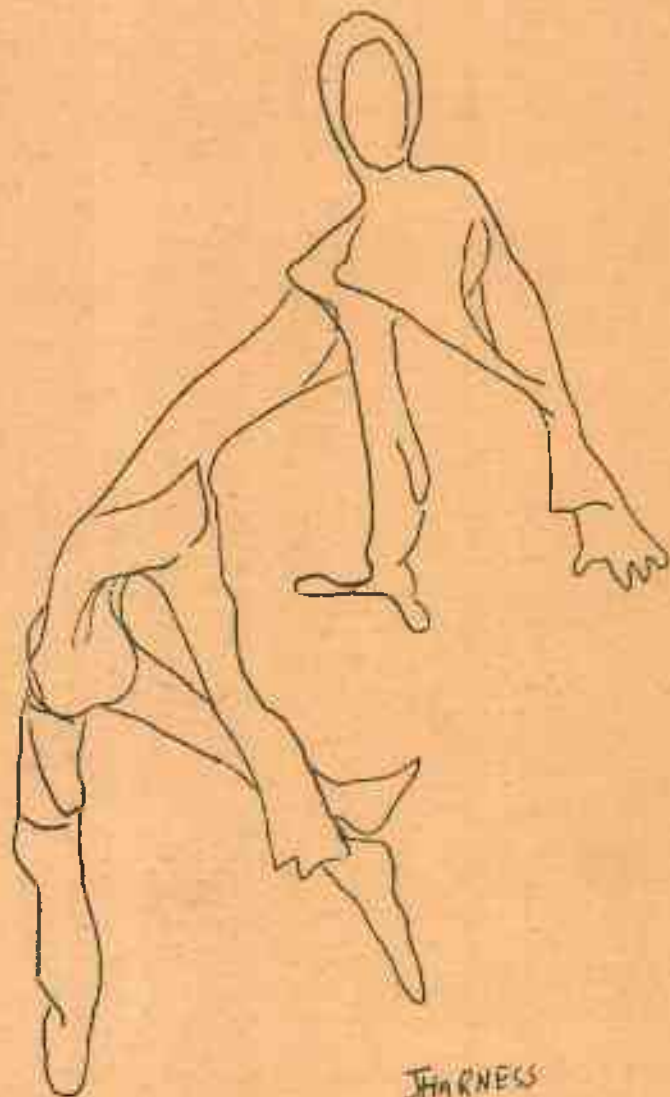


# SPACESHIP

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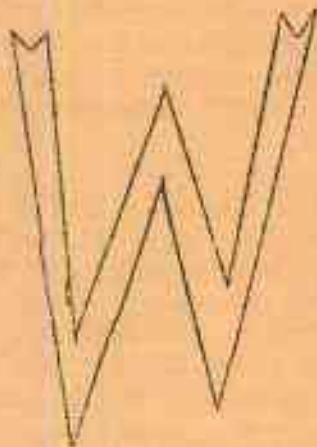


JHARNES

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# FLIGHT OF THE SKYLARKS

REDD BOGGS



When I told Bob Silverberg not long ago that I thought The Skylark of Space by Dr. E.E. Smith would be on my list of books for a desert island he found the idea "a bit shocking." Of course I was kidding, a little; one doesn't include even a great science fiction novel in a desert island library--if it crowds out Moby Dick or The Complete Shakespeare. And even if there was room for a science fiction book or two, I would give serious consideration to Last and First Men or The World Below.

But Skylark of Space is a good choice, at that. I read the yarn almost ten years after I discovered science fiction, so I know it isn't bathed in the aura that surrounds even trashy stories read in the first blush of fannish enthusiasm. I've read the book a number of times, so I know it wears exceedingly well. More important, the story captures almost perfectly what is for me the essence of science fiction: the lure of far-off worlds, the spell of space, the thrill of conquering the stars and enlarging man's knowledge.

Of course it would have to be the complete Skylark trilogy, if I took it along. Unlike most such series, the first story is not the best; each story is an improvement upon the preceding one. Smith got better as he went along. This is not surprising; The Skylark of Space was his first try at fiction writing and was begun almost a dozen years before the second story in the series, Skylark Three, was actually written, while Skylark of Valeron, last of the trilogy, was written after he had had the added experience of doing both Spacehounds of IPC and Triplanetary.

The Skylark of Space had its origin nearly 40 years ago, on a hot afternoon in Washington D.C. in the summer of 1915. Doc Smith, his wife, and another young couple, the Carl Garbys, were doing their best to keep cool, and everybody was wishing audibly that they were anywhere but in sweltering Washington. These remarks reminded Dr. Garby of an impromptu speech Smith had made at a recent chemical "smoker," and he told the girls about Smith's statement that it would be "nice and cold" in interstellar space. Someone wondered aloud how one could reach interstellar space, and the talk turned to speculation about space flight. After a long discussion, during which Doc revealed his knowledge and his theories about the subject, Mrs. Garby asked him why he didn't write a novel about spacefaring. Smith had, as he admitted, "a vivid and fertile imagination," but this was a new idea to him and he rejected it by explaining lamely that he couldn't handle the love int-



erest, which a good novel requires. "You handle the rest of it," said Mrs. Garby, "and I'll write the love interest." Thus challenged, Doc agreed to try his hand at a space yarn.

