

Science Fiction Book Club
Interview with David Ritter (Jan. 2022)

David Ritter is the editor at First Fandom Experience, a cooperative publishing project that has done extensive research on the early history of science fiction fandom. (See <https://firstfandomexperience.org>) Ritter started reading E.E. "Doc" Smith when he was 12, starting with Triplanetary, and has remained a fan ever since.

Thanks for the opportunity to offer what insight we can on E.E. "Doc" Smith. The responses here are the product of the First Fandom Experience team, consisting of David Ritter (me), Daniel Ritter, John L. Coker III (President of the [First Fandom](#) organization), Sam McDonald and Doug Ellis (organizer of the annual [Windy City Pulp and Paper Convention](#)).

John Grayshaw: How did Smith get his famous nickname "Doc"?

For an in-depth exploration of this question, refer to <https://firstfandomexperience.org/2022/01/13/how-did-e-e-smith-become-doc/>

This post also contains a rich autobiographical interview with Smith from 1933 and other artifacts relevant to many of the questions.

John DeLaughter: The Smith estate has allowed other authors to write stories set in the Lensman universe. Why haven't they allowed one to write the final Lensman novel, hinted at in the penultimate Children of the Lens?

We have limited insight on the past or present thinking of the estate. Courtesy of John L. Coker III, some remembrance from David A. Kyle gives us an idea of how Smith's family has tried to protect his legacy. Kyle was the author of three post-Smith Lensman novels, with the collaboration of Frederik Pohl and Verna Trestrial, Smith's daughter. Kyle said:

"Verna had a lot of trouble with pseudo-Lensmen. A Japanese company was ripping-off the Lensman characters, publishing books and animated movies. A company in the United States starting putting out a Lensman comic book. Verna was involved in that because she wanted to protect 'Doc' Smith's memory. In 1989, the lawsuits began. During 1990-93, Verna was fighting to keep 'Doc' Smith's work unsullied, and it cost her thousands of dollars.

"Lloyd Arthur Eshbach... was in constant communication with Verna; each Saturday he would telephone her. Over the years, first with 'Doc' Smith's material, then later with Verna's material, Lloyd sold artifacts, manuscripts, books, all sorts of things to raise money which went to help Verna pay for the lawsuits that have been instituted. Verna fought very hard to keep her father's memory alive and honored."

Kenny Martens: I've heard that the early fans wrote a lot of Lensman parodies and pastiches which they shared in fanzines. Do you know if Doc Smith was active in fandom, if he ever read any of these stories, and what his opinions were? And do you know if any of those old stories are still around, because although I've found references to there being a lot of them, I've only been able to locate two titles in fanzines.

We're aware of the following parodies or take-offs on Smith's work in fanzines:

- **“The Skylaugh of Space” by “Omnia”**
Fantasy Magazine, v3n3, May 1934 and v3n4, June 1934
"Omnia" is described in the July 1934 issue of *Fantasy Magazine* as “a young chap who has shown promise in the science fiction field, having already sold stories to *Wonder* and *Amazing*. Besides, he is editor of his college humor magazine...”
Fitting this description is [Milton Kaletsky](#), frequent fanzine contributor and author of such stories as "The End of the Universe" (*Wonder Stories*, April 1934) and "The Beam" (*Amazing Stories*, September 1934).
- **“Whither Wollheim” by [Richard Wilson](#)**
Fantascience Digest, v1n5, July-August 1938
Not strictly a Smith parody but invokes his work heavily.
- **“Skylark Versus Thought” by [Milton A. Rothman](#)**
Fantascience Digest, v1n6, September-October 1938
- **“Pielark Patrol” by Tony Strother**
D’Journal, v1n2, March 1939
- **“The Skylark of Love” by Philia Hyghe**
D’Journal, v1n3, May 1939
- **“Lensman on the Loose” by [Al Ashley](#)**
Nova, v1n1, November-December 1941
- **“Doomed Lensman” by Sybly White**
Serialized in *The Third Foundation* beginning with n77, 1967
Text is online here: <https://efanzines.com/Planetary/PS02/doomedlensmen.htm>
Appears to be an attempt at a serious addition to the Lensman saga

We’ve made the early fanzine pastiches available in a blog post, here:

<https://firstfandomexperience.org/2022/01/17/foist-lensman-early-fan-pastiche-from-the-works-of-edward-elmer-smith-ph-d/>

Others were published later, not in fanzines:

- *Star Smashers of the Galaxy Rangers* by Harry Harrison
Putnam, 1973
- “Backstage Lensman” by Randall Garrett
Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact, June 1978

This list excludes the authorized extensions such as David A. Kyle’s *The Dragon Lensman*.

