

F. W. STOCK & SONS

MILLERS OF
FAMOUS MICHIGAN SOFT WHEAT AND
CHOICE NORTHWESTERN SPRING WHEAT

HILLSDALE
 MICHIGAN

June 4, 1931.



Dear Dick;-

Thanks immensely for your two letters. I had no difficulty at all in reading the first one--my great trouble is finding time to do the things I must do. It seems to me that there never is time enough on the clock. I told you before, I think, that I could not promise to correspond with anyone regularly---the best I can do is to dash off a letter in between things that absolutely must be done. Right now, for instance, I am running a set of crude fibers, some viscosities, and a couple of alcoholic extracts; and am typing a few words at a time between operations, here in the laboratory. And incidentally, my two assistant chemists are just about as busy as I am.

Regarding chemistry as a profession; I am probably too close to it to see it in its true perspective. However, if I had it to do over again, I would do the same, I think. I would rather write for a living---but I and my family also want to eat; and to make a living writing, a man has to be really good. However, I will say that you are laying yourself out for a long grind---because a Ph.D. is almost a necessity for a chemist, these days. You are worrying yourself needlessly about preparation, however. The chemistry you will get in high school is extremely elementary--merely a laying of the groundwork of chemical thought in preparation for college work; just as college chemistry paves the way to advanced stuff, which in turn only teaches a man to think---after finally finishing his graduate work the student is merely equipped to start learning something about his specialty. That being true, it is eminently silly to think about outside preparation---the high school course is enough, and all that you will be able to use to advantage---if you get it thoroughly, that is the most important thing.

I note a very peculiar circumstance; which might be called one of the ironies of fate. My own son, also a high-school student; has been all wrapped up in airplanes ever since he was six years old. He had been building models, and pores for hours over plans, specifications, etc., for everything available that flies. I used to entertain hopes that he might take up chemistry, a field in which I could help him in later years---help him to get a start, at least; but the more time passes, the more deeply he becomes engrossed in matters aeronautical. He has everything planned---he is

going to take a Ph.D. in aeronautical engineering in the University of Michigan, then become a test-pilot and general airplane designer and chief engineer. (You undoubtedly know the scientific terms of the positions he wants). And in him and you lies the irony. I gather from the stationary you used that your father operates an airplane field of some kind; and my son turned green with envy of you when he saw that letter-head. His idea of heaven would be to trade places (and fathers) with you---if he could live around an airport he would ask little more in life. Now you, son of an airplane man, and with unbounded opportunity to advance in that field; want to be a chemist---while the chemist's son, who could get a flying start in his father's laboratory, thinks chemistry a very humdrum thing indeed and insists upon entering the colorful field of aeronautics! THAT, in my opinion, is certainly one of those things. Tell your dad to play it over on his radio, and see what he gets!

I was startled to learn that you had already read the first installment of the Spacehounds, since I have not, even yet, received my copy of the July issue, nor has it been received by the local news dealer. I note your attitude toward it with interest and with no little trepidation; for, even though I have been afraid for some time that that viewpoint would be more or less general, I have been hoping that it would not. For, friend Dick, even though you may not realize it consciously, your attitude toward the "Spacehounds" is precisely that of the Old Black Crow (of beloved memory) who was wont to remark, "Even if that was GOOD I wouldn't like it!" I have received many letters in the last few weeks, several of whose writers declared outright that they were not going to like the "Spacehounds"---that I had no business writing anything except another Skylark.

Now in defense of the poor old Spacehounds I can only say that it was started long before "Skylark Three" was printed. In fact, it was practically done in September, 1930. You see, as soon as I had finished "Three", which was, as I remember it, late in the fall of 1929, I thought that I had ended the Skylarks definitely, and did not expect to hear a single vote for more. Therefore, so thinking, I started what was to be a new series of stories---a series more interesting, more scientific, and sounder than the Skylarks.