The novel was begun the same year, but was not finished till late in 1919. Though she had offered at first to do only the love interest, Mrs. Garby was an active collaborator on the story. "When working together," says Smith, "we sat at the same table and fought over every paragraph, as (I suppose) other collaborators do. After we moved to Michigan, the Garbys remaining in Washington, it was the same thing except by mail. One of us would write a chapter, the other would tear it apart, and eventually we would compromise. We were of course working from the same outline--we had thrashed that out while we were all in Washington." Crane's music room, the Osnomian banquet hall, the wedding, and "a lot of other stuff" were basically Mrs. Garby's contributions. She thus won mention in the byline of the first Skylark story: "In collaboration with Lee Hawkins Garby."

Once completed, the manuscript was typed by Mrs. Smith and bundled off to a publisher. It came back after a while, landing with a thud on Doc's front porch, the first of many futile trips, this one to McClurg, then publishers of Edgar Rice Burroughs, and others to every book publisher and then every magazine publisher that had ever published any fantasy of any kind. For more than seven years the only thing the bulky manuscript gave Doc was the rueful hobby of collecting rejecting slips. Sometimes he also received lengthy letters of rejection, such as one from Bob Davis of Argosy, which raved over the story but explained that it was too big, too "wild," too fantastic for their readers.

In April 1927 Smith noticed an issue of Amazing Stories on a newsstand and realized that here was the perfect market for his space tale, if a market was ever to exist. He hauled the battered manuscript out of storage for one last trip and sent it off the same day. This time it didn't come back; Doc received an enthusiastic letter of acceptance, from associate editor T. O'Connor Sloane. The novel was serialized in Amazing, August through October 1928, copping the cover with the first installment and earning Smith cover mention in big red print, along with H.G. Wells and Philip Francis Nowlan, creator of Buck Rogers who debuted (as Anthony Rogers) in the same issue.

In hailing the story, the editor declared in his blurb that The Skylark of Space was "the greatest interplanetary and space flying story that has appeared this year," then added, less conservatively, "Indeed, it will probably rank as one of the great space flying stories for many years to come." In his blurb for the final installment, the editor cast aside all self-restraint and stated flatly that this was "one of the outstanding scientific stories of the decade; an interplanetary story that will not be eclipsed soon. It will be referred to by all scientific fans for years to come. It will be read and reread. This is not a mere prophecy of ours, because we have been deluged by letters since we began publishing this story."

Truer words were never printed in Amazing. Nearly 20 years later, The Skylark of Space was the first choice of the Hadley Publishing Company, to lead off their science fiction list, and it was one of the few sci-

ence fiction books to be republished later by a different firm. The others in the series were among the first titles contracted for by Fantasy Press. Smith's books have always been regarded as best sellers in the field. Some reviewers have attributed this continuing popularity to curiosity about the eostefnal era of science fiction or to the historical importance of these novels, but these theories do not explain why The Skylark of Space hit good Papa Gernsback's readers with the impact of an X-plosive shell.

In 1928 "scientifiction" had existed as a separate genre with a magazine of its own for only two years, although Gernsback himself, Frank A. Munsey, and others had been printing science fiction for many years. Jules Verne and H.G. Wells had become famous by writing "scientific romances." But few writers up to that time had had the courage to follow their uninhibited imaginations as far as they could reach. Wells had depicted a spatial voyage in The First Men in the Moon and had daringly portrayed an interplanetary invasion in The War of the Worlds, but even he preferred never to have both feet off solid earth at once. Garrett P. Serviss, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Ray Cummings, and some of the younger writers Gernsback was grooming, timidly ventured to send their characters into space. Even before the First World War such stories as Jack London's Star Rover and J. U. Giesy's Palos of the Dog Star Pack had hurtled across the galaxy for tales of adventures on worlds beyond human ken. But the flaw in all these stories lay in the realm of believability.

Even so imaginative a series as Cummings' Tubby stories was carefully contrived as a dream sequence, and in the London and Giesy stories the protagonist bridged the gap between this world and the star-worlds as a disembodied entity. When a real spaceship was used in a story it was usually an incredible contraption, patently mythical in concept, just as time machines are in dimensional stories to this day. Interplanetaries were still in the diaper stage; interstellars generally fell into a special limbo that was neither quite seance fiction nor purely science fiction.