A collection of more recent fanfic can be found here:

<http://www.ethanfleischer.com/lensman/links.htm>

We haven’t seen any direct commentary on these works from Smith.

Jim Dean: Skylark and Lensman are full of pithy remarks by the characters, such as “you’re a blinding flash and a deafening report” ... what are some of your favorites - and which ones to your knowledge were not commonly used in the era he wrote? And did he speak like that himself?

Perhaps the “Smithism” that’s most widely and durably promulgated is “Clear ether!” This is essentially the space-faring equivalent of “Smooth sailing!” or “Safe travels!”

The first appearance of this phrase seems to be in *Spacehounds of IPC*, where it’s used as a general dismissal of concern:

“You two seem to know Miss Pickering extraordinarily well. Would I be stepping on your toes if I give her a play?”

“Clear ether as far as we’re concerned,” Brandon shrugged his shoulders. “She’s been kicking around under foot since she was knee high to a duck -- we gave her her first lessons on a slide rule.”

“Don’t be dumb, Norman. That woman’s a knock-out – a riot – a regular tri-planet call-out!”

“Oh, she’s all x, as far as that goes. She’s a good little scout, too – not half as dumb as she acts – and she’s one of the squarest little aces that ever waved a plume...”

This dialog reflects Smith’s hallmark, idiomatic, pseudo-futuristic, adventure-saga phraseology: “a regular tri-planet call-out...”; “she’s all x...” This sort of wordplay often appeared when the subject turned to women. It’s oddly both “of the period,” reflecting the casual objectification of the 1930s – and adapted to the sci-fi context. Even so, it’s possible that some of this dialog originated with Smith’s wife Jeanne, or Lee Hawkins Garby, Smith’s co-author on *Skylark of Space*. Per Smith’s 1933 interview in *Science Fiction Digest*, the two women were responsible for contributing the “love story” aspects of the stories.

Other sayings of note:

- “QX,” meaning “Okay” or “Roger”
- “Flit,” meaning “leave abruptly or with urgency”
- “You’re full of little red ants,” meaning “you’re full of baloney”
This isn’t original with Smith. We don’t know the etymology.
- “Thank Klono” and “I wish to Klono,” where Klono is God, or the god of spacers, or some such that should be thanked or wished upon, and who has an array of metal body parts (“golden gills,” “gadolinium guts,” and so on) which are alternately cursed and blessed
- “Wide-open two-way,” a completely open exchange of thought between two people
- “I check you to (some number of) decimal places,” meaning, “I strongly agree”

Regarding “blinding flash and deafening report,” the phrase seems a bit out-of-sync with the setting. Sound doesn’t propagate in the vacuum of the ether.

Robert A. Heinlein said of Smith:

“In casual conversation Doc used a number of clichés . . . and his male lead characters used the same or similar ones. This is a literary fault? I think not. In casual speech most people tend to repeat each his own idiosyncratic pattern of clichés. Doc’s repertory of clichés was quite colorful, especially so when compared with patterns heard today that draw heavily on “The Seven Words That Must Never Be Used in Television.”

But in his public presentations, Smith decidedly did not speak in the mode of his swashbuckling characters. For a rich sample of the author's style of more formal address, read the text of his Guest of Honor address to the 1940 World Science Fiction Convention at Fanac.org: <https://www.fanac.org/fanzines/Fanfare/Fanfare075-01.html>

Robert Matthew Knuckles: What kind of emotions did he have watching rocket development and the Space Race in general prior to his death in 1965?

John Hayes: I'd be more interested in his reaction to solid state electronics, wish he'd lived long enough to see micro-computers. Always find his space tech version of Victorian electrical circuits and switching gear fun, the original steam punk? Oh, and the electronic valves.

