

The More Things Change ...

A tale of the Legion of Super-Heroes

by David Meadows

They gathered around the tomb of the fallen hero. The first of them to fall, it had affected them deeply and all of them felt the grief.

“He was the noblest of us all!”

“He gave his life selflessly to save another!”

“I—I hope I can be that brave when the time comes!”

As one, they turned to their leader. It was only right that he should say some words at a time like this. He sighed and looked down at the ground for a long moment, then gazed around at his friends and team-mates.

“My friends,” he began. “We stand before this tomb to honour the fallen, but also to reaffirm our pledge to those we serve. We will always be there when they need us, and any one of us would gladly lay down his life for any of them. Thus we honour the great example of Superboy. I swear this on my name... Krypto the Superdog!”

His chums in the Legion of Super-Pets, Streaky, Super-Horse, and Super-Monkey, all voiced their approval at this noble speech and then and there they agreed they would always honour the memory of their pal, Protty the shape-changing blob, who sacrificed himself to restore Lightning Lad to life.

Without warning, the bent figure of an old woman stepped from behind the surrounding rocks.

“Well said, Super-Pets,” she cackled.

Krypto leapt back in surprise. Few people could sneak up without his super-hearing catching them. This smelled suspiciously of magic!

“Who is this and what does she want?” he thought.

“My name is unimportant, though you may learn more of me in the future. Yes, don’t be surprised, my Pets, for I have the power to read your thoughts. As for what I want, it is more a matter of what you want. For I am here to help you.”

Streaky the Supercat scratched behind his ear, pretending not to be interested. “How can an old woman help us?” he thought in a nonchalant manner.

“Because I know the secret of returning your friend Protty to life!”

The Super-Pets crowded round the mysterious woman.

“What?”

“How?”

“Tell us more!”

The woman cackled again. “Patience, patience. There is a simple spell that will revive any of Protty’s race, but for it to work I need four special items... items that are hidden in hard-to-reach places that will require great courage and cunning to reach!”

The Pets held a hurried discussion. While they were not certain they could trust the mysterious old woman, they agreed that any chance to resurrect their friend, no matter how slim, must be attempted.

The woman quickly explained what the four items were and where they may be found. The Super-Pets drew lots to determine who would go after each item. In a flash, the four heroic pets were off on their missions.

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Comet the Super-Horse woke from a dream of romping through space with Supergirl riding him. It took a few moments to gather his thoughts. He must have passed out when he left the time-stream. “How strange,” he thought. “That has never happened before.” He started to stand up and almost collapsed in fear when his legs wouldn’t work properly. Then he looked down at himself and realised why – he was in a human body! That would explain why he had passed out—he no longer had his super powers to protect him from time travel!

The Super-Horse looked up into the sky, and sure enough there was a blazing comet, bright enough to see even in the full daylight. A witch’s curse caused him to change to human form whenever a comet was overhead, but how unlucky was he to choose to travel to an exact moment in history when a comet had appeared?

Picking himself up again, he walked towards where he could see a distant town. He would just have to complete his mission as a human, then wait for the comet to vanish so he could fly back into the time-stream.

The not-so-Super-not-Horse soon found himself in a busy town, admiring the classical architecture and clothing. The sights reassured him that he had come to the correct time period—as did the ancient Greek language that the people were speaking. He drew some curious looks, as he was clearly a stranger in town, but nobody challenged him.

While he was wondering where to go next, a disturbance broke out in the nearby marketplace. Two youths were roughing up an old man, who seemed quite harmless. Though a couple of women screamed to see the violence, nobody stepped forward to help the old man, who the thugs had pushed roughly to the ground.

“I must concentrate on my mission,” thought Comet. “I would like to help, but there are two of them, and I don’t have my super-powers as long as that comet is in the sky! It is much more important that I—”

A cry of pain from the old man brought Comet to his senses. Of course he must not stand idly by while somebody needed help! Is that what Superboy, or his mistress Supergirl, would do? Ignoring the fact that he no longer had super-powers, Comet galloped into the fray. A hard shove knocked the wind out of one thug, and a clip round the ear took the fight out of the second. The youths picked themselves up and ran like the cowards they were. Comet helped the old man to his feet.

“Are you all right, sir?” he asked politely. Without thinking, Comet had spoken modern English. The man looked at him strangely.

“Thank you, young man. I am sorry that I don’t speak your language to thank you properly.” The elderly man spoke ancient Greek, which of course Comet understood perfectly even without his super-telepathy. He answered in the same language.

“Think nothing of it, sir. But perhaps you could help me now. I’m looking for a famous man, a scholar named Euclid. Do you know where he may be found?”

“Why... yes! I did not realise I was famous, but—I am he!”

Comet was astounded. Because of his brave action to help this man, his own quest was going to be completed that much sooner!

“That’s wonderful news. I have a request, and I know it might sound strange, but...”