The Skylark of Space was probably the wildest romance ever conceived, but underneath all the fantasy and derring-do there was an element of realism that earlier stories did not have. A skylark is a bird that can fly almost straight up, out of sight, but colloquially a skylark is also a boisterous frolic or sportive adventure. The name Skylark of Space for story and spaceship implies both sorts of skylark. Smith did not mean that the yarn or ship should be taken for anything more than a skylark of the imagination. Nevertheless, he bolstered his high-spirited romance with an obvious and sincere belief in the ability of man to tap the energy of the atom and by this means reach the stars. He didn't pass his story off as a dream or give us any nonsense about disembodied spirits shooting through space. He showed us atomic energy, violent enough to blast a village out of existence, and gave us a real spaceship, a good solid machine such as any twentieth-century man could appreciate, a lot bigger, faster, and more complicated than a tin lizzy, but just as tangible and perhaps just as possible. By anchoring his unfettered imagination on the bedrock of confidence in science, Doc Smith opened the galaxy to the mind of man.



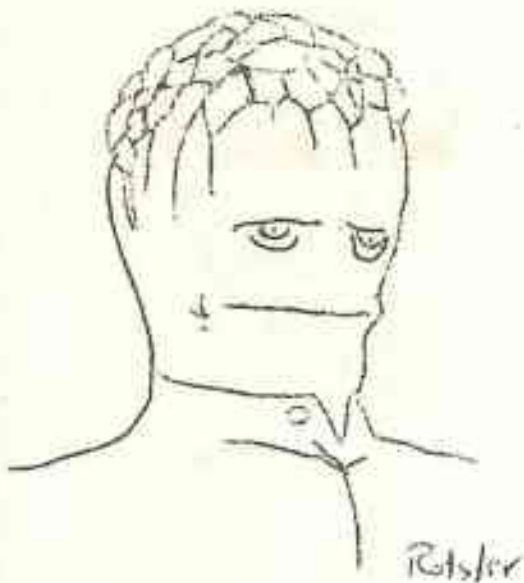
## 2.

The Skylark of Space is not an outstanding story in plot or characterization, but then, neither is the *Odyssey*, which it resembles in form and appeal. Its main virtue is that it takes the hero--and us, the readers--out into the unknown, where he sees and does fabulous things. And it performs that job in a breathtaking way. At the beginning of the story, Richard Seaton is a young chemist who dashes around Washington D.C. on a motorcycle; by the end of the book he has piloted a mighty spaceship many thousands of light years to the center of the galaxy and back. The plot, such as it is, is mainly concerned with accomplishing this startling transition in a fantastic but believable way

As the story opens Seaton accidentally discovers a method of liberating "the intra-atomic energy of copper" while trying to electrolyze a solution of "X," the mystery metal, upon a copper steam-bath in his laboratory. The steam-bath hurtles through the window and flies out of sight in two seconds faster than an instant. Assisted by his friend, the multimillionaire Martin Crane, Seaton builds the *Skylark of Space*, a ship utilizing atomic power, and on a test run they fly around the moon. This trip takes less than an hour and is not even described in the book, which gives you some idea of the scale on which Doc Smith built this novel.

The secret of atomic power is stolen by an unscrupulous colleague, Dr. Marc C. Duquesne, called "Blackie," who with the backing of the World Steel trust constructs another spaceship. With this craft Duquesne kidnaps Dorothy Vaneman, Seaton's fiancée, and Margaret Spencer, who is yanked into the plot by her "heavy, wavy black hair" in order to provide Crane with a fair companion. The description of their rescue by Seaton and Crane forms several chapters in the middle of the book, but the whole turn of events is mainly a device to get the action out into interstellar space.

When the story was serialized in Amazing, Gernsback hacked off three chapters and some other material from the early part of the novel--there was once a rumor that he had cut "12 or 14 chapters" from the story, but only three chapters are restored in the Hadley book version and, as Doc remembers, "the version I sent Amazing was pretty much the same as the one Hadley published, except of course for the revising I did on the Hadley version." In any case, Gernsback's editorial instinct was sound: the earth-bound section of the story is by far the duller part of the whole series. The mature Smith never allowed his story to bog down for long on any planet, especially Earth, for Smith--who outwardly resembles a normal air-breathing Terrestrial -- is really in his element in outer space.



Once the girls are rescued and Duquesne is captured and made a semi-prisoner on the *Skylark*, the story turns into a sort of travel narrative: the spacefarers wander from star to

star, planet to planet, seeing strange places and people, and surviving a small or medium-size crisis at each port of call. Plotwise, this Cook's tour of the galaxy has only a superficial purpose--that of replenishing the supply of copper for power. The story is a science-fictional version of the picaresque novel, "which strings its incidents on the line of the hero's travels"; the only formal unity in the yarn is achieved by the return of the Skylark to Earth, from which the voyage--and the story--began. There is no grand climax to which the whole plot pointed.

