on the bare foot of one of his captors. It hopped away making yipping noises through its breathing straw, blowing huge bubbles in the Pool of Life.

Captain Proton punched out the two holding Constance, then quickly dove at the last one still grasping Kincaid. Kincaid felt his arm yank as the creature was torn away by Captain Proton's forceful blow.

"Run!" Proton shouted, turning to face the onrushing hound of Lost Race creatures, moving

around the pool at them while keeping their breathing sticks in the water.

Kincaid turned and started to dash toward the jungle, away from the pool, when he heard Constance scream.

He stopped and looked back. The Lost Race people had covered Captain Proton in a mass of bodies, but Kincaid could tell he was still fighting. Constance had been grabbed by the guard with the hurt foot and two others were running toward her.

Kincaid knew that if he went back to help her, he too would be captured and all of Captain Proton's valiant fighting would be wasted.

He had to follow Captain Proton's orders and escape. It was the only chance they all had.

He turned and headed for the jungle at full speed, moving up hill as much as he could. He figured the closer he got to the ice walls and ceiling of this huge underground jungle, the less chance any of them would follow him.

Behind him he heard Constance scream once more, then the sounds were muffled as he ducked into the thick brush.

Captain Proton had once told him that the best way to avoid someone chasing you is to do exactly the opposite of what they would expect you to do. Right now, Kincaid knew the Lost Race creatures would expect him to keep running away from the Pool of Life, toward the ice. He had to do something different at first, to throw them off track. Ten paces into the jungle he turned right, moving along the edge of the jungle, going around the clearing and the Pool of Life.

After about a hundred running steps he stopped and ducked behind a log, trying to calm his heavy breathing so he could hear if someone was close behind him.

Nothing.

He waited.

Nothing.

No one was chasing him. Was it possible they couldn't move very far from the water? Was getting away really that easy?

He waited another full minute before easing up from his hiding place. Then cautiously, he moved toward the edge of the clearing, checking every detail before each step to make sure he made no noise. Finally he was behind a large tree where he could see the clearing and the Pool of Life. Captain Proton and Constance were being led around the Pool of Life. They both seemed to be all right, which was a great relief to Kincaid.

On the other side, the Lost Race creatures stopped and formed a line along the Pool of Life. One creature touched a pole sticking in the ground, then looked upward and shouted, "Ancestors, hear us!"

Then to Kincaid's astonishment, the ground near the pool started to open.

Slowly, the rumble filled the air as the rocks moved back, forming a round hole.

Constance screamed over the sound, but it seemed to Kincaid more like a faint squeak.

"The Pit That Time Forgot," one creature shouted when the rumbling stopped.

The other creatures hooted and blew in their breathing tubes, forming huge bubbles in the Pool of Life.

The lead creature stopped them after a moment and faced Captain Proton. "Intruders in our world, you who dared to swim in the Sea of Living, connected to the Pool of Life, you are sentenced to spend two units of time in the Pit That Time Forgot."

"Exactly how long is two units?" Kincaid heard Captain Proton ask, his voice level.

"For you," the leader answered, "it will seem as only a moment."

Kincaid noticed the wrong sounding detail in the sentence, the two words that were the most frightening. "For you . . ."

"I assume," Proton pushed, noticing the same two words that Kincaid had noticed, "that time will be longer outside the Pit."

"My great, great, great grandchild will be the one to greet you when you come out."

"And we will be free to go at that time," Proton asked.

"Of course," the leader said. "You violated our home, contaminated the very water that sustains us. This is your punishment."

Kincaid wanted to run into the clearing and shout, "No!" But instead he remained frozen behind the tree, making no sound as Captain Proton nodded to the leader of the Lost Race, then took Constance's arm and stepped down into the Pit. Clearly there must be some sort of staircase there.

Down, down, down, as if the Pit were slowly swallowing them feet-first.

After they vanished, the Pit slowly closed back up with more massive rumbling. Then all of the creatures dropped their breathing tubes and simply dove back into the Pool of Life, vanishing under the surface. They didn't even leave a guard.

Kincaid stayed silent, watching the clearing, waiting.

Nothing moved.