Sadly, Smith wrote little about himself in later life, and there's never been a robust biography. We don't have any understanding of how his feelings regarding new technology evolved over the years.

Though certain mechanical aspects of Smith's technology have a steam-punky feel, most would attribute the origin of that genre more to Verne and (to a lesser extent) Wells.

Chris Sudall: Do you think he would've gone on to write more D'Alembert novels himself? Would he have approved of the series written? I quite enjoyed them and they were the first books to get me back to Science Fiction (for the covers alone!)

It's very hard to say. All the extensions of his universe and characters appeared after his death. This could be an indication that he held his ideas close to his vest during his life.

Ed Newsom: When were these stories appearing in the author's life? Who would he have read/been reading when he was writing them?

Smith was born on May 2, 1890. He began work on what became *The Skylark of Space* as early as 1916, but this first work wasn't published until 1928. He was older than most writing at the time. He was already married and established in his professional career. He wrote most actively in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

On the second part of the question, see the answers below on Smith's influences.

Ed Newsom: What was Smith like as a person?

We've never found anyone who wrote a negative word about Smith as a person, even if they didn't care for his writing. The 1939 description by young fan Erle Korshak in our blog post is a great example of his openness and genuine affection for his readers.

From Forrest J Ackerman we have this nugget, courtesy of John L. Coker III:

"Edward Elmer "Doc" Smith was a vivacious individual. He liked to race his car. I understand that one time Heinlein was sitting next to 'Doc' as he was driving about ninety miles an hour. Oddly enough, while he was a Ph.D., he made a living in doughnuts."

In a 1979 tribute, Smith's daughter Verna said:

"Daddy was such a knowledgeable, helpful, understanding and brilliant human being with an absolute passion for seeking to learn all that he could. The last year of his life, at seventy-five,

he enrolled at Northwestern University for a course in 'Black Holes in Space.' No problem was too minute for him to investigate and do something about if it would help another."

Robert A. Heinlein wrote:

"In each story Doc's male lead character is a very intelligent, highly educated, cheerful, emotional, enthusiastic, and genuinely modest man who talks exactly like Doc Smith who was a very intelligent, highly educated, cheerful, emotional, enthusiastic, and genuinely modest man."

Eva Sable: I'll admit it. I have never read any of his work. Have them, haven't cracked a single one open. Should I just jump in chronologically as is my wont, or is there another starting point that may excite me into continuing?

David Ritter: The book that first captured me was *Triplanetary*. (The full book version from 1948, not the shorter serial version from *Amazing Stories* in 1934.) The epic scope with the sweep of history from the ancient past in the future was compelling to me (at 12 years old). I've re-read it several times since. Like all his work, some parts don't age well, but as an epic yarn it still excites. If you enjoy that book, then the rest of the Lensman series is the natural follow-on. *Skylark* can wait and be read if you still have an appetite, IMHO.

Daniel Ritter: I think *Galactic Patrol* might be my favorite. Kimball Kinnison is quintessential Smith for me. As I recall this is really where I feel like the memorable space battles pick up, and the overall universe Smith builds to is in full form. The slave race / master race arc is memorable to me – the Velatians and Delgonian overlords. *Galactic Patrol* could even be a good place to start reading Smith, but I think a thorough read through should probably begin with *Triplanetary*.

Ed Newsom: Would you share some Smith-Heinlein anecdotes?

It's likely that Smith and Heinlein first met in person at the September 12 1940 meeting of the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society, subsequently deemed the "Skylark Meeting." Smith was the Guest of Honor, having driven to LA following the 1940 Worldcon in Chicago. We know that Heinlein and his wife attended, as did Jack Williamson, Edward Hamilton, Ray Bradbury, Leigh Brackett and Ray Harryhausen.

Heinlein reported this incident:

"August 1940 – back road near Jackson, Michigan – a 1939 Chevrolet Sedan: 'Doc' Smith was at the wheel; I am in the righthand seat and trying hard to appear cool, calm, fearless – a credit to the Patrol. Doc has the accelerator floorboarded... but has his head tilted over at ninety degrees so that he can rest his skull against the frame of the open left window in order to listen by bone conduction for body squeaks. Doc could do almost anything and do it quickly and well. In this case he was selection a road-testing for me a secondhand car. After rejecting numberless other cars, he approved this one; I bought it. I drove that car for twelve years. Doc Smith has not missed anything. It's name? Skylark Five, of course."