Smith allowed one loose thread to dangle invitingly as the start of a sequel: the escape of Blackie DuQuesne. One wonders whether Doc envisioned a sequel when he wrote this final chapter or whether he merely liked the character of DuQuesne well enough to let him escape. Though not the psychological good-man-gone-wrong nor even an old-fashioned mad scientist, Blackie DuQuesne is such an incredibly cold fish that he is fascinating. His characteristic lack of sentiment is displayed in the scene where his spaceship falls toward the dark star, its power supply waning. Scrounging the vessel for more copper, DuQuesne calmly sacrifices "his almost priceless Swiss watch" and then relieves Dorothy of her engagement ring, given her by Seaton. He tosses the circlet into the power chamber, but wrenches the diamond out of its setting first and gives it back to her. He is not tenderhearted: obviously the diamond wouldn't help provide the needed power! Ideally, in a saga as shapeless as the Skylark series, DuQuesne should have emerged as the prime antagonist against whom Seaton, for all his involvements in smaller crises from time to time, is always pitted. Though this seems to be what Smith had in mind for him, DuQuesne is never quite the menace he should have been.

Doc often characterized Richard Seaton as a "good" counterpart of the villainous DuQuesne--they are "physically so like, so unlike mentally"--and it is interesting to contrast Seaton's behavior during a fantastic crisis comparable to the one outlined above, which DuQuesne faced. They have been rotated into the fourth dimension and the body of each member of the Skylark crew becomes "nothing but the three-dimensional hypersurface of [his] new hyperbody"; one can see and reach past his outer skin to take hold of his own heart or other internal organ. Seaton remarks: "There's something...I never expected to look at--my appendix. Good thing you're in good shape, old vermiform, or I'd take a pair of scissors and snick you off while I've got such a good chance to do it..." This is the same sort of scientific objectivity that DuQuesne displayed when his ship fell toward the dark star, but in this case coldbloodedness is relieved by humor and by the fact that Seaton said it, however misguidedly, in an effort to cheer up Dorothy and get her "used to this mess." DuQuesne





would have no truck with such sentimental intentions.

Many have called Seaton a superman, and of course he is. Certainly he is no ordinary mortal. But despite our current preferences in the realist-naturalist tradition for making characters "portraits from life," it is not necessarily a flaw that Seaton is bigger than life. So was Ulysses, and Antony in "All for Love," and even Hamlet himself. In the context of the work Seaton is believable, and that is all we have a right to ask. One must remember that Seaton matures intellectually during the series. He is not an average man when we first meet him, but his discovery of atomic energy is pure chance and his application of the method to a space drive is the result of plugging away at it. He becomes superhumanly intelligent only after he learns, by means of a mechanical "educator," the incredibly advanced science of Norlamin. Only then does he make an original transcendent discovery on his own: "the fundamental theory and practical technique of sixth-order phenomena and forces." Learning of this feat, Seaton's mentor, Rovol of Norlamin, exclaims, "Magnificent! And by one brain, and that of a youth. Extraordinary!" Fodan, Chief of the Five of Norlamin, utters a mild admonition which we should all heed: "But do not forget that the brain of that youth is a composite of many, and that in it, among others, were yours [Rovol's] and Drasnik's. Seaton himself ascribes to that peculiar combination his successful solution of the problem of the sixth order. You know, of course, that I am in no sense belittling the native power of that brain."

Martin Crane, Seaton's partner, never attains status as a major character in the series. Aside from complementing Seaton's work in certain endeavors, taking the routine matters as his own, and acting as a counterbalance of common sense to Seaton's brilliant intuitions, Crane is a non-entity.

In contrast, the girls, Dorothy and Margaret, are not quite so shadowy as characters, though sometimes one wishes they were. They are typical of the gushy, sweet-girl-graduate heroine found in the pages of the trashier 1910 drugstore novel. Though Dorothy is "pretty much" Smith's creation, while Margaret was all Mrs. Garby's, they are produced from the same stereotype. Dorothy, having a larger role, is the more sickening; not only does she call Seaton "Dickie" (he calls her "Dottie Dimple" but everything is always "just too darned perfectly wonderful for words." Margaret wisely says less, and, furthermore, won the undying affection of all good Skylark fans by being surprisingly intrepid and brave when she and Seaton were captured by the hypermen of the fourth dimension. Why Doc allowed Margaret rather than Dorothy to share in this adventure is a mystery. Perhaps he could stand only so much of Dorothy too. Neither girl compares in any way with Chris, heroine of the Lensman stories, who in almost all respects is an extraordinary character.

Many deprecating words have been used to describe the love interest in the Skylarks. It has been called "amateurish," "saccharine," and "mushy," and those words describe it very well indeed. The lovers behave toward each other like a pair of puppets; the sexual element is not only disregarded but refined right out of existence. When Seaton and Dorothy, and Crane and Margaret, are married on Osnome, they undergo a mental examination in which each couple's minds are read by the official and they read each other's minds "to the minutest detail"

after which the Osnomian declares: "You are all of the highest evolution and your minds are all untainted by any base thought in your marriage." Nevertheless, Smith establishes the validity of what is evidently for him one of the most important blessings of marriage: companionship. Sex is inevitably implied in this, but the communion Smith celebrates is that of old and loyal comrades whose love is tested under constant outer stress. The obvious element of comradeship in married life has, I fear, been much neglected by most modern writers.