In the giant cave under the ice there was no wind. Just heat and jungle and the clearing with the Pool of Life that lead to the vast ocean they had fallen into after sliding down the vent in the ice.

Finally, after waiting a good hour, Kincaid stood and moved slowly back into the meadow, expecting a Lost Race creature to appear out of the Pool of Life at any moment.

None did.

Kincaid moved up to the post the leader of the Lost Race creatures had touched to get the Pit to open. It looked just like any other post stuck in the rock. Wooden, worn in a number of places, rounded on the top.

He touched it, then waited for the ground to open.

Nothing.

He shoved the post.

Nothing.

He inspected the post, looking for buttons or levers.

Nothing.

"Okay," he said to himself. “Think.”

In his mind he went over what the leader of the Lost Race creatures had done to open the hole in the rock. Detail by detail. He was just about to repeat every tiny move when the clearing was filled with a low growling.

Kincaid looked around, then froze. Coming out of the jungle on one side of the clearing were three massive dog-like creatures. They had red eyes, long, sharp teeth, and saliva dipping and foaming around their mouths. Their shoulders were as tall as he was. Never in all his life had he seen such huge canine creatures.

Kincaid knew without a doubt that if those hounds caught him, he would be their next meal. Actually, at their size, he would be just a snack. Running faster than he had run in a long time, he turned and headed across the clearing into the jungle.

The hounds were behind him, chasing him. But the good news was they weren't gaining ground on him. The bad news was that he wasn't gaining any ground on them either.

Focusing on the path ahead through the jungle, making sure of every step so that he didn't trip, he ran for the ice. Behind him the three hounds crashed through the brush. Kincaid had no doubt that as big as they were, they were just running right through the small trees.

The ground sloped upward in front of him and the jungle was get- ting thinner. But he was also getting tired. He didn't dare even slow down.

The higher he climbed, the thinner the jungle, until finally he broke out onto a rock slope that slanted up toward a huge ice wall. It was much cooler up here, which felt good to his sweating, exhausted body.

He allowed himself to look back. The giant hounds were still coming. Ahead of him he just hoped there was an opening in the ice wall, or he was going to be trapped there, a cold snack for the hounds.

A few minutes later he had reached the wall and turned to the right, running and scrambling along the ice where it met the rock. It was hard going for him, but behind him the hounds were having the same problem.

Finally, when it seemed as if there was no hope, he came upon a massive crack in the ice. A small stream ran out of the crack and down toward the jungle. He forced himself to stop for just an instant. If this crack lead to the surface, there would be a breeze blowing through it. Did he feel a breeze?

He tried to stand still as behind him the hounds gained ground, growling, dripping saliva. If he didn't hurry, they would soon be dripping his blood out of their mouths.

Yes! There was a breeze, blowing into the crack. There was a way out here.

He sprang back into motion, at first running up the rock slope inside the crack, then slowing as the crack narrowed.

Finally, the crack narrowed so much that he could barely slip through. He knew the hounds behind him would never fit. He was safe at least for the moment.

He stopped, working to catch his breath as he watched the growling hounds try to force their broad shoulders up into the crevice and fail.

"Sorry guys," he said aloud. "You'll have to find another dinner today."

One of them looked at him with glaring red eyes and Kincaid shuddered. It was time to move on. He had to get back to the ship, get some weapons and equipment and come back and rescue Captain Proton and Constance from the Pit That Time Forgot.

It took him the rest of the day to get up through the ice to the surface and another few hours to find the ship.

The first thing he did was make himself a good meal and warm up, then he started putting together the equipment he would need to go back. He worked slowly and carefully, finally falling asleep only after everything was ready. Even though he knew Captain Proton and Constance wouldn't be noticing the time passing in the Pit That Time Forgot, he still slept fitfully, as if not going back at once was wrong. Would Captain Proton have gone back at once? Or would he have rested first, made sure he was ready? Kincaid didn't know and made a mental note to ask Proton after he was rescued.

Ten hours later, well fed and rested, he started back for the crack in the ice that lead down into the clearing and the Pool of Life. He was carrying three weapons, blasting equipment in case he had to go through the rock to get them out, and food. It was a heavy load, which made the going slow, but he managed, only slipping a few times getting back down the ice crevice.

