

33 Rippon Ave.,
Hillsdale, Mich.,
July 30, 1931.

Dear Dick;-

Your letter of June 13th was appreciated just as much as your others---just as much as if I had answered it the next day. The spirit is willing; but there simply isn't time enough on the clock. You know how that is?

However, I am taking time bodily to answer your letter now---ahead of several others---because by the time you get this you will undoubtedly have finished reading "Spacehounds"; and I would very much like to get your full opinion of it while it is still fresh enough in your mind so that you remember it. What I want is your honest opinion---just as nearly as possible as though you were writing it in a diary for only yourself ever to see. That is a hard job, I know, but I am asking several people to do it. I do not want senseless flattery, nor equally senseless attacks upon minutiae---but I would like very much to have your opinions as to the strengths and weaknesses of the story; its good points and its bad ones as you see them. I am asking this because the "Spacehounds" is to be the first of a series---if there is any demand for more---and ~~XXXX~~ a consensus of opinion of this yarn will be a potent aid in continuation.

The third Skylark story, about which you and others seem so keen, is progressing slowly, but as well as is to be expected. A name, of course, has not yet been considered. Or did you know that the name is always the last thing to be written? The story is written first; and after it is finally polished into its final form, the introduction, foreword, or whatever you call it, is put in. Then comes the title!

I regard to the fundamental weaknesses of the Skylarks---you know them already. Intra atomic power, while not absolutely impossible from a mathematical standpoint, is about as nearly so as anything can well be. Many physicists, particularly Millikan, have shown that except for an almost infinitely small possibility of error, all ordinary matter is in its most stable state; that work must be done upon any ordinary atom to break it up. At the time I wrote the Skylark, some seventeen years ago, the newer physics was as yet unborn, and we all believed quite firmly in the possibility of such liberation of power. With the newer knowledge, however, I do not like to use it, because I no longer believe in its possibility. Many authors are still using it---probably because they do not want to go to the trouble of calculating out a mathematically-possible method of propulsion---but I do not like it at all. Personally, I think that the drive of the Spacehounds, which is eminently possible, is far superior. Having started the Skylark on intra-atomic power, however, of course I could not change it. That is the one great reason why I wanted to abandon the Skylarks completely

at the end of "Three". One mathematical impossibility to which I have already pleaded guilty is the acceleration I applied to unshielded bodies. Several other things you know from readers' comments; particularly the time necessary in going to the Green System at normal acceleration, as was so cleverly pointed out. I tried to get away from that, but couldn't do it logically; so I simply soft-pedaled it as much as possible, hoping to get by with it. But you can't get by with a thing in Amazing Stories! Other things that verge too much upon the absolutely impossible are the dud star (don't tell Campbell that I ever admitted this!); the armored monsters, the mental beings, and others too numerous to mention. The whole thing, as I have admitted before, is pseudo-science; written before really scientific fiction was on the market; and, having started out with those weak foundations, I will of course have to keep on with them as long as Skylarks are written. But after all, I very much like the Skylarks, Seaton, Crane, and the girls; and will keep on writing them as long as people want to read them, no matter whether they are strictly scientific or not. But Spacehounds is designed to be defensible, from a really scientific standpoint.

How did I come to write Skylark? Back in 1913 or 1914 I made a talk at a chemical-society smoker; taking as my subject Intra-atomic energy. I tried to be funny---I actually invented a spaceship and went through most of the adventures described in the Skylark of Space. The talk was quite well received; so much so that talk of it spread around chemical circles in Washington, and Mrs. Garby (Lee Hawkins Garby is a woman, the wife of my erstwhile college roommate, since deceased) asked me why I didn't write it up as a story. I countered that there was no woman in it, and that a story without a love interest was all wet. She came back that if I would write the science, she would put in the love; and so it was written. As it turned out, though, I found that I could handle the love interest better than she could--her name as a collaborator, even in the first story, is largely honorary---and since we had moved away from Washington several years before I found anyone brave enough to take a chance on publishing my wild stuff (Amazing Stories started about then) I have been writing alone since that time.

Merritt is my favorite--he stands head and shoulders above all the rest of us. All the rest of us are very poor seconds. My criterion of a story is whether or not it is worth re-reading---whether or not new things, new depths of thought, are revealed upon the second, third, and further readings---and that test is passed by very few stories of the type. "Footprints", in my opinion, is one of his poorest; "The Face in the Abyss" and its sequel, "The Snake Mother", are sheer masterpieces. ~~XXXXXXXX~~ Merritt tells me that his favorite is "The Ship of Ishtar", but that is out of print and I haven't been able to get it.

Think I've answered most of the points you brought up. Write again---I enjoy your letters, even though I sometimes do not find time to answer them immediately.

Very cordially yours,

Edward E. Smith, Ph.D.