

Ink—fuel for Todd's spaceships

When I met with Todd Propst the other day, it struck me that I would need to revise the old phrase about "a young man who has been going places."

Todd is "a young man who has been going spaces" — outer spaces, where his mind, like an inter-galactic rocket, has traveled beyond the stars.

Not only has he the imaginary powers of a budding science fiction writer, but an additional, very real talent for recording his ideas through the medium of cartoon art.

His visualizations of weapons and spaceships of the future are nothing like the doodlings of an idle dreamer. The drawings are sharply delineated, executed with attention to minute detail, and appear to be the clean-cut sketches of a well-trained professional. It was my impression that together with a skilled engineer's blueprint for the intricate mechanisms within, Todd's conceptions might well receive serious consideration from explorers of outer space.

More amazing than Todd's sci-fi comic strips with their hero-villain characters and their suspense-filled derring-do, is the way he got started.

"I watched cartoons on TV," he said, "and I collected hundreds of adventure comic books such as Batman, Spider Man, Superman, Marvel and D.C. comics."

Who among us does not firmly believe that watching television and reading comic books is a straight road to nothing in the way of child development? Who hasn't been convinced that the "boob tube" is a stultifying hypnotic device through which a young mind receives stimuli, but derives little or no nourishment? Or mental exercise?

Todd, it would seem, is the exception to the rule. His response to programming meant only for entertainment was to become so highly programmed with his own ideas and impulses that before long he began to create his own adventure tales, tales far more intense than mere fiction, for he himself was the featured hero.

It is Todd, at 17, who stows away on a jet, thus beginning the four-volume comic strip "Adventures in Outer Space." He is the one who fights against the villainous Slade in such episodes as "No Escape from Planet Krumpston — S"; "On the Run"; and "Then and Yesterday."

And out of these fantasies have come firm convictions. "I believe in all the possibilities of outer space," Todd said. "I think like the astronauts that it's our final frontier. We are earthbound — the space shuttle is only the beginning of what will be our future in space...It is very narrow-minded," he went on, "to look up at the stars, and realize that each one is a sun with its own surrounding planets, and then say there's no other life out there... There's got to be."

The reed-slim, East Burke High School junior smiled, his dark brown eyes intent as he spoke. "When I camp out with friends on summer nights," he said, "we look up at the stars and talk about stuff like that."

Kevin Todd Propst was born in 1963 at Valdese General Hospital. He is the son of Maxine Seitz Propst, manager of the Highlander Outlet store in Morganton — and Jerry Lynn Propst, who works for Premiere Products, Inc. Todd's brother Tim, a Navy man now serving on shore patrol in Brunswick, Maine, was featured in this column when he returned last year from the Indian Ocean, where he had been on duty at the time of the ill-fated hostage rescue attempt in Iran. Tim's first child, Joshua, was born a few weeks ago.

"It was Tim who really got me started reading Flash Gordon and watching re-runs of 'Star Trek'," Todd said. "My brother and I collected those life-like GI Joes, Civil War toy soldiers and toy weapons. We had about 2,000 Army men — and we'd set up battles on the bedroom floor. We'd shoot at the soldiers with rubber bands and little stones ... and made up adventures as we went along."

"Most of that stuff got lost or broken over the years," Todd explained, "but I got a lot of ideas from those games we played. I've kept all of my drawings, notebooks, papers, everything I ever did, because I kept hearing my father and mama say things like 'I wish I'd saved my old Chevrolet,' or 'I wish I'd kept that.' I decided I'm going to keep everything of mine. Now mama says I'm a pack rat."

He was about four years old, he said, when he began drawing "weird comic figures on sketch pads and school notebooks. I'd show them to my friends and make them laugh."

These days his reading has expanded to science fiction and history. He owns over three dozen Star Trek paperbacks and shelves full of World War II books and historical fiction. "And I've got all those old comic books," he said. "I wouldn't part with those."

It was in 1979 that he began "Adventures in Outer Space." "I did seven editions of Volume I," Todd said. "I kept improving it, and I think I must be getting better, because I only did four editions of Volume II." He has also turned out numerous drawings, architectural plans, and pencil sketches. He won second prize at the Drexel Fair for a pen-and-ink drawing



Todd Propst



Marion H. Lieberman

of a gunman, and has exhibited his work at the Science Fiction Art Show in Lenoir. He was one of the painters who worked on the huge murals on the

wood panels mounted in front of Surety Savings and Loan during the extensive renovation of the building. "I worked on the Civil War scene, the Liberty Bell and the picture of Paul Revere," Todd said.

Except for art classes in school, Todd has had no formal art training. "Steve Helser taught me at Drexel Junior High," he said. "And Ron Barnes, my art teacher at East Burke, has taught me a lot and encouraged me to improve my work."

He has set his heart on a career as

an artist. "I'd like to work for a comic book company," he said, "or have my own syndicated strip." He fingered his sleek tan cowboy hat thoughtfully. "I'd like being an astronaut, even though I guess that could never happen."

Meantime he is busy with school and his part-time job in the kitchen at the Foothills Nursing Center "where I wash dishes and clean up," he said. He likes to ride his bike, roller-skate, camp out and hike in the mountains. "Tim and I used to go fishing a lot at Lake James and Lake Rhodhiss," he said. "Both my grandfathers own fishing boats, and we'd go out in one of those." He still enjoys fishing with his dad.

He has also taken a few guitar lessons. "I like guitar, and wish I could play," he said. "I didn't have time to keep up." He did complete his karate course at the Collett Street Recreation Center.

Most of all, his attention is focused on new adventures which keep whirling around the spinning axis of his imagination. "I get ideas all the time," he said of his cartoon stories.

"My three main heroes are John Wayne, Captain James T. Kirk of Star Trek, and the original Lone Ranger, Clayton Moore. When I'm working on an episode, and my characters get in a jam, sometimes I go blank figuring what to do. I think to myself, what would those guys do in a situation like this? They inspire me...and suddenly, I have the solution..."

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Todd's comic strips

Todd, I am sure, is "a young man who is going places."

Earthbound — or in outer space — I hope that all his flights, however fan-

ciful, come in for happy landings.

(Marion H. Lieberman is a local columnist.)