Eight hours later he inched through the jungle, Energy Ray Gun ready and armed in case any monster hounds appeared, until finally he was on the edge of the clearing that contained the Pool of Life. It had now been a full two days since Captain Proton and Constance had gone down into the Pit That Time Forgot. Kincaid just hoped the Lost Race leader had been right and it would only seem like a moment to Captain Proton and Constance. Otherwise they were going to be really hungry and thirsty by the time he got them out of there.

He was just about to head out into the clearing when the heads of Lost Race creatures appeared in the Pool of Life and slowly climbed out, picking up breathing sticks and putting one end back in the water.

Fifty of them lined up again along the edge of the Pool, then one of them moved forward, touched the pole stuck in the ground and said, "Ancestors, hear me." Again a massive rumbling shook the ground as the earth opened into the Pit That Time Forgot.

Kincaid couldn't figure out what was going on. Did the Lost Race creatures have someone else to put down there? Kincaid couldn't see anyone if they did.

Maybe they had had a change of heart and were letting Captain Proton and Constance out. Could that be possible? Or maybe they had decided to kill them instead. But either way, now was his chance. The Pit was open, he had weapons. It was time for a rescue.

He put the food down, took a second ray gun for his left hand, then jumped up and ran into the clearing, ray guns in both hands.

"Don't anyone move!" he shouted.

As if on one neck, every head of every Lost Race creature turned and looked at him, the lidless eyes staring at him like he was something completely unexpected.

"Now let them out of the Pit!" Kincaid ordered, moving up so that he faced the Lost Race creatures. He kept both ray guns aimed at the leader near the pole, in case he moved to close up the Pit and trap Captain Proton and Constance.

"No need for that, my friend," Captain Proton said from the Pit as he helped Constance up the steep steps just inside the rock hole. "We have served our term. We are free to go. Is that correct?"

The leader of the Lost Race nodded. "You have served your time. You are free to leave now, as was ordered by my great, great, great grandfather, in the time before yesterday."

Kincaid lowered his weapons as Captain Proton smiled at him. In all his years he had never been so confused. "How? Why?"

Captain Proton laughed. "I'll explain it all when we get back to the ship. And from the looks of your equipment, you know the way."

Kincaid could only nod.

Captain Proton turned to face the leader of the Lost Race. "We are sorry we broke your laws, swam in your Sea of Living. It will not happen again."

The leader bowed slightly to Captain Proton, who returned the bow, always the perfect diplomat Then Captain Proton took Constance’s arm and lead her to where Kincaid waited.

'Time to get out of here," Proton exclaimed.

"And not a minute too soon for me," Kincaid said, as he turned and headed back for the jungle, keeping a sharp eye out for monster hounds.

Back in the ship, as the Red Mountain ice planet vanished in the distance behind them, Kincaid turned to Captain Proton. "You knew all along you were only going to be in that Pit for a few days."

"Of course," Proton laughed. "Give or take a day or so. Otherwise I would have fought to stay out of it."

"But how did you know?"

"Details, my dear friend," Captain Proton answered. "During the time we were being held, the leader aged dramatically. He was young when we were captured, almost an old man when I faced him near the Pit. When he told me of our sentence, I knew it would not be for long."

"So the Lost Race age very quickly," Kincaid said.

'Twelve hours is a long life, I would guess," Proton said. "And since under the ice. in the oceans, there is no such thing as day or night, their life spans seem normal to them."

"And time didn't stand still for you in the Pit?" Kincaid asked.

Captain Proton quickly steered their ship around an Asteroid Shower, then shook his head. "We slept, mostly. Luckily I had a few rations and there was water in the Pit to drink, or we would have been very hungry. But it turned out almost pleasant, didn't it Constance."

Constance almost nodded.

Kincaid laughed. "Glad it turned out the way it did. Can't believe I didn't see the detail of them aging. I'm supposed to see details."

"Not something you would normally look for," Proton said. "And by the way, thank you for the rescue attempt."

Kincaid smiled. It wasn't often that Captain Proton thanked anyone for anything. Usually people were thanking him for saving them. "You are more than welcome."

"So," Proton continued, "tell us about your two days outside the Pit. Was it eventful?"

