

# Tightbeam 339



Double Suns by Tiffanie Gray

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December 2022

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Tightbeam is published approximately monthly by the National Fantasy Fan Federation and distributed electronically to the membership.

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## Editorial

We are saddened to report that Justin E. A. Busch has joined Will Mayo in passing to the next plane of existence. His obituary has appeared in the November issue of FanActivity Gazette, in the place of the Fanfaronade column he edited for all Neffers.

Justin had briefly assumed the editorship of Films Fantastic. In light of our losses, for the nonce film reviews will appear in these pages. It is sad state of affairs, but over the years we have gradually lost reviewers for Tightbeam, so that this zine is less long than in years past.

Neffers are encouraged to write reviews specifically for Tightbeam, including reviews of films, television, videos, poems, music, short stories, comics, and anime.

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## Editorial

To begin with a bright note, we are grateful to Bob Jennings for his novel reviews. We hope that they will long continue to appear. We also welcome short reviews, but long reviews are truly appropriate for our pages.

Tightbeam tries to review a bit of everything stfnal, in every medium. The late Will Mayo opened our pages to entire forms of stfnal representation not before reviewed here. It remains for other fen to continue in his footsteps. Surely there is some Neffer who would be willing to review anthologies, short stories, music, film, comic books, or manga?

## Anime

### Anime Review – One Punch Man Review by Jessi Silver Authoress of S1E1.com

One Punch Man Saitama is a hero who only became a hero for fun. After three years of “special” training, though, he’s become so strong that he’s practically invincible. In fact, he’s too strong—even his mightiest opponents are taken out with a single punch, and it turns out that being devastatingly powerful is actually kind of a bore.

With his passion for being a hero lost along with his hair, yet still faced with new enemies every day, how much longer can he keep it going?” – Daisuki.net

Streaming at Daisuki , Hulu  
Episodes: 12  
Source: Webcomic/Manga

Review: I do a panel once a year at the Anime Detour anime convention focused on “Anime for Grown-Ups” – anime series that older anime fans might enjoy. I try to pull anime series, old and new, from several different genres that have aspects that might appeal to folks who are older, have a lot of life experience, and might not identify very closely with the typical anime protagonist (teenage male high school students, specifically). There are people who tend to misinterpret this as me saying that popular anime or anime aimed at younger audiences is “inferior” in some way to these shows and movies that I’m suggesting in this panel, but that couldn’t be further from the truth. It’s just that, sometimes, it can be difficult being an older anime fan and never seeing yourself represented in the shows you like to watch, especially in the popular ones.







The upside is that, when the overlap between popularity and representation happens, it's like striking gold a hundred times over. One Punch Man isn't a complicated show and its action animation and humorous writing have made it really popular with the anime viewing masses. But the element of the series that resonated the most with me and which I think makes it more successful than anime with a similar focus is that its central character embodies a lot of the things that can make life as an adult an emotional struggle.

Let me just say, I really like being a grown-up. I like handling my finances, being able to hold down a job, and having the ability to decide what to do with my time. Driving a car is really great, and watching all the R-rated movies I like is pretty nice, also. But there are struggles, too. Navigating treatment for mental illness sucks, mortgages are complicat-

ed and scary, and even a good job can get really boring and tedious if you aren't in a space where you feel like challenging yourself. Possibly one of the worst parts of coming into your adulthood is eventually gaining enough knowledge of the world to become cynical about it. If you're careful and lucky this might be avoidable, but I think for most of us it's easy to allow the gleam of adulthood's privileges wear off, or perhaps you're in a situation where you've never really even been allowed access to the things that others take for granted. Either way, arriving at the realization that "this is it" can be kind of sucky.

What I loved about this show is that this is exactly where we meet Saitama. Currently stronger than just about every monster, demon, or alien that shows up to harass the people of his city, Saitama's internal desire to fight for justice and defend the citizenry is currently at a low simmer. He's reached a point where life no longer holds any challenges, and waking up from a wonderful dream where he's in an all-out fight for his life, only to realize that the hot-blooded danger he envisioned in his mind's eye was all an illusion, is depressing. There's actually some humor in this situation, but I think different audiences will laugh for vastly different reasons.