## 3

Skylark Three appeared in Amazing exactly two years after the original story, August through October 1930, but it was written almost a decade after the other. It was outlined, and a little of it was written as early as 1920 and 1921, when Doc was still hopeful of publication, but then it was dropped until the spring of 1927, when he took it up again and worked at it till he finished it on 21 November 1929. In this novel Doc at once showed himself to be a more mature and skilful writer, for though the plot of Skylark Three is by far the most unsatisfactory of the trilogy, in sheer imaginative power the book reduces The Skylark of Space to a mere pimple on the series as a whole. In comparison with this story's tremendous scope of setting and technological ingenuity, the earlier story seems little more than a slightly fantastic Tom Swift adventure.

The original Skylark spaceship--it is sometimes called a "space-car"--is "a spherical shell of hardened steel armorplate of great thickness, fully 40 feet in diameter," but while it is supplied with acceleration mats, handrails for pulling one's self around in free fall, and other fittings that one would find in the ship of "Destination Moon," the Skylark is curiously primitive. The windows are of ordinary optical glass; the pilot sees prosaically "by means of special instruments, something like periscopes;" and Seaton has a habit of peering out of the window through a pair of binoculars. When they discover DuQuesne's ship falling toward the dead star, Seaton and Crane signal the doomed vessel by firing against its hull with a machinegun. Such details remind us, in this era of supersonic fighter planes, of the early days of World War One when hostile airplane pilots fought aerial battles armed only with pistols.

The original Skylark was rebuilt on Osnome by replacing the steel hull with transparent arenak, "a metal 500 times as strong and hard as the strongest and hardest steel," and by fitting it out with new weapons and instruments. But these are minor changes compared with those accomplished in Skylark Three. As the story begins, the Skylark crew sets out for Osnome in Skylark II, now equipped with a force zone developed by Seaton from Osnomian science. In a chance brush with a great battleship of the semi-human superscientific Fenachrone, Seaton realizes that even the re-armed Skylark II is "as obsolete as a 1910 flivver." Learning that the Fenachrone believe that "the Universe is ours, and in due course we shall take it," he decides to visit each "highly advanced planet" he can find, and by "combining the best points of the warfares of many worlds," to evolve some means of combatting the fearsome Fenachrone. Here again is a plot device that allows the Skylark to meander among the stars like the ships of Odysseus among the islands of the Mediterranean. After visiting several strange worlds, the Skylark reaches the world of Norlamin.



As we said above, Skylark Three is weak in plot. Though the story opens with a chapter devoted to DuQuesne and his plans for revenge upon Seaton, DuQuesne appears only once again in the narrative and has no part at all in the climactic scene. If DuQuesne is presumed to be the ultimate antagonist of the series, Skylark Three and Skylark of Valeron must be regarded as one book, rather than thirds of a trilogy, for it is only in the third book that DuQuesne "returns," at approximately the point he was forgotten in the second book. Furthermore, if DuQuesne is the real antagonist, the Fenachrone war is only another phase in Seaton's interstellar odyssey and not a part of the main struggle, for DuQuesne is only tangentially involved. Despite this, Seaton versus the Fenachrone gives Doc Smith his best workout in the series in the sort of narrative he has become famous for: the imaginative description of space battles, inconceivably complex, fought with stupendous projectors and force fields over distances too vast to comprehend. The chapter devoted to Seaton's destruction of the Fenachrone fleet and the atomic blowup of the planet itself is classic, equalled only by the battles described by Smith in the Lensman stories.

The war is fought with the help of the Norlaminians, men of massive intellect, who have a fantastically old, incredibly advanced civilization. Norlamin is the prototype, not only of Arisia, in Doc's own Lensman series, but perhaps of all similar civilizations depicted in science fiction, even unto the Earthmen of the far future often portrayed by Don A. Stuart. It is almost traditional now to expect the ancient races one finds on distant worlds to be intellectual rather than emotional, trusting rather than suspicious. The Norlaminians are all this, though they contrast with such peoples as those in Robert Moore Williams' "Flight of the Dawn Star" by still living in a scientific age rather than beyond one. Smith's imaginative powers were never in better fettle than when he created Norlamin. The main flaw in his depiction is that all Norlaminians talk and act so much alike. It is hard to keep individuals differentiated, even though all Norlaminians are super-specialists, one great scientist devoting his century-and-a-half of life to the study of psychology, while another whitebeard spends an equally long career studying chemistry.

From them, by means of the "educator," Seaton receives all the ancient and advanced knowledge that Rovol, the First of Rays, and Drasnik, the First of Psychology, can pour into his receptive brain. Possessed now of knowledge of "fifth-order" radiation, Seaton is the master of the Fenachrone. He is able to wipe out the enemy fleet and to blow up the planet without leaving Norlamin, though the distance between the two worlds is 500,000 light years! No wonder DuQuesne, seeing the destruction of the Fenachrone planet, cannot at first believe it is Seaton who did it.