"Very," Kincaid answered. And then set off telling them how he escaped. In the telling, the ice got slicker, the cold colder, the hounds bigger and closer in the chase. But all that didn't matter. It was just details. He got all the big stuff right, just as any good reporter would do.

Afew words before we blast off on our regularly scheduled flight to other worlds. I've been getting a lot of letters by readers who care about where our kind of fiction is going, and I've decided that'll take a lot more talking than usual.

It's time for you readers to pick up the charge. Write me, and attend scientifiction conventions, and get new readers involved in scientifiction!

As we journey through the twentieth century, where do you think scientifiction is going? Where do you want to steer the great rocketship of the genre?

Read on, Ensigns!

WHAT A MESS!

by Leonard R. Findleson

DEAR SARGE:

Ivariciously enjoy anticipating the arrival of your fiction periodical, and often that enjoyment is matched by the quality of story populating the space between the lurid covers. Which reminds me, the cover art you consigned for Vol. 3, No. 2 was exceptionally inappropriate for the content of the issue. Although the story "Captain Proton and the Sandmen of Mercury" involved a female heroine who assisted the grand Captain in his mission, at no time did either of them wear clothing in the least reminiscent of the cover art (which was clearly supposed to illustrate this story; it is obvious to anyone, considering how large the Sun is against the crystalline surface of the planet). Anyone "in the know" is aware that a human walking around in a bathing suit on the surface of the planet Mercury (mean distance from Sun: 36,000 miles; equatorial diameter: 3000 miles) would die instantly!

That aside, I wish to express my enjoyment of the story by Robert F. Danman, entitled, "Captain Proton and the Caverns of Doom." I especially enjoyed the loquacity of the Captain when he extricated himself from the rostrum of the evil Lord Dragoon during the river battle aboard the vicariant vessel, "Drum." He is so cavalierly cartesiatic!

Then I began to be distracted by typographical errors you and your editorial assistants should have easily spotted and corrected. For example, on page 126, the text reads, "Captain Proton donned

his blaster belt and he leaped from the rail of his schooner to the planks of Lord Dragoon's vessel, knocking aside two pirates before even drawing the weapon." Anyone with a basic education in the English language comprehends that one doesn't merge two unrelated clauses in such a way. You must use a comma before the conjuncture, in this case, "and." However, my editorial suggestion is that such sentences be better utilized if split into two discretionary sentences instead of trying to keep them as one.

I will not go into every instance of misappropriation of the English language that I identified on the pages of your magazine, but let it be I said by me that you truly need to keep a diasporic eye clearly focused on the quality of language you publish, otherwise educated readers (myself included) will continually be disinclined to continue subscribing, and, instead go in search of finer-edited fiction.

*I couldn't've said it better myself, Ensign Findlehammer! I'll crack my whip harder behind my editorial assistants!) from now on. By the way, for more about the mysterious planet Mercury, see*The Planets of the Future,*elsewhere in this issue.*

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCURATE SCIENCE

by Dirk Renschenhammer,

a.k.a."Dr. Dirk"

DEAR "SARGE":

Being a fan of your magazine who works at a prestigious Eastern Technological University, I feel it is my duty to point out some scientific shortfalls in the fine stories you have published.

For example, in "Alien Invasion Foiled Again!" by Jack "Doctor" Michaelson, we see this sentence:

"As Captain Proton stood firmly on the smoky, flickering command bridge of the limping battle cruiser, watching his gunners suddenly open fire on the flagship of the enemy's galactic-conquering fleet, he could hear the distant rumble of that vessel's explosion as it lit up the cluttered asteroid belt with a flash of multichromatic light."

Now, an educated reader cringes whenever he hears mention of sound traveling across vacuum. Physics and chemistry both dictate that sound cannot travel through a vacuum, at least not in the wave-lengths that the human ear can observe. I'm certain that I'm not the only reader who cringed at this error. Here is another example from the same story:

"Shaking madly, Captain Proton's still-damaged cruiser accelerated through the speed of light and kept accelerating! The vast pinwheel of stars crowding the endless galaxy whooshed past, leaving behind them rainbow-colored streaks in the velvety blackness of infinite, interstellar space."