The Girl by Angela K. Scott

Young people will likely giggle at the utter absurdity of Saitama's battle power and how his low-key attitude about it all is so incredibly different from your typical bellowing shounen anime protagonist. But for those of us who have been around long enough to have come to the realization that, most of the time, you don't end up in some career that uses all your talents and pays enough to allow you to live your dreams, and most of the time life isn't an endless parade of doing whatever the hell you want with your time, the laughter definitely comes from a place of understanding. For a show about a guy who punches dudes through buildings and causes enemy bodies to explode, I'm starting to make it sound kind of depressing.

One of the things that saves this series from being entirely cynical is the relationship between Saitama



Saitama (unwillingly) takes on a protege.  
Copyright Madhouse Inc.

and his eager student, the cyborg soldier Genos. It's clear from the outset that Genos doesn't really need anyone to train him since his robotic body affords him all sorts of power, so much so that he's immediately recognized as one of the top-ranked heroes in Japan. Even though he could survive well enough as a loner, he thrives when he looks to Saitama as his master.

There are a lot of times when I wonder why, at the age of 34, I still attend a college anime club. Most of the time when I'm there I get really irritated at the other attendees and their inability to settle down and watch the shows, or the fact that they might not appreciate the full scope of why some series are classic or important (not just older shows, but some really great newer ones, too). But I also get the experience of being around people who are plenty smart and full of real talent, and for some reason some of them want to talk to and get to know me, too. It's easy to look at anime fandom and think, as an "older" fan, "there's nothing left for me here."

Fandom keeps getting younger while I stay the same, or at least it seems that way sometimes. But when I see my younger friends' artwork or hear about the new cosplay they're working on, or if they want to talk to me about lolita fashion, there's something about those interactions that remind me that there isn't such a wide gulf between myself and these people, and being around them helps remind me that I don't have to let go of all the shiny things in life just because life itself isn't a constant stream of shinies and rainbows. I like to think (and have interpreted the situation as such), that Saitama gains a little bit of the same perspective being around Genos, whose earnestness helps to offset Saitama's ennui very well.

The other aspect of the series that reflects its underlying youthful joy is the way that this show was animated. As much as I would love to be an expert on key animators and the animation process in Japan, it's just not a sense that I've had time to develop and so I leave it to the experts. There's an excellent article over at Anime News Network written by contributor Kevin Cirugeda regarding what makes One Punch Man's animation so special, complete with commentary and some informative gifs that should give you a pretty good idea of what has gone into making this show look the way that it does. The biggest takeaway I had, though, and what I think is especially relevant to the spirit of this series, is that the production team for this anime wasn't working with some extravagant animation budget or an abundance of time in which to draw it all.



The aftermath of one of Saitama's encounters. Copyright Madhouse Inc.

What it is, according to the chief animation director, is simply the work of passionate animators doing their best. Knowing anything about the Japanese animation industry, with its ability to work its animators to the bone and pay them salaries that keep them in a state of poverty, it seems almost impossible to think that there are animators left with the ability and drive to push their art to the limit. But once again I think that's one of the lessons worth learning from this

series – it’s easy to be cynical (and sometimes grossed-out) once you know how the sausage is made, but it bears repeating that there are many people who, either because of their young age or some magical ability of theirs to keep from becoming completely jaded, truly exemplify why there are things worth caring about.

If I had to levy a complaint against this anime, it would probably be that it gets bogged-down by introducing a lot of side characters and “plot” (defined very loosely) in the second half that drag the show down a bit. With a title like *One Punch Man* expecting high art would be stupid, and the show appropriately spends most of its time being, how to say, “dumb as hell.” That’s fine and doesn’t bother me. Even with a paper thin plot I still managed to somehow draw a lot of personal meaning from the show.

But once the series achieved “dumb as hell and full of other dummies, too” by introducing a slew of other hero characters in the latter several episodes, I started to get a little annoyed. Some of the characters are interesting – I especially liked Silver Fang, the old man with high level martial art powers. But some of them are downright irritating, namely Tatsumaki, the green-haired esper with a bad attitude who spends most of her screen time being snotty for no reason. In any case, because the anime is so brief I felt like there really wasn’t time to utilize the large cast of characters very well, and if there had been a good way to keep things simple (at least for this season of the show, as there will surely be more to come later on) and focus on Saitama and Genos for a while, I would have preferred that.