Heinlein also described this conversation regarding a scene in *Spacehounds of IPC*:

"[This scene is] almost purely autobiographical in that it tells why the male lead, 'Steve' Stevens, knows how to fabricate from the wreckage at hand everything necessary to rescue Nadia and himself. I once discussed with Doc these two chapters, in detail; he convinced me that his hero character could do these things by convincing me that he, Edward E. Smith, could do all of them. . . and, being myself an experienced mechanical engineer, it was not possible for him to give me a 'snow job. (I think he lacked the circuitry to give a 'snow job' in any case; incorruptible honesty was Dr. Smith's prime attribute-with courage to match it.)"

David Stuckey: There are a lot of mentions by Smith about his consulting with other technical people on certain matters in the Lensman books when his own knowledge was limited; Is it possible to name some of them now, such as "The Lockheed engineer who worked on the Shooting Star" who calculated the details for the atmosphere of Trencu, for instance?

We know the identity of one early scientific collaborator: Dr. Carl Garby, who Smith described as "my roommate in college and my life-long friend" and "a mathematical physicist of no mean attainments." Garby and his wife contributed to the *Skylark* stories.

From "The Epic of Space," we know that:

"The planet Trencu was designed and computed, practically in toto, by an aeronautical engineer who was responsible for the Lightning, the Constellation, and the Shooting Star. Dr. James Enright, of Hawaii, psychologist and psychiatrist, solved some of my kinkiest problems. Dr. Richard W. Dodson, nuclear physicist, helped a lot. So did Heinlein. So did many others, not only in the United States, but also in such widely separated places as Australia, Sweden, China, South Africa, Egypt, and the Philippines. It is bromidic, but true, to say that two heads are better than one. It has been my experience that fifty are still better."

Regarding the designer of Trencu, our best guess would be Lockheed engineer Hall L. Hibbard. See his 1996 obituary from the *LA Times* here:

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-06-26-mn-18711-story.html>

Jim Dean: Did Doc consider Marc Duquesne to be a black hearted villain a la Boskone, or did he intend Duquesne's occasional pragmatic "good" deeds (with ulterior motive of promoting his eventual triumph) to evidence some shards of goodness in his heart?

I've heard others promote that theory - I don't ascribe to it - Doc seemed to like black and white distinctions on heroes and villains, imo.

We don't have a source that would indicate Smith's intentions for the interpretation of Duquesne. It's interesting that the character was a chemist, like Smith himself – but based on accounts of Smith's personality and ethics (noted elsewhere), we'd say the similarities end there.

Personally, I read Duquesne as amoral, acting transactionally to his own benefit. Others have described the character's action as "pragmatic." If this happened to align with what was "good," it was a coincidence. But in this regard the character is an interesting contrast to Smith's other actors who could generally be classed as "moral" or "immoral."

It can be credibly argued that Smith's most prominent work – the Lensman series – is categorical in its separation of good and evil. The entire history of the universe and the beings in it are aligned with either Arisia or Eddoria in two pan-galactic pyramids, destined to war with each other to the bitter end.

Of Smith, Robert A. Heinlein wrote:

"He believed in Good and Evil. He had no truck with the moral relativism of the neo- (cocktail-party) Freudians. He refused to concede that "mediocre" is better than "superior." He had no patience with self-pity."

Kurt Rongey: Did Smith ever read Robert William Cole's *The Struggle for Empire*? If so, did he share his thoughts on it?

We don't know if he read this book or what his perspective may have been. We've haven't seen it mentioned in any of his essays. Of course, the comparisons to Smith's work are obvious, so it wouldn't surprise me if he'd encountered it. He was an avid reader.

Andrew ten Broek: Given he had stated (in regards to stories) that the more unlikely the technology described is, the better he'd like it, what future technology / concept he came up with was his favourite one? Did he also have a favourite one written by another author?

We haven't found any direct statements from Smith regarding his favorite inventions. Seems likely to us that the technology that enabled interstellar travel in his books – Seaton's inertialess drive – would top the list. The Lens would be another natural fav, given its dual role as guarantor of the wearer's integrity and universal language translator, enabling inter-species communication.