Here we find a number of scientific errors. First, everyone knows the speed of light is the upper limit to how fast a spaceship can travel. Look at what Einstein wrote and you will see that, although to out- side observers a near-lightspeed vessel might appear to be traveling faster than light, it in fact is not. That's Relativity. Second, the galaxy is not endless; it contains approximately 10 million stars. Third, stars do not leave "rainbow-colored streaks" as a near-lightspeed vessel passes them; in fact, you will not notice much movement at all, because you are not moving faster than the speed of light, and stars are usually hundreds of light-years apart, so you would only notice movement after a few years' travel. However, artifacts of the Doppler Effect might play a minor part in making approaching stars look "blue," and stars moving away look "red." Fourth, interstellar space is not "infinite." The newest studies anyone can read in the scientific journals point out that the Universe is only four billion years old, and then there's the Relativity Effect, which puts an upper limit on the size of the Universe. It's all very scientific and difficult for the layman to understand, but if your readers are interested, they can check out the scientific journals. Also, the cruiser would not "Shak[e] madly," because there's no air in vacuum, so the waves (similar to those that occur from breaking through the sound barrier) from breaking through the "light barrier" (if there were such a thing, which there is not) would not occur.

I could go on citing other examples from the text of your magazine, but you get the idea. Since I study all the papers that I type for the Professors in the Physics Department at my prestigious Eastern Technological University, I am perhaps more well-versed in the most modern technological knowledge than your average reader or copy-editor. I am willing to go over your manuscripts for scientific accuracy before you send them off to production, and I will do it for a very low fee.

Besides these minor, scientific problems, keep publishing rousing, technologically accurate scientifiction! Oh, and please print more nonfiction articles about future technology and astronomy; those sections are my favorite part of the magazine.

Well, thanks for the offer, "Dr. Dirk," but my editing budget's all tapped out. Just so all you sci-smart Airmen out there don't cringe while reading the stuff on these pages, 111 make sure my assistant reads more of those journals to keep up on modern super-science! And don't worry, science fans. We'll have nonfiction articles every issue-if you keep wantin' 'em!

MORE FIGHTIN’

by Joe Monty

DEAR SARGE:

Boy do I love reading about Captain Proton and his adventures in outer space! The story by Jack Jackson, "Captain Proton Versus the Moon Men," that was great! And I couldn't put down the magazine during "Captain Proton's Adventure at Alpha Centauri," the mini-novel where he and his loyal companions had to stop the invasion of Earth without firing a weapon on the Centaurian homeworld because they have laws against that. Captain Proton is a genius, plain and true. Who else would have thought to use a paper clip and six jars of alien baby food like that? These kinds of stories are what get me to read instead of just going to sleep after a hard day at the plant.

But then I got to "Baby Turns Six," the touchy-feely yarn by Theodore Salmon. What were you thinking when you picked that one out of the slush pile? Sarge, that wasn't scientifiction, it was about talking and weirdoes and emotions and girl stuff. It wasn't even a Captain Proton story! Heck, I didn't even understand it. Scientifiction isn't about psychology-that's not science! If I wanted to read something like the "Baby" story, I'd pick up*Aunt Martha's Book of Confusion and Depression* . Gee whiz, Sarge! if you do it just to make grown men cry? That's not why we buy*Captain Proton* . We buy your pulp because it's the only kind of reading we do. If you publish a story like "Baby" again, I swear I'll cancel my subscription for a full year, and I'll tell all my buddies to do the same.

Here's a simple checklist to help you pick the right story: Is Captain Proton the main character? Does the Captain get into lots of fights? Does he get taken prisoner and escape using his wits and high-tech gadgets? Is there an evil villain who must be stopped? Does the fate of the world hang in the balance? Does the reader rocket to strange and wonderful new worlds and meet alien races? Are there lots of superscience machines and weapons?

You usually do such a good job picking Captain Proton stories. Every once in a while, though, you go and publish one of those original stories that none of us guys like to read. Just stop doing that and you'll keep your loyal readers subscribing well into the future.

Thanks for writing, Airman Monty. Boy, would it be exciting to put you and the next reader in the same room for a night! (By the way, if you get ten of your buddies at the plant to sign up for the magazine, you'll get two full ranks' promotion, with all rights and privileges.!)