Because the final confrontation is so purely focused on Saitama, specifically him finding someone with whom he can have a (nearly) fair fight, I think this would have been do-able with a little tweaking. But surely that would have upset fans of the source material, so it’s just another no-win anime adaptation situation.

Being an adult is complicated, and it doesn’t always feel that great. For every awesome splurge, there’s also an accompanying bill to be paid. The ability to do the fun things you want to do is coupled with the lack of energy that keeps you from doing it. You can buy any anime DVD you want, but there might not be a lot around that you want to own anymore (not my personal problem, but then again I’m a hopeless weeb 4 lyfe up in here). I

n some cases, it can feel a little bit like there’s not much point to going through the motions every day. I think it’s great, then, to have a reminder that there are still thrilling experiences to uncover (even if you have to wait until you’re discovered by a disgruntled space alien with a penchant for violence... yeah, sometimes anime isn’t all that realistic).

I wouldn’t have expected that reminder to show up in the form of an incredibly popular shounen series, but it serves as a great reminder that there are plenty of younger people out there with valuable things to teach us, and that listening to them might just keep us young.

Pros: The show, possibly somewhat by accident, is sort of insightful about the struggles of adulthood. Dat animation.

Cons: It gets bogged down with too many characters (some of whom are very irritating) in the second half.

Grade: A-

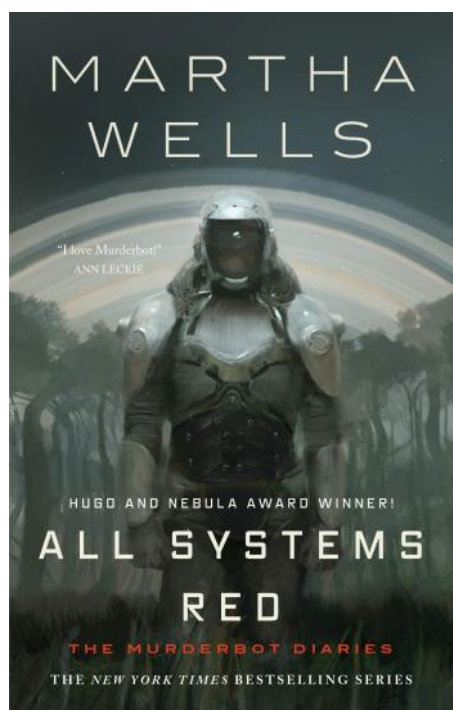


# Novels

## All Systems Red: The Murderbot Diaries

by Martha Wells

Review by Bob Jennings



I freely admit that I am late coming to this series. Thus far seven MurderBot books and three short stories have been published, and I barely knew they existed until recently, when I happened to be reading some stf news, and discovered that Ms Wells said that she didn't want her latest book in the series to be considered for this year's Nebula Awards, since she had already won so many Nebulas and other awards for the series that she felt she should step back and let others share the spotlight (as it were).

Well! That sure impressed me, so I checked this book out from the library, and I have to say I enjoyed it thoroughly. Altho this is packaged as a hardback book, it is properly a novella, longer than a novelette, but way shorter than the standard word count of a novel (which is generally accepted as 60,000 words or more).

The protagonist of the series is a security construct cyborg: part organic, and part mechanical. Assigned to assist and protect a small exploration/survey party on a recently discovered distant planet, problems begin to develop immediately when a large, nasty, previously unknown creature in the area they are investigating lunges out of the sand and tries to eat one of the party. The security Bot kills the monster, saves the life of the human and also the life of his partner. But, there are problems with the save, as some ongoing med, security and network feeds seem to directly conflict with each other during the encounter.

We quickly learn that the artificially intelligent security bot has managed to hack her programming so that she is able to ignore human commands, disregard new upgrades and downloads unless she feels like accepting them (or parts of them), and has developed sentient intelligence and independence. In her free time, of which she had plenty, since she is not human, she likes to be entertained, particularly with human adventure soap opera serials. She also has access to any field of knowledge that interests her due to the off planet network feeds. Because of the rapid intergraded circuits in her system, she can learn, store, remember, and react to situations thousands of times faster than any human.

Oh, and despite being addicted to human entertainment vid stories, she doesn't particularly like humans, and tries not to interact with them up close and personal unless absolutely necessary. She named herself MurderBot because on one of her previous security jobs with a mining company she went berserk and killed ninety+ human miners before she was stopped.