In a letter from John W. Campbell, Jr. to Smith on June 11 1947, Campbell asserts that the US Navy used Smith's ideas for displaying the battlespace situation (called the "tank" in the stories) in the design of their Combat Information Centers. Campbell writes:

"The entire set-up was taken specifically, directly, and consciously from the Directrix. In your story, you reached the situation the Navy was in—more communication channels than integration techniques to handle it. You proposed such an integrating technique and proved how advantageous it could be. You, sir, were 100% right. As the Japanese Navy—not the hypothetical Boskonian fleet—learned at an appalling cost."

(This anecdote is from Wikipedia, and we generally don't cite material from that source without further validation. In this case, we're confident in the veracity. The notes on the Wikipedia entry refer cite the letter as shared with the entry's author by Smith's daughter Verna.)

In a letter dated November 16 1947, Campbell wrote to Robert D. Swisher:

"Count (Werner) von Braun, ex-chief of research at Peenemunde, currently – for the last six months – at White Sands, (was) discussing something in the rocket line the Navy wanted with a Navy rocket expert. The Navy man had been laying down the specifications they'd like (and knew they couldn't get), and von Braun was shaking his head. Finally, he said 'Ja, I know. What you want for that work is a Bergenholm' (an engine used by E.E. Smith in his Gray

Lensman series). The Navy officer nodded and answered, 'Well, how near can we get without the Bergenholm?' and the discussion continued. Willy Ley told me that one."
(quoted in *Fantasy Commentator*, v11, n3-4, Spring 2011. A. Langley Searles, Editor)

Like von Braun, Willy Ley was a German rocket scientist who escaped to the United States just prior to World War II. He was also a science fiction fan and author, known most for his science articles published in science fiction magazines.

Andrew ten Broek: I just read Doc Smith was also a food engineer earlier in his life, focused on pastries. So, what were his favourite fillings for the pastries?

We haven't seen Smith express a particular favorite. From his 1933 interview, we read:

"Did quite a lot of work on fully prepared flours – doughnut, waffle, biscuit, etc. – and finally this side-line grew into a really important business. So important, in fact, that the firm took me out of the main laboratory, built me a research laboratory, and called be 'Director of Research.' I am now in line for the honorary D.Dn. [Doctor of Doughnuts]."

Kennedy Gammage: My question is about public domain status and the possibility of a movie someday.

It appears that Smith consciously revised the Skylark and Lensman material when it was re-published in book form, which can have the effect of establishing a new work for copyright purposes. Because of this and the 95-year protection offered for work from that period, much of his material is likely still protected.

An article on IGN cites a SCI FI Wire report that Ron Howard's film company (Imagine Entertainment) considered a film adaptation of the Lensman series in 2008. Wikipedia reports the project was scrapped due to budget limitations.

<https://www.ign.com/articles/2008/01/11/opie-optioning-lensman>

John Grayshaw: Who were some of the writers Smith grew up reading?

John Grayshaw: Who are some writers that were Smith's contemporaries that he enjoyed/admired and how did they influence his work?

John Grayshaw: Who are some of the science fiction writers he had correspondence and friendships with?

From "The Epic of Space" by E.E. Smith, published in *Of Worlds Beyond*, Lloyd A. Eshbach, editor, Fantasy Press, 1947

"What do I, as a reader, like to read? Campbell, de Camp, Heinlein, Leinster, Lovecraft, Merritt, Moore, Starz, Taine, van Vogt, Weinbaum, Williamson – all of these rate high in my book. Each has written more than one tremendous story. They cover the field of fantastic fiction, from pure weird to pure science fiction. While very different, each from all the others, they have many things in common, two of which are of interest here. First, of all they put themselves into their work, John Kenton is Abraham Merritt; Jirel of Joiry is Catherine Moore. Second, each writes or wrote between the lines, so that one reading is not enough to discover what is really there. Two are necessary three and four are often-times highly rewarding.

Indeed, there are certain stories which I still re-read, every year or so, with undiminished pleasure. Consider Merritt, for instance. He wrote four stories: 'The Ship of Ishtar,' 'The Moon Pool,' 'The Snake Mother' and 'Dwellers in the Mirage' which will be immortal.

