

EDWARD E. SMITH. PH. D.
313 HOMECREST ROAD
JACKSON, MICHIGAN

Oct. 1, 1939.

Doctor Richard Dodson,
2702 Maryland Avenue,
Baltimore, Md.

Dear Doctor Dodson:-

Perhaps, later on, I will be able to address you as "Doc", or perhaps return to the old, informal "Dick"--- but in my first letter after the acquisition of all the new dignity, such presumption---not to say lese majeste---would be unthinkable!

Anyway, congratulations, felicitations, and all possible good wishes as I welcome you to the ranks. I have had it in mind to answer sooner your letter of July 9th; but, by this time, you probably know how it is with me and letters! We enjoyed the ~~sh~~apshots immensely; even---or especially?--- the one with the pipe.

I certainly envy you your chance at working on the uranium fission. I used to be a pure scientist, you know; and I don't suppose that I will ever get it out of my blood. There are a good many unsolved problems in donut work, of course---altogether too many of them; since we lack about a hundred years of intensive basic work---but I wish often that I could take six years off and go back to school. Wouldn't I have fun? Astronomy, philosophy, physics (atomic), mathematics (non-Euclidean geometry, etc) and all the rest of it! I have enough background now, I think, so that I could maybe learn something. It's out of the question now, of course, but sometime the dream may come true. At least, it's a pleasant thought to dwell on.

And I really would like to watch you count the Geiger some day, help you kick in the cyclotron, and otherwise disport myself in your laboratory. Jean and I are going to drive to New York next Spring; to attend my Creral Chemists' Convention, which is usually held during the last week in May. It wouldn't take much encouragement---scarcely any, in fact---for me to drive back by way of Baltiomre.

If you have been watching ASTOUNDING you already know that "Gray Lensman" is starting. Three or four of the boys have read the MS, and the concensus so far is that it is the best story I have ever written. I like it myself---I have really gone in for characterization and philosophy in this yarn; and have managed to do it without too much (I hope) sacrifice of blood-and-thunder.

Campbell wants another story; a continuation of the same setting. He's got a basic idea that's a hum-dinger--- the discovery that the Uncertainty Principle applies to natural laws. In other words, that there is no one underlying basic law, but an assortment of diametrically different ones. Light may be either a particle or a wave, depending upon whether the velocity or the position of the ultimate particle is taken as reference standard. I pored over his letter in horrified fascination for three hours, then wrote him a note that should have blasted him out of the ether---but it didn't! For, while I admit that that idea would make the most stupendous science-fiction story ever written if it could be handled properly, I don't believe that there's a man alive who can do it justice and yet put it into a story that will appeal to the rank and file of SF readers. I'm pretty sure that I can't---like Kinnison, I don't think I've got jets enough to swing it. And I know that anybody tackling that theme will sweat blood before he gets it even half licked--- I could write three or four darn good stories with less mental wear and tear than that thing would take.

But Campbell, instead of being shot down out of control, wasn't even jarred---not even insulted. He countered that there was no sense in giving a strong writer a weak idea, and that he was sure I could handle it---then he poured on the old oil. But, apart from the oil---or because of it, says you?---I'll probably try it a whirl. If I don't, I'll never know whether I can handle it or not. Campbell---damn his eyes!---is quite a psychologist, at that!

What d'you mean, "inflexibility"? Don't I always accept ideas when they're worth a damn? The fact that most of your criticisms were inconsistent with my ideas of the basic needs of the stories did not belittle in any way the really good ideas of yours which I did adopt. And if I do decide to go ahead with this Uncertainty theme, I may want to call on you for some high-powered help; because I don't know any more about modern physics than a pig does about Sunday.

"Robots' Nemesis" was spoiled in editing---I scarcely recognized it. I don't write down to readers; and your comments are charitable. It stunk. AD ASTRA (a fan mag) is going to run an article by me on editing in its next number; with names and references. No holds barred. If I'm assassinated shortly, you'll know that some editor did it!

Jean joins me in best regards to both you and the 51%, and agrees with me that a week-end in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. (we used to live there, you know) wouldn't be a half bad idea for next May.

Until you get around to answer this delayed epistle, please believe me to be, Doctor, your most humble and obedient servant-----

P.S. What do you think of the cover? Point me I see and, I submit --- Roger can get Kinnison to a T. I want that original (only me I see saw that I did want) and am trying to get it. Ly