As I have said before, I was not and am not at all pleased with the fundamentals of the Skylark stories, since they are in some respects entirely indefensible. In fact, they are really pseudo-science, and not scientific fiction at all, in the strict sense of the word. Spacehounds, on the other hand, is really scientific fiction---built from the ground up. In my opinion, it is more interesting than the Skylarks---but of course I am not the judge of that. And the drawback that you mention; that of staying inside the solar system; is necessary because of the really scientific system of power used. It would be drawing things altogether too far to have them perfect a system, right off the bat, that would let

them go from galaxy to galaxy, like the Skylark could.

This condition, however, was to be remedied in the next story. Late in this one you will make the acquaintance of a race of folks known as the Vorkuls, who know several things that not even Brandon has guessed at---and logical developments will permit the spacehounds of the next story to cover the Galaxy. In fact, a third story has been very dimly visioned, in which some kind of a future development (to be forecast in the second story) will permit of inter-Galactic, or even inter-Universal flight. However, whether or not those stories ever will be written depends entirely upon how the present Spacehounds is received. If the attitude suggested in your letter and openly expressed by several others is very general, the Spacehounds won't stand a chance of making themselves liked---too much prejudice before they are even read.

However, it may help some when I tell you that for several months---ever since the great clamor for another Skylark became insistent---I have been working upon another story of that series. It is hard to write, as you can imagine a story in progression with those two would be --- but I may be able to handle it. If so, it should appear in Amazing Stories sometime late in 1932. I am making no promises or definite statements, however. If I cannot do what seems to me a good job, it will never appear anywhere.

Now about that wild yarn I told you I was playing with from time to time. I cannot tell you about it, since a synopsis of a thing like that would be utterly meaningless. Then, too, I have only the rough draft of about half of it done, and have no idea of what the characters will get me into before I finish it. Also, I have no idea when it will be finished; so there would be no particular point in letting you read it as far as I have gone. You don't like to wait from one month to the next---how would you like to wait for an indefinite period, for something that not even the author knows what is going to happen, or when it will be happened? For instance, right now, in that yarn, I have (and have had, for months) the hero and heroine in a lifeboat out in space, a hundred thousand lightyears or so from Tellus, adrift. They are staring at an impenetrable field of murky red force, which is reaching out at them and which is eating the end off of their steel shell. Now neither the hero nor I know as yet what that force is, who is behind it, or how they are going to get away from it; and I have no intention of writing any more on that brainstorm until some long, cold night next winter, when I will probably get an idea too wild to use in any other story I am thinking about, and will put it behind that red field of force. See? Wouldn't you rather wait until the whole thing is done, and then read proof on it for me?

Well, too much of this already, and none of your questions answered yet. Yes, Campbell and Edwards are OK;

although personally, there are others I like better. Campbell seems---well, rather juvenile; and Edwards goes in for altogether too many unthinkable situations. And yes, I thoroughly agree with you concerning those two authors, whom I need not name---and whom it is very unethical for me to discuss. Pure punk-- drivel and piffle. However, let's leap to the ones I do really like.

Merritt first and foremost. His stuff isn't scientific, true---it isn't pseudo-scientific---it isn't any kind of science at all, in fact. Science takes one on the chin on every one of his pages, but boy! how I do love the way he handles situations and events! And the way he writes is a thing of beauty and joy. Widely imitated, he never imitates anyone else; and the perfection of technique and detail he uses is nothing short of marvelous.

Also, I greatly liked Philip Nowlan's two stories. It's a shame he is doing that silly strip---but I imagine that he is getting real money for it. Another gem, I thought was "Futility", by Meek. (The only really good thing he ever wrote, to my way of thinking. That one, however, was a bit of sheer perfection. If he never writes anything else, that one story will justify his existence.)

I also revel in Cloukey's stuff. When he gets into the mazes and paradoxes of time, I settle back deep into the old chair for a session of real mental enjoyment---what it takes to fillip the old think-tank, he's got.

Well, the afternoon samples are in and the boys are yelling "come on, Doc!" You'll have to snap it up if you expect to play any golf this evening!" so I'll have to quit. I've been pecking away at this in odd moments all afternoon---if it doesn't make sense it's just too bad, for I'm not even going to reread it---if I do it probably won't go and you won't get another letter from me for Lord knows how long.

Very cordially yours,

"Doc" Sweet.

Rick and Doc - isn't that hectic?