A ten-year-old child can read them and thrill at the exciting adventurous surface stories. A poet can read them over and over for their feeling and imagery; philologists can study them for their perfection of wording and phraseology. And yet, underlying each of them, there is a bedrock foundation of philosophy, the magnificence of which simply cannot be absorbed at one sitting.

In this connection, how many of you have read, word by word, the ascent to the Bower of Bel, in 'The Ship of Ishtar?' Those who have not, have missed one of the most sublime passages in literature. And yet a friend of mine told me that he had skipped 'that stuff.' It was too dry!

These differences in reader attitude, however, bring up the very important matter of treatment. It is a well-known fact that many readers, particularly those whose heads are of use only in keeping their ears apart, want action, and only action. Slam-bang action; the slammier and the bangier the better. It is also a fact that some editors will either reject or rewrite stories which do not conform to such standards. Since it is practically impossible to read such a story twice, however, the type is mentioned only in passing."

Also, from my copy of the 1931 edition of *Spacehounds of IPC*, Smith inscribed the book to L. Sprague de Camp:

"While it may not be de rigeur to mention only one achievement of a guy who has hit the top so often, your 'Divide and Rule' really did things to me -- I get more of a kick out Sir Howard van Slyck every time I re-read it."

John Grayshaw: What kind of research did Smith do for his books?

Two examples at least, from "The Epic of Space" (op. cit.), referring to *Skylark*:
"Since the inertia of matter made it impossible for even atomic energy to accelerate a spaceship to the velocity I had to have, I would have to do away with inertia. Was there any mathematical or philosophical possibility, however slight, that matter could exist without inertia? There was – I finally found it in no less any authority than Bigelow (Theoretical Chemistry – Fundamentals). Einstein's Theory of course denies that matter cannot attain such velocities, but that did not bother me at all. It is still a theory – velocities greater than that of light are not absolutely mathematically impossible. That is enough for me. In fact, the more highly improbable a concept is – short of being contrary to mathematics whose fundamental operations involve no neglect of infinitesimals – the better I like it."

"Having the Lensman universe fairly well set up, I went through my collection, studying and analyzing every 'cops and robbers' story on my shelves: from Constantinescu's 'War of the Universes,' which I consider a masterpiece, up to the stories of Starzl and Williamson, who wrote literature worthy of the masters they are."

(Smith erroneously names Clinton Constantinescu and his 1931 novel, *War of the Universe*.)

John Grayshaw: What are some interesting anecdotes about Smith going to conventions and meeting his fans?

There are many. Most notably, Smith was the Guest of Honor at the second World Science Fiction Convention, the 1940 "Chicon." He traveled from there to Los Angeles, where he was the Guest of Honor at a remarkable meeting of the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society. He was an organizer and host of the "Michifans 'Get-Acquainted' Conference" in Jackson, Michigan in November 1941 – the precursor of the long-running annual "Michicons."

Perhaps most revealing is Smith's participation in the costume contest at the 1940 Worldcon, where he dressed as "Northwest Smith" from the stories by C.L Moore – though his leather suit and ray gun could well have been the uniform of a Gray Lensman. His daughter Clarrissa MacDougall Smith was garbed as Nurse MacDougall from *Gray Lensman*.

[Shameless plug follows.] We've assembled a number of these stories as well as a comprehensive look at Smith's activities at the 1940 Worldcon in our latest book, [*The Visual History of Science Fiction Fandom, Volume Two: 1940.*](#)

John Grayshaw: What are some of the most interesting things you've found in your research of Smith?

As we've noted elsewhere, Smith's active involvement in fan activities went well beyond that of his peers. He attended conventions (in costume!), help to found the Galactic Roamers club in Michigan, traveled coast-to-coast to attend fan club meetings, made substantial contributions to fanzines and regularly wrote back to fans that sent him letters.

Contrast this with his stolid professional career as a chemist. And contrast both with his hobbies and lifestyle, riding Indian motorcycles and driving his car at extreme speed. Overlay this with the universal reports of his basic decency and warmth – Smith seems to us to have passed a unique life, very well-lived.

John Grayshaw: Do you have personal favorites of Smith's work? And what are some of his works that don't get as much attention as they deserve?