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In the 20th century, Streaky the Supercat whooshed down to land outside Superman’s Fortress of Solitude. Of course there was no way he could lift the giant golden key—only Superman could do that—but his mistress Supergirl had recently installed a Super-Cat-Flap in the fortress’s door. Streaky slipped through the flap and into the mammoth fortress.

As he padded silently through the great halls, heading towards one specific room, Streaky’s super-hearing detected voices talking.

“There must be some weapons here somewhere.”

“And with them we will crush Kal-El and rule this world!”

Ugly laughter came from the pair, and Streaky moved stealthily towards the sound. Soon he got a good look at the two men.

“Gasp! Kryptonian villains escaped from the Phantom Zone!” thought Streaky. “There are weapons in this fortress that can hurt even Superman, and if these criminals find them they will be able to ambush him when he comes home!”

While he was thinking this, Streaky was backing carefully away from the two Kryptonians—but not carefully enough, as he backed into a big metal pipe and sent it crashing to the ground! Streaky froze and hoped the criminals wouldn’t spot him.

“What was that?”

“Superman?”

“No—look, it’s a cat”

“Get it!”

“Drat!” thought Streaky, turning and running as fast as his Super-Legs would carry him. With a yell, the two villains charged after him.

“I’m not strong enough to fight two Kryptonians,” thought Streaky as he skidded down a corridor. “I must think of a plan!”

With sudden inspiration, Streaky turned and flew back the way he had come from. The surprised villains reached for him but missed him by a literal whisker as he streaked past them. They took up the pursuit once more, their pounding feet close behind him. Flying faster than ever before, Streaky whooshed into the chamber that contained Superman’s Phantom Zone projector. Now if he could only find... Yes! There it was!

The Kryptonians raced into the room an instant behind the Supercat and looked around for him. They soon spotted him—heading right for them, something long and colourful trailing from his mouth.

They charged forwards, but Streaky swerved aside at the last moment, flying right around their legs. Without stopping, he circled round their legs twice more, then streaked off towards the Phantom Zone portal.

The villains leaped in pursuit again—only to stop short as they found their legs wrapped in invulnerable Kryptonian string! They stumbled, flailed for balance, and both fell headlong through the portal! In a flash, Streaky deactivated the Phantom Zone projector.

“Well, that was close!” thought Streaky as he stopped for a quick wash. “It’s a good thing most criminals aren’t very intelligent! Now... what was I here for?” Then he spied a shelf of lead jars. “Oh, yes...”

*

After a very short trip through time, Krypto the Superdog flew down to the biggest city on the beautiful planet Trom. In the time of the Legion of Super-Heroes, the planet was a wasteland, devastated by space pirates. Krypto had travelled through time to visit it as a thriving culture. The power to transmute any element into any other meant that the Tromites could meet every material need simply by thinking. This allowed them unlimited leisure time—and it showed! The city was a showcase of art and beauty. Houses were constructed of a thousand glittering minerals and every public place was filled with dazzling sculptures, made of any material the artist wished.

“What a marvellous planet, full of wondrous people,” he thought. “What a tragedy that all this must soon be lost!”

Krypto landed and looked around curiously. There was a lot to take in, and it would be difficult to find the item he needed among all this splendour.

Cries of alarm roused him from his thoughts.

“Look! That giant green sculpture is toppling on that house!” a man cried.

“Nobody is near enough to transmute it to a lighter element!” gasped another.

“The people in the house will be crushed!” wailed a young woman.

Without a further thought, Krypto sprang into action, racing towards the house to save the occupants. His x-ray vision showed him that a young family was within, all unaware of their danger.

As he approached the sculpture, Krypto began to feel a strange weakness.

“Great Rao! The sculpture is made of green kryptonite!” he thought as he veered away. “I won’t be able to catch it but... I only have seconds to save that family!”

Without any thought for his own safety, the rapidly weakening superdog crashed through the window of the endangered house and set up a deafening barking. The young couple within leaped up in alarm.

“Eeek a dog!” cried the woman.

“He’s trying to warn us of something!” said the man, rushing past Krypto and looking out of the window. “Great galaxies! That sculpture is just about to crush us! I’ll change it into harmless nitrogen!”

With a thought, the Trommite changed all of the green kryptonite in the giant statue to inert gas, which dispersed rapidly, saving the house from sure destruction!

Krypto sat panting on the floor, trying to recover his strength from the close brush with kryptonite. The Trommite man patted him gratefully.

“Thank you, boy. I don’t know where you came from, but without your warning...”

His wife picked her yellow haired baby out of his crib.

“Look, Jan! Look at the brave doggie that saved us!”

“Gosh,” thought Krypto, “That must be my master’s friend Element Lad as a baby! It’s a good thing that I saved him from being crushed!”

Meanwhile, the man was removing a shining pendant from around his neck.

“Here you are, boy.” The man tied it to Krypto’s collar. “I give this to you this medallion of rare metal as a gesture of our thanks and as a medal for all the galaxy to know how brave you are!”

Krypto wagged his tail happily, wishing he could tell the family how pleased he was. Then, remembering his errand, and feeling quite recovered from the effects of the kryptonite, he leaped up and flew away.

