Space Ships Highlight Local Chemist's Yarns

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Project John Dillinger several hundred years into the future. Have him chased by a police system similar to the present federal set-up. Equip the pursued and the pursuers with space ships and give them the entire universe for their escapades. From this startling picture the reader can grasp a vague conception of Dr. Edward E. Smith's next scientific-fiction serial.

Dr. Smith is chief chemist at the F. W. Stock and Sons mills. During the winter months, when the golf course is frozen over, he writes—not as a vocation but for pleasure. After receiving his B. S. and chemical engineer's degrees from the University of Idaho, Dr. Smith went to Washington, D. C., where he was employed as a cereal technologist in the United States department of agriculture. Anxious to advance himself in his chosen field, he attended afternoon and evening classes at George Washington university, being granted first a M. S. degree and later a Ph. D. In 1919 Dr. Smith accepted his present position with Stock's.

Dr. EDWARD E. SMITH

Keeps Abreast of Times

The writing of fiction is not Dr. Smith's only diversion. He is

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* - Now, for the Dawn Doughnut Co.

Dr. Smith, Chemist, Writes for Hobby

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constantly keeping up with the advances of science by reading, as is evidenced by his recent talk entertainingly presented to the Hillsdale Rotary club. In the summer golf occupies a large portion of his spare time. He plays the local course in around 85, winning the club championship in 1927 and 1928. He has been runner-up twice in the past three years.

Dr. Smith has become a familiar figure at carnivals and other festivals where he enjoys acting as chef at the doughnut concessions, incidentally to the delight of his son and two daughters. Since he has been principally concerned with the development of fully prepared flours he has become expert in frying the cakes. He likes to tinker with radio and other instruments. Recently Dr. Smith rigged up an apparatus in Stock's laboratory capable of keeping water within one-hundredth of a degree of a constant temperature, an invaluable advantage for his testing work.

New Serial in Formative Stage

"The Galactic Patrol," Dr. Smith's next scientific fiction serial, is only in its formative stage and none of it is on paper, yet Dr. Smith has been developing it for a year.

Before he begins the actual writing there are hours of patient figuring to be done. How fast must a space ship travel to reach a planet of Arcturus in three days? What must be the dimensions of the space ship to traverse the distance at that speed? What is the longest possible duration of the eclipse or Gangmede by Jupiter? These are just the beginnings of mathematical and physical problems which must be solved and made a part of the background of a Smith yarn. And this background must all be within the realm of possibility—possible after certain limitations are overcome—before Dr. Smith is content to proceed.

Errors Are Noticed

In the first of his five published scientific fiction serials Dr. Smith inserted a fight between a saber tooth tiger and a dinosaur to speed up the action in a spot that dragged. It was done in a last, unguarded moment. A few weeks after this chapter of "The Skylark of Space," had appeared in Amazing Stories the editors received a scorching letter from an official in Smithsonian Institute, inquiring how a scientist so well grounded as Dr. Smith could have a saber tooth tiger and a dinosaur locked in a death struggle. The combat occurred on a planet still in the carbonferous age. The two animals could not both have lived in that age, the official said.

It was the last time Dr. Smith used an episode without first thoroughly investigating his data. For he realizes now that scientists of the highest type, as well as sensation seeking high school boys read his adventures.

Releases Intra-Atomic Energy

"The Skylark of Space" deals with the discovery by a young chemist that intra-atomic energy can be released. A rival steals some of the solution "X" and the plans for a space ship. After many stirring adventures the rival's ship is lost millions of miles from the earth and the young chemist is in pursuit, to save his sweetheart held captive by the rival. A rescue is negotiated and after visiting many strange worlds the chemist's space ship returns to earth. The details of the ship were carefully figured out by Dr. Smith. Such problems as gravity resistance, the reaction of certain metals on the space ship, the search for copper and the type of planet that would have an abundance of it were worked out. It takes a fertile, inventive brain to write a plausible and yet interesting, moving story such as "The Skylark of Space."

Very little of the background material creeps into the stories. Editors of scientific fiction magazines demand action, not long technical discourses. Most of the real effort expended in creating such yarns, therefore, is hidden. The editor introduced "The Skylark of Space" with "You will follow the hair-raising explorations and strange ventures into far-away worlds with bated breath, and you will be fascinated, as we were, with the strangeness of it all."

Starts Writing by Chance

Dr. Smith's invention had its origin, as so many hobbies do, with a wisp of an idea. At the time, the summer of 1916, he was employed at Washington, D. C. Tropic heat enveloped the capitol that season. Those who could not escape in fact did so by imagination. One day Dr. and Mrs. Smith were with their inseparable friends the Garbys. Someone suggested that the stratosphere might offer relief from the torrid city. Why not build a space ship and travel to a more frigid world? Why not, indeed? Dr. Smith admitted he often toyed with such ideas. Scientific fiction of this sort would be great sport to write and it should find plenty of readers. Mrs. Lee Hawkins Garby suggested that Dr. Smith develop the technical phases of such a yarn and she would insert the romantic portions. It was agreed and not until two years later did their interest in "The Skylark of Space" flag.

The Smiths moved to Hillsdale. One day while rummaging through some of his papers Dr. Smith ran across the forgotten "Skylark." Its potentiality again intrigued him. Mrs. Garby was contacted and with renewed vigor the story developed. Ideas were exchanged, chapters were collaborated upon and finally the yarn was whipped into a completed manuscript.

One of Earliest Novels in Field

But "The Skylark of Space" was a pioneer in the field of scientific fiction. Rivers of doubt in the minds of editors had to be forded. There were only a dozen writers in this outpost. In his files at home Dr. Smith has a large array of rejection slips. Many of them are personal letters from editors, doubtful that the type of story would entertain their readers but appreciative of the story's quality. After several years Amazing Stories accepted the manuscript and in 1928 it appeared in print.

Hordes of writers have followed the trail blazed by Dr. Smith and the other early writers of scientific fiction. His stories no longer go out in search of publications, but now are usually sold before completion. Since the first one there have been four more Smith serials, including two more on the "Skylark."

Dr. Smith writes for pleasure. His stories are all tied up with mathematics, physics, astronomy and a lot of philosophy. They contain but little chemistry. Chemistry is his vocation and he prefers to leave that in his laboraory at Stock's.

When Dr. Smith delves into the actual writing of a space ship novel he will often remain up most of the night, obsessed with an idea and anxious to get it on paper. His manuscripts are done in long hand and Mrs. Smith types them for submission to magazines. After a story has been published Dr. Smith goes over it very carefully to make sure it has been printed the way he wrote it. Often he will make notes, change words, rewrite entire chapters so in case the novel is published again it will be nearer to the way he wants it.