David Ritter: For me, it's the Lensman novels, end-to-end. The Skylark series follows in my ranking. For the sheer audacity of the premise ("They were the finest interstellar agents – and the greatest circus stars...") and the rollicking action, IMO "The Imperial Stars" represents the most interesting of his later writing. This 1964 novella was the basis for Stephen Goldin's follow-ons, dubbed the "Family D'Alembert series."

John Grayshaw: Are there any unpublished Smith works in drawers or archives somewhere or is everything published?

Robert A Heinlein wrote:

"The Lensman novel was left unfinished; there was to have been at least a seventh volume. As always, Doc had worked it out in great detail but never (so far as I know) wrote it down. . . because it was unpublishable - then. But he told me the ending, orally and in private.

I shan't repeat it; it is not my story. Possibly somewhere there is a manuscript-I hope so! All I will say is that the ending develops by inescapable logic from clues in CHILDREN OF THE LENS."

At this point, we'd say it's unlikely that there's much to be discovered. Lloyd Arthur Eshbach had access to some fragments. He "completed" and published *Subspace Encounter* in 1983. One other hint from John L. Coker III:

"An acquaintance of mine was close to Doc Smith and told me in 1999 that he had an unpublished manuscript that Doc had given to him. What happened to the manuscript is unknown."

It's consistently surprising to us how things thought lost sometimes turn up in unexpected places. Many science fiction fans are also avid collectors, so who knows what's lurking in stacks of boxes in various garages?

We're also not aware that Smith's papers have been donated to a university. Per the next question on Smith's writing habits, he made several drafts of his stories. What became of these? We can't help but wonder.

John Grayshaw: Did Smith have any particular writing habits or routines he stuck with?

Again from "The Epic of Space:"

"I write the first draft with a soft pencil, upon whatever kind of scratch-paper is handiest. This draft is a mess; so full of erasures, interlineations, marginal notes, and crossovers to the other side of the paper that I can't read it myself after it gets cold. The second draft is written, a day or so later, from the first – with variations. It is also in pencil, but isn't so messy; except when radical changes are necessitated by departures from the outline a few chapters later. My wife can read most of it, and she types what we call the 'typescript;' in reality the third rough draft. This draft, in various stages of completion, is read and heatedly discussed by the Galactic Roamers, a fan club in Michigan and Los Angeles. Comments and suggestions are written on the margins; on some hotly-contested points they cover the entire backs of pages. I accept and use the ideas I think are better than my own original ones; I reject the others. By rights, these friends of mine should have their names on the title-pages and a share of the loot, but to date I have been able to resist the compulsion to give them their dues.

"From the typescript, after the last 'final' revision, my wife types the 'original,' which goes to Campbell. And as soon as it has been shipped I always wish that I had it back, to spend a few more weeks on the rough spots."

Smith's commitment to collaboration was notable throughout his career. His active membership in the Galactic Roamers provided a ready base for early input to his work. The club was organized in 1941 following the 1940 World Science Fiction Convention in Chicago, and included fellow author E. Everett Evans and leading fans such as Walt Liebscher, Jack Wiedenbeck and Al and Abby Lu Ashley.

John Grayshaw: What were some of Smith's hobbies other than writing?

From a May 8 1938 letter from Smith to Chicago fan Jack Darrow, we have:

"...there's an irreducible minimum of club and social activity – the motorcycle club, about which my son and daughters howl bloody murder if I miss too many events. [Smith owned and rode Indian motorcycles.] Golf: if I don't get out there often enough, my hook gets

uncontrollable, my score gets 'way over 90 and I develop high blood pressure. Bowling ditto – my average is something pitiful, and I used to roll in the 180's for the season! Bridge – I have had to quit playing cards entirely. I have a peach of a shop in my basement – carpenter, machinist, radio – and that gathers dust most of the time. And I've simply got to do some digging in the yard and some tinkering around the house. And in my spare time I've got to write scientific fiction stories..." (Letter provided by Doug Ellis)

In a 1979 convention speech, Smith's daughter Verna asserted that his golf handicap was three, and that he was an amateur open champion in Michigan. She also said:

"In Heinlein's magnificent tribute to Daddy he wrote about how expert Daddy was in so many areas: 'I do not believe Doc played the dulcimer (although it would not surprise me in the least to discover the was an expert.' It was with great delight I could tell Bob that Doc had been president of the University Mandolin and Guitar Club! Here at the University of Idaho we discovered more marvelous things about my father – he was captain of their crack drill and rifle team, president of the Chemistry Club, and sang in Gilbert and Sullivan light operas."