Then, in Skylark III, Seaton and his crew pursue the Fenachrone scientists who fled toward "a distant galaxy" before their planet was destroyed. Built by the Norlaminians, the new Skylark is a "two-mile-long torpedo," constructed of the super-metal inoson, the "theoretical ultimate of possible strength, toughness, and resistance," and equipped with a stupendous fifth-order projector that enables Seaton to send out a detector screen "with a velocity unthinkable millions of times that of light," and to blast the huge, fast-moving Fenachrone battleship into pure energy from a distance of 200,000 light years! Only a few years before, Seaton had been chased by traffic cops for exceeding the

Washington speed limit on his motorcycle.

4

Dr. Smith's first three stories, the first two Skylarks and Spacehounds of IFC, appeared in Amazing. In January 1932 he submitted Triplanetary to Harry Bates of Astounding and in the January 1933 issue the story was announced for a future issue; however, the Claxton firm folded up after the publication of the next number, March 1933, and Doc's manuscript was returned to him. He then submitted it to Amazing, where it appeared in four parts in 1934. Thus Doc never appeared in Astounding, scene of his greatest triumphs, till the publication of Skylark of Valeron as a seven-part serial, August 1934 through February 1935, in the new Street and Smith magazine. It was, in many respects, an auspicious debut for Doc in the new leader among science fiction magazines. Though inferior to Galactic Patrol, his epoch-making novel of two years later, it was indisputably his finest story so far, showing him at the height of his imaginative sweep and power.

Smith had started writing Skylark of Valeron early in 1931. In February 1934, having been in correspondence with Desmond Hall of Astounding he sent the typescript to Hall for his comments and criticisms. Instead of criticizing it, Hall sent back a check. Thus Doc claims that this story "wasn't really finished at all."

Skylark of Valeron follows Seaton's education in advanced technology up a positively accelerated curve. During a series of adventures on the same intergalactic voyage in which he destroyed the Fenachrone warship, Seaton learns how to utilize sixth-order radiation, of which thought itself is a band, how to rotate an entire spaceship--Skylark II, which is carried in Skylark III as a lifeboat--into fourth-dimensional hyperspace, and how to build and control a new Skylark, the Skylark of Valeron, mightiest spaceship of the First Universe, by means of a "perfectly efficient, mechano-electrical artificial Brain" a cubic mile in diameter. The ultimate Skylark is "almost of planetary dimensions," and resembles a "looming planetoid." To enter, one passes through 50 massive gates; inside, a bright artificial sun illuminates "an immense grassy park," in the middle of which are replicas of the Earthside homes of the Seatons and Cranes (not that they ever lived in them for long). Between them is the control building, equipped only with the master headsets of the Brain which directs the ship.

Smith makes a valiant effort in the final Skylark story to work up to a smashing climax in which his protagonist and main antagonist, Blackie DuQuesne, will meet face to face, "hard gray eyes staring relentlessly into unyielding eyes of midnight black." With this end in view he opens the book with four chapters that bring us up to date on DuQuesne's doings since we lost track of him in the middle of Skylark Three. He follows through by using the parallel-action technique of alternating between Seaton's adventures and DuQuesne's developing skulduggery. Visiting Norlamin, DuQuesne inveigles the unsuspecting scientists into building him a spaceship like Skylark III, after which he returns to Earth to make himself ruler of Terra. The purpose of his villainy is to mobilize Earth's resources to the end of destroying Norlamin itself and making him master of the galaxy.

I think it was only instinct that made Doc finish up the series in this



fashion. To give any semblance of unity to the series, the action inevitably had to return to Earth in the end; nevertheless, as we have said, Smith realized at the same time that his element was deep space and far planets; he was not at home writing about Earth. As a matter of fact, Smith neglected Earth throughout the series: we are told little about the effect the development of the space drive must have had on terrestrial economy and politics. Sometimes Seaton and Crane claim to "represent" Terra at interplanetary war councils, but for all we know, the United States government is unaware that they ever left home. When Dunark from the planet Osnome arrives on Earth, the first extra-terrestrial--and a powerful ruler at that--ever to visit our planet, Seaton and Crane receive him privately. This is probably the greatest affront in diplomatic history.

Thus when DuQuesne makes himself dictator of Terra, we are as little excited about it as Doc himself seems to be. We are inevitably more interested in Seaton's thrilling adventures upon the planet Valeron in an unknown galaxy. Furthermore, the final "battle" between Seaton and DuQuesne, when it finally comes, is anticlimactic; the outcome of Armageddon never appeared so predictable. For Seaton is now so invincible that there is no struggle. However, the end of the book is not a complete letdown, for Doc skilfully ties DuQuesne's fate in with those of the pesky "Intellectuals," beings who exist as pure thought, whose menace Seaton faced earlier in the story. Seaton's two antagonists are disposed of together: DuQuesne, made an Intellectual himself, and the seven other Intellectuals, are confined in a tiny spaceship which is pointed out of the galaxy and set to accelerate at "approximately three times ten to the twelfth centimeters per second per second" for one hundred thousand million years, after which it is to be rotated into the fourth dimension--and "if your capsule gets back into three-dimensional space you will be so far away from here that you will certainly need most of the rest of what is left of eternity to find your way back!"