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Super-Monkey flew into the Legion Club House, to find several of the Legion boys playing a game of Galactic Darts.

“Not fair, using your magnetic powers to guide the darts,” Colossal Boy was laughing as Cosmic Boy scored yet another bulls-eye.

“Why don’t you join in with us, Chameleon Boy?” Sun Boy was asking.

“I don’t feel in the mood for games,” said the Durlan, sadly. “Not since my pet, Proty, died.”

“Maybe you can get another one?” suggested Sun Boy, but Chameleon Boy only sighed.

“It wouldn’t be the same,” he said. “But... yes, I think I will plan a trip to Antares to find a new pet!”

“Well... try to cheer up. Look, here’s Super-Monkey! He’s always funny!”

Realising that the boys were all looking at him, Super-Monkey capered round the room. “Yeep! Me must distract them!” Super-Monkey knew that he wasn’t as smart as the other Super Pets and wondered how he could get the item he needed while the Legionnaires were all watching him. “Me have the toughest task of all!” he thought.

A sudden inspiration struck him and he walked over to the Galactic Dartboard and pulled out two of the darts.

“Hey, careful, Monkey! Those darts are Super-Sharp!” said Cosmic Boy.

“Me knows that,” Super-Monkey thought smugly. “It is my plan!”

He held the two darts on top of his head like antennae and continued prancing round the room.

“Ha!” laughed Colossal Boy. “Look, Chameleon Boy, he’s pretending to be you!”

All the Legionnaires laughed, including Chameleon Boy. While they were distracted, quick as a flash, Super-Monkey darted forward and pricked the surprised Chameleon Boy with a dart.

“Ow! Hey, careful! Look, you’ve drawn blood!”

“Good,” thought Super-Monkey, looking at the spot of bright blood on the tip of his dart. Before anyone could stop him, he flew out of the window, leaving a very surprised group of Legionnaires behind.

*

Back at the rocky asteroid that housed Protty’s tomb, the Pets one by one laid their prizes in front of the old crone. She cackled as she looked at them.

“Good, good. You have done well!”

“Yes, we have brought what you asked for,” said Krypto. “Now tell us, why do you want these things and how can they help our poor friend?”

“Very well, now is the time for explanations. Protty is not dead as you thought! Oh, that has made you shut up, hasn’t it? But it’s true, a bolt of lightning is not able to kill one of his shape-changing race. It has simply made him dormant, waiting for something to re-ignite the spark of life inside him.”

The old woman produced a large, bubbling cauldron, which she began to stir as she spoke. Krypto didn’t like the smell of magic coming from it, but he resolved to see this mystery through to its end in the hope that it could really save Protty.

“How do we reignite that spark?” he asked.

“That is what these items are for, of course. I shall employ a spell of sympathetic magic. Observe!”

The old woman dropped in a scroll that the Super-Horse had retrieved from ancient Greece.

“The writings of Euclid, the man who discovered the science of geometrical shapes!

Next, she opened a lead jar that Streaky had retrieved from the 20th century and tipped out glowing red rocks.

“Red kryptonite, the element that causes Kryptonians to change into unpredictable new forms. Don’t get too close, dog!”

Thirdly, she dropped in the medallion that Krypto had brought back tied to his collar.

“Pure tromium, an element that can only be created by the alchemical powers of the long-dead people of Trom!”

Finally, she dropped in the dart that Super-Monkey had brought.

“A drop of blood from a shape-shifting Durlan!”

She continued to mix the cauldron.

“These items are representations of the properties of changing shape and form!” she intoned. “And as they are destroyed, the laws of magic dictate that another who embodies these properties will be re-created! Arise, Protty of Antares!”

As her last shriek echoed around the rocks, the Pets heard a movement from Protty’s tomb. They looked on anxiously as the form of their friend stirred, squirmed, and sat up.

“I feel as if I have been asleep!” Protty declared.

“And so you have been, my friend!” cried Krypto joyously. “But now you are awake again!”

The Pets greeted their friend happily and quickly explained what had happened. Proty declared that he felt as fit as ever and ready to re-join the Super-Pets club.

“I must go and tell my master, Chameleon Boy,” said Proty.

“Not so fast,” said Krypto.” It will be hard to explain to the Legionnaires what has happened here.”

“I agree that we must be cautious until we understand it ourselves,” agreed the Super-Horse. “But, what is Proty to do now?”

“Me know!” cried Super-Monkey. “Him can go to Antares, meet Chameleon Boy, pretend to be a new Proty!”

“That’s a very clever idea, Super-Monkey,” said Krypto admiringly. The Monkey bounced up and down happily at winning such praise.

“Now there is only one mystery still to solve,” said Krypto, turning to the old woman—but she and her cauldron were gone.

“How strange,” said Streaky. “I wonder if we will ever discover who she was?”

“I have a feeling we will,” said Krypto. “Magic has a habit of tricking you when you least expect it... but when she returns, whether as friend or foe, we will be ready for her!”