As the story unfolds we rapidly learn that someone, or something, is trying to kill all the human



survey teams on this new planet for unknown reasons. What happens during this dangerous interchange with unknown foes makes up the bulk of the story, centered around Murderbot and how she reacts and tries to save her party of humans, and somehow unravel the mystery of what is trying to kill everyone, and why they are doing it. There is plenty of action and interaction between Murderbot and the humans. Ms Wells is an excellent writer who invests genuine characterization into her cyborg protagonist including some flaws and weaknesses related to her independent from total Company regulations and control. Murderbot emerges as a well rounded character with a distinct personality.

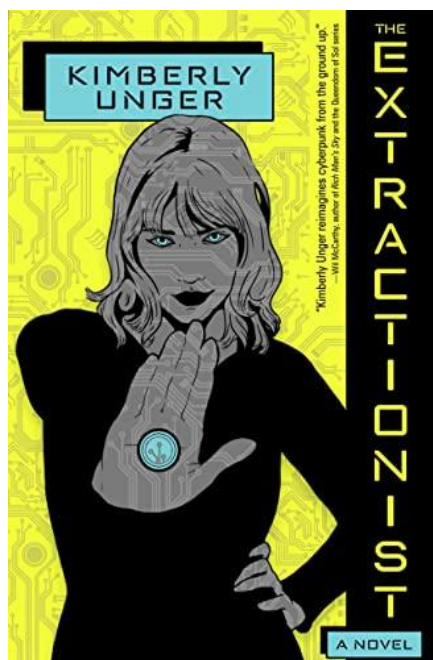
I don't want to say too much more about the plot of the story, in case there are a few people out there who haven't read it yet. If you haven't read it yet, you should do so, soon. This story won a Hugo and a Nebula Award and some other awards as well, and it deserves all the accolades it has received.

I did notice one flaw in the back story plot of Murderbot's existence near the end of the tale. Namely when Murderbot is being purchased intact from her original owners, the Company technicians are horrified, upset, and very adamant that after every contract job is completed, the SecurityBot memories have to be erased and new upgrades automatically installed. If that were indeed the case, then Murderbot should have no memories, no sentient intelligence, and no way of hacking into her programming. Her existence would begin from scratch with each new contract job, including this one. Perhaps Ms Wells addresses this interesting situation in one of the later stories. I'll let you know, since I already have the next three books on order from my town library.

## The Extractionist by Kimberly Unger

### Review by Bob Jennings

This is a fantasy novel masquerading as science fiction. The premise is that in the not too distant future computer technology has made significant advances to the point where people can become hard-wired, with complex computer systems built right into their brains. In this future



world there is a never ending radio wave flow of information about everything everywhere that savvy computer whizzes, especially people with X-advance interfaces such as our heroine Eliza McKay has can tap into. The setup says that McKay can also direct and control this at the local level, including writing effective computer code in her mind on the fly, and have it applied immediately to the data flow (the Stream) and seeing its effects become reality immediately (apparently no hard core engineering work is needed in this world).

I'm a firm believer that when reading any kind of science fiction novel you have to Buy The Bit; that is, accept the background and the basic premises the author sets up in order to make the story work, then go with it to see what the author has accomplished with the setup and the plot as it unfolds.

However this was a pretty large pill for me to swallow. Altho I am pretty much a computer and mathematical dunce, it was



**The Roar by Angela K. Scott**

very difficult to accept this setup, even tho Ms Unger handles the setup very well and only rarely steps outside the fictional technological world she has created. I just can't see much difference here between the computer code spinning McKay uses effortlessly to direct and change reality and a mage knight swinging a magical sword or a Doctor Strange character wiggling his fingers around and muttering a few gobbledy-gook words to have something he wants magically happen without any rational explanation for any of that besides the generic term "hey, it's all magic!". Except in this case, "Hey, it's all computer-ize!" So far as I can see all the computing stuff in this book might as well be magic too, since it doesn't seem to have any kind of connection with the real world at all.