The series ends with Odysseus at home at last: Richard and Dorothy Seaton recline comfortably at their own hearthside, staring dreamily into the flames. They speak of Richard Seaton Jr.--Dorothy typically plays false to the pioneer spirit by wanting him born at home--and Seaton declares that he is reconciled to staying at home for good. We are inclined to view his remark skeptically, but whether or not Seaton kept his promise, and whether or not his son inherits his father's wanderlust, we can safely assume that Doc Smith won't bother to chronicle any further adventures of the Skylark. There is nothing new under any sun for Seaton or Seaton Jr. to try: in these three novels Seaton went everywhere and did everything.

## 5

Doc Smith had confidence in the perfectibility of humanity; the confidence manifests itself in every word of the Skylark series. I do not want to read deep meanings into things that have no deep meanings, but I think one of the chief appeals of this trilogy is that Doc displays such calm conviction that man has the innate ability to learn to fly to the stars, absorb the vast knowledge of great and ancient races, defeat the inimical peoples who would subjugate or destroy him, find his way back from the farthest corner of the universe. The concept so often found today in science fiction, that of imperial Earth holding sway over a million star-systems in a galactic empire, leaves me cold; but the

idea that man is great and good enough to do brave and intelligent things--this inspires me.

In his final battle with DuQuesne, Seaton snatches off the headset of the Brain as "sheer hate" pounds through his mind and he fears what the Brain, "actuated by his own uncontrollable thoughts," might do. Seaton says later, "I realized that I could never get good enough to be trusted with that much dynamite." This is, I think, a wise insight on Doc's part; it takes some of the curse off Seaton's superhuman knowledge and skill to discover that despite all he is still a man, prone to the faults of man. But Seaton's last speech, trite though it is, expresses, I think, Doc Smith's ultimate faith in mankind: "It'll take time, of course--racial hates and fears cannot be overcome in a day--but the people of good old Earth are not too dumb to learn."

I think Doc Smith believes that statement, and I think he further believes in heroes greater than Richard Seaton who will climb right up to the stars in ships made of purple inoson. If he doesn't believe it, he still has the ability to make it sound both dramatic and possible, as if it didn't have to be a mere skylark after all. After reading the Skylark trilogy, I believe it. And it's a belief that I'd like to have bolstered once in a while, even while I was living on a desert island.

#

NOTE: I wish to thank Dr. E.E. Smith for his help in writing the factual portions of this article; he supplied most of the information concerning the actual writing of the Skylark series. Bea Mahaffey and Bob Tucker also deserve special mention and thanks. The critical analyses are in all cases my own and should not be blamed on the kind people mentioned here.

--Redd Boggs

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Unfortunately, there's no room for SOAPBOX in this abbreviated issue. But here are the ratings of the January Sship:

1. 1954 in Review (Bob Silverberg)
2. File 13 (Redd Boggs)
3. ~~Interview~~ (Larry Stark)
4. The Way I See It (Bert Hirschhorn)
5. Review: The Red Peri (Terry Carr)

These back issues are available:

#17, April 1952, Third Annish, 15¢

#22, July 1953, 10¢

#24, January 1954, copies not up to technical standards, 10¢

These issues of IRUSABEN, my former FAPazine: #11, 12, 13, 10¢ each

All other issues of both magazines are out of print.



# IRUSABEN

## A Review of the 67th FAPA mailing

FANTASY AMATEUR -- Unfinished business of the previous mailing: 9th and 10th places in the FAPA poll, by my reckoning, should have gone to Bob Silverberg (29 points) and Dean Grennell (23). But I know how exasperating a FAPA poll can be, so Rotsler's not too blameworthy for miscounting.

FANTASIA -- Loud agreement for this attack on censorship.

OOPS -- Let's echo your final interlineation: if you ever try to write something like this again, may somebody please hit you over the head.

LOOKWARD -- Giving Dave Rike "credit" for that miserable mimeo job is the neatest example of left-handed egoboo I've seen.

DIASPAR -- The definitive parody on the Hemingway novella, so far as I'm concerned, is Rich Elsberry's non-fannish "The Old Engineer and the D," which appeared in the Minnesota Technolog last year.

FIENDETTA -- Generally neat and attractive despite the absence of lettering guides. But it's a pity to do all that work on the heading for your editorial and then misspell "Void." # Your definition of sf is so flexible that it's unwieldy, but in general it rings true. However, it's a bit too general, since just about any work of fiction could be crammed into the "fantasy" category with a little shoehorning.

DEPT. OF IRRELEVANT FICTION -- I don't think I'd have bothered to read this weren't I aware it was by Lee Hoffman, which is either a sad commentary on my reading habits or a fine example of my discriminating taste. As it was I was bored with the attempt to use Runyon's style, but delighted with the bits of Hoffmanisms which showed through despite all.

DAMN! -- Clever cover. # From the style of the author's note after the untitled satire, I'm willing to bet "Tod Cavanaugh" is Norman G. Browne.