THE RUINATION OF SCIENTIFICTION

by Norma Rinspad

DEAR EDITOR:

I just finished reading my first copy of Captain Proton, and I must say I am appalled. Is this the sort of material we want the children-the adult readers of tomorrow-reading? Unfortunately, such dreck as what

you print in your magazine tempts (I will not even begin to discuss the cover!) the young and ignorant reader into buying yours over a respectable magazine like*Astounding* . Imagine this horrifying possibility: *Captain Proton* pushes*Astounding* off the racks!

This is unacceptable, yet here is the nightmare I foresee: First, magazines like*Captain Proton* pander to the young and uneducated. Second, kids start telling their friends that the only "hip" magazine is *Captain Proton* . Third, new readership of "real" scientifiction magazines falls. Fourth, advertisers pull their ads from the real magazines and invest more heavily in rags such*as Captain Proton* . Fifth, no real scientifiction is available for new or veteran readers, so the only people who read in our genre are innocents and youths. Sixth, the death knell: The only scientifiction that gets published is drivel, such as that published in your pages.

True, you had the good sense to publish the beautiful and moving tale "Baby Turns Six," by Salmon, but you are allowing children and childish readers to push your magazine into oblivion. If scientifiction as a healthy and evolving genre dies, you'd better believe it will take*Captain Proton* with it.

It has taken many years for people to start taking scientifiction seriously, if even a little bit so. Let us not allow mindless space opera to displace true scientifiction. Let us not allow the literature of the mind to wither and die.

You, Editor, hold in your hands the very future of scientifiction. Much as the man who controls power over the atom must decide if he will use the fruit of his mind for good over evil, you, too, must decide if your creation will work to help build this great genre or demolish it

I will pick up another copy of*Captain Proton* six months hence (I understand the difficulties of producing a magazine). If I find in your pages more work of Salmon's quality, I will tell all my fellow scientifiction fans and writers to subscribe to your magazine. If, on the other hand, I see only more of the drivel that populates the majority of your pages, I will ensure that none of my friends or colleagues-or their friends, family, or colleagues-ever spend a cent on your magazine, as consumers or advertisers.

It's your choice. Don't blow it.

CAPTAIN PROTON'S FUTURE

by Benny Russell

DEAR SARGE:

A lot of my friends at school make fun of me for reading Captain Proton because they say that adventures like the ones the Captain has could never happen. They're wrong! Captain Proton fights for the good and the right and fairness to everyone. He's showing us how to make our own world better

while he fights to save us from bad guys like Dr. Chaotica who think that only their kind should be in charge.

I've been writing my own Captain Proton stories. I haven't told my friends that because they'd just laugh at me. But I know that Captain Proton's future will someday come true or at least a future a lot like it.

"Onward and Upward!" as Captain Proton might say.

*Well, well, well! Whaddya think of that, kind readers? Would you rather see more of the brave Captain, as Airman Monty asks- no,*demands!*Or do you agree with Ensignette Rinspad, that stories about the Captain are wrecking scientifiction? Heck, I'll do whatever you subscribers want. . . our boys are "over there" fighting for democracy, aren't they? So I'm giving you all the vote!*

Yep, you guessed it: These last two are the letters that decided me to ask you Readers to tell us where to go. Every current subscriber who sends in a vote automatically becomes an Airman; everyone who starts a new subscription by sending in this form earns the rank of Ensign-but don't worry, you'll get to be an Airman soon enough! You can earn higher ranks in other ways that you'll learn about in your membership packet.

So keep reading and writing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

D.W. "Prof Smith sold his first short story, "The Dingbats of the Tree People," in 1927 and has been writing science fiction ever since, penning such classics as "Skudove Frenchie" among others. Since turning his attention to writing full-time, he has become one of America's most beloved and fastest authors, writing master works under many names, including Lester Lee, Don Simster, Dean Wesley Smith, and Ray Hamil. He is even rumored to be part of the famous writing team of Sandy and Schofield. Lately he has been writing "The Adventures of Captain Proton," a task the "Prof" says he loves almost more than eating.