John Grayshaw: What is Smith's legacy? Why was his work significant at the time? And why is it still important today?

Prominent early fan David A. Kyle, author of *The Dragon Lensman* and other derivative works, said this of Smith:

"Doc' Smith was an innovator, filled with creative ideas, and did things that had not been done before. He was an inspiration to many other science fiction authors who were writing in huge galactic frames of reference. His first story, considering he was an amateur, was a remarkable piece of work. 'Doc' learned his craft as he was writing, and subsequent writing improved. It was more cohesive, better. When he was writing the Lensman stories he was at his peak. 'Doc' Smith was an older man, as Ray Cummings and David H. Keller were older men." (Quote courtesy of John L. Coker III)

As we know, the "space opera" thrives to this day. *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Babylon 5*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Guardians of the Galaxy* – all can credibly trace some heritage back to the original spacefaring epics. The influence of the Lensman novels on George Lucas was noted in Dale Pollock's biography of the filmmaker.

Critics brand Smith's work as bombastic and lacking substance. Some point to the objectification of women and the casual extermination of alien races the "good guys" find offensive. These characteristics were ubiquitous in writing of the period and not confined to the science fiction genre.

Robert A. Heinlein wrote:

"The ideas, the cosmic concepts, the complex and sweeping plots, all were brand new when Doc invented them. But in the past half century dozens of other writers have taken his plots, his concepts, and rung the changes on them. The ink was barely dry on SKYLARK OF SPACE when the imitators started in. They have never stopped."

Resources

Quotes from Robert A. Heinlein are from his essay "Larger Than Life: A Memoir in Tribute to Dr. Edward E. Smith," as it appeared in *Expanded Universe, The New Worlds of Robert A. Heinlein*, Ace Books, 1980

Quotes from Verna Smith Trestrail are from her Guest of Honor speech at Moscon 79, September 1979, as transcribed in *First Fandom Magazine*, Fall 1980 – Spring 1981. Material courtesy of John L. Coker III

Smith's Wikipedia entry has a decent overview of his life and work, though it's missing some citations:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E. E. Smith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._E._Smith)

Smith's entry in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* is also helpful, especially for its thorough listing of derivative works:

https://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/smith_e_e

For a complete listing of Smith's publications, the Internet Speculative Fiction Database is a good source:

<http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi?67>

The full text of many of Smith's stories is online with Project Gutenberg:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/author/9515>

Photos

(Please be sure to include the full captions if these are re-published.)



The "Skylark Meeting" of the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society.

Fantasy Fiction Field, n35, June 14 1941, documenting the September 12 1940 meeting of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society.

Front row: Charlotte Malby, Pogo (Mary Corrine Gray), Irene Schlmeyer, "Ln-or" O'Brien, Virginia Laney, Sophia Van Doorne, Morojo (Myrtle R. Douglas), Mrs. Leslyn Heinlein

Second Row: Hal T. Curtis, William Crawford, Ray Harryhausen, George R. Hahn, Grady McMurty, Russ Hodgkins, Arthur K. Barnes, Robert A. Heinlein, Walter J. Daugherty, EE Smith, PhD, Jack Williamson, Ray Bradbury, Perry Lewis, Harold Clark, Alex Endemano, Alvan Mussen

Back Row: Franklyn Brady, A. Ross Kuntz, Melvin Dolmatz, Forrest J Ackerman, Edmond Hamilton, Charles D. Hornig, Victor J. Clark, T. Bruce Yerke, Roy A. Squires II



E.E. "Doc Smith," his daughter Verna and Lloyd A. Eshbach, c1950.
Photo by Ben Jason. Courtesy of John L. Coker III



Jeanne Smith, Robert A. Heinlein, E.E. "Doc" Smith, likely at the 1960 Worldcon. Photo by Ben Jason.
Courtesy of John L. Coker III