HECK! -- Juxtaposition of this and the preceding title in the mailing was purely coincidental, I assume.

HORIZONS -- Recently the B Minor Mass has appeared in duplicate performances on two different labels...know anything about this? Bach Guild issued a Fritz Lehmann-led performance on two lps at \$5.95 each (in New York this set is available at any record store at half price) and simultaneously Urania issued a Request set with the same performers and conductors at \$3.50 per record. Any information on this? # I suppose, as an eagle-eyed observer of paperback developments, you know of Knopf's forthcoming 95¢ Vintage Books. These will reprint items from Knopf's back list, which probably contains more noteworthy books than that of any other American commercial publisher. Included in the first batch are Gide's Immoralist, Eric Bentley's In Search of Theater, Forster's Howards End (available in England from Penguin) and others.

GRUE -- Magnificent is the only word. Lord knows how long Grennell will be burned out after this. # I suspected that Wollheim was Grinnell, but luckily didn't get into print with my "proof positive" before DAW denied it. # In reference to Mittelbuscher's column: I'm not afraid of antagonizing editors with my critical comments, but I do think it's out of line to criticize other authors when by my own efforts I show I'm not in their league. It seems futile for me to write Atheling-like comments on authors, assuming I could, when I make the very same mistakes I'd be pointing out. # Best thing in the issue was your retort to Acky on page 45.

HALF BAKED ARTICLES -- I'm glad Burbee let this one through.

LARK -- Saw my second 3D picture last month, Phantom in the Rue Morgue. It pointed up the reason why 3D has flopped--it made hardly any use at all of the 3D effect, unlike the early It Came from Outer Space, which hurled rocks at the audience in spectacular fashion. Since 3D is an uncomfortable medium when used to maximum effect, and an unnecessary expense when at minimum as here, it's been unable to justify its existence. The picture I saw with Phantom, Creature from the Black Lagoon, had been filmed in 3D but released in conventional depth, which made it tolerable to watch.

SKYHOOK -- Funny thing. I hadn't read the March ASF when I read Atheling's column, and so I wasn't familiar with the Zirul story which undergoes vivisection this time out. Normally I'd have read a page or two of the story and skipped the rest...but, having read Atheling, I subjected myself to every one of the 15,000 words, using it as a primer on what not to do. A choice example which Atheling couldn't bear to quote directly is this: "'Have to,' Halwit blew a smoke ring toward the ceiling, 'no telling what they can find out.'" Curiously, the usually precise Harry Warner commits the same flooper, not quite as horridly, in the opening line of his Imagination yarn, "Cancer World": "'We won the Patagonian trust case,' Greg Marson's jubilant tones filled the apartment."

#### The Previous Mailing

CARRZINE 3: 1 -- Your defense of McCarthy sounds impressive but fails to convince. "If a man is innocent of treason, let him speak up and say so." Guilty until proven innocent, eh? Does it constitute treason to have been, at some time in the past, a Communist? People stamped ex-communists might just as well still be reds, since they're hounded just as much and even more, unless, like Louis Budenz, they piously about-face and help rid the world of the Red Menace. I don't believe it's sinful to be an ex-Communist, and it's unfortunate that the state of American democracy is such that such folk must protect themselves from recrimination by hiding the fact. Everyone has effectively frightened everyone else, and McCarthy is making political capital out of the whole sad situation. Perhaps by the time this reaches FAPA, the current Army-McC hearings will have shown him up as the demagogue he is. I hope so, GM, I hope so.



# BACKTALK

With this issue SPACESHIP rejoins the Fantasy Amateur Press Association after an absence of four years. The alterations in this issue reflect this change. Various rearrangements become necessary:

All exchanges with non-FAPA publishers will continue, unless the other party wants to terminate the exchange. Since exchangers who are also FAPA members will be receiving Sship through FAPA, other arrangements will have to be made individually in such cases.

Subscribers who do not wish to receive the new Sship can have the remainder of their money back on request; inclusion of return postage is preferable but not necessary. Other subscribers will continue to receive Sship until the expiration of their subscriptions. Although Sship will be primarily a FAPA magazine, subscriptions will be accepted at the original rate of 10¢, 3 for 25¢. No advertisements will be accepted except by special arrangement.

The new Sship will have much the same policy as the old: high-quality critical articles, occasional short fiction and miscellany. The columns have been discontinued: Bert Hirschhorn and Roger Dard both plead lack of time, and Redd Boggs prefers not to do a column for a FAPazine, for understandable reasons. No replacements will be sought.

We're still on the lookout for articles in the old Sship fashion. Letters of comment and controversy will be welcomed and will be published when appropriate. SPACESHIP will appear, as always, in January, April, July, and October, and in all respects is still very much alive as it enters its sixth year of publication, despite words to the contrary emanating from the bastions of Eighth Fandom. FAPA members are requested to be tolerant while the period of readjustment from subzine to FAPAmag-cum-Subzine goes on. IRUSABEN is now defunct, but its best features--if any--will be retained in Sship.

--Bob Silverberg

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