However, to be fair, some of the computer-magic in the story is clearly nanotech, and A-I robotics, not computer tech. The things that get done are often the work of nano-robots, the stuff scientists and micro-engineers say can be literally built from molecule molding levels upward and assigned to do specific tasks, like keeping carpets clean of dirt, or eating foot spots off dishes. In this story robots from small to large have A-I intelligence built in and are told to handle any number of routine tasks, so there is that much anchorage in the world of science/science fiction.

But, be that as it may, Ms Unger handles the story very well. The X3 enhanced computer designer Eliza Mc Kay has lost her government license to fiddle around designing new computer and nanotech A-I systems because of a never quite disclosed foul up, and now works as an extractionist. In this world people can send their personas into virtual worlds where they can stay and experience the artificial world of gaming, or pornographic fantasies, of mathematical interfaces, or business extrapolations, or whatever. The costs are cheap, the lure is often addicting, and sometimes the personas get trapped in the digital world and cannot be retrieved by normal means. That's when an Extractionist needs to be called in, to pull the persona out of the virtual universe and moved back into the physical body in the real world.

What starts out as a semi-secret extraction of a government investigator who was in the Stream trying to find information on possible illegal activities his agency is checking escalates rapidly.



**Winged Kitten by Angela K. Scott**

First, the persona doesn't want to be extracted, then outside forces, presumably employed by the person who is being investigated tries to break up the operation. Then the plot escalates rapidly as McKay is physically and cybernetically attacked by people or agencies unknown. Everyone either wants the persona of Mike to be extracted and contained, or allowed to slowly degrade and die. McKay is the only one who seems able to complete the job of actually pulling Mike's persona out, that's if she can live long enuf to get the work coding processed properly.

This is a high tension, fast moving, suspenseful sto-

ry that holds the reader interest from first to last. There are any number of quirks and red herrings along the way to keep the plot twisting in unexpected ways. Ms. Unger is a good writer, and as mentioned, once you Buy The Bit, she remains remarkably consistent with the perimeters of the universe she has created. The heroine is interesting and the plot works very well to keep the reader completely engaged in the story.

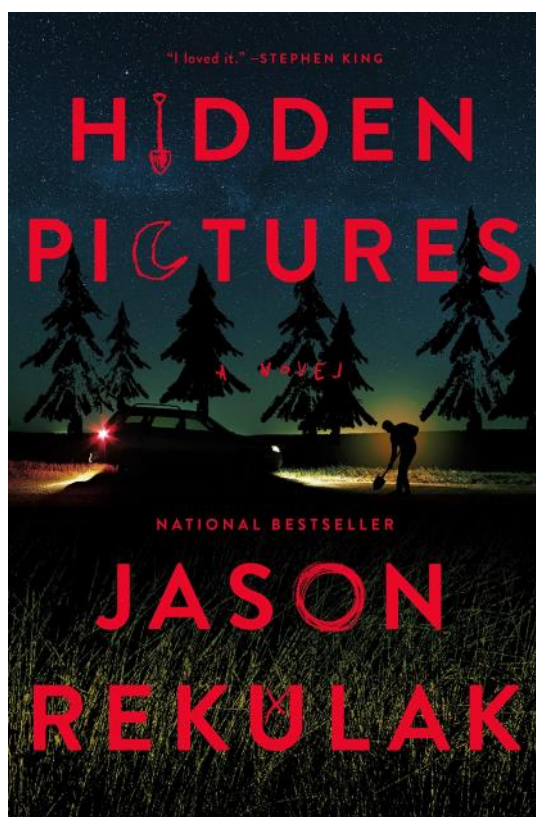
Author Kimberly Unger is a computer whiz herself. A designer of computer games going back to the early days of the field, she also has degrees in English and Illustration. In addition to writing computer games, and science fiction, she also gives lectures on the intersection of art and computer code. The Extractionist is her second full length novel, and it is a good one, well worth reading. I'm sure it won't be her last.

### Hidden Pictures by Jason Rekulak Review by Bob Jennings

This book is being advertised and promoted as a horror thriller. It even has a glowing recommendation from Stephen King as a prominent cover blurb. Do not be swayed by this hype. I am well aware that there are lots of people who turn and run the other way when the very mention of a horror novel comes up in conversation.

Hidden Pictures is not a horror novel. It is an unusual story involving supernatural elements, and a mystery story that escalates and becomes a genuine thriller as it nears its climax.

The plot is deceptively simple. Mallory Quinn, 21 years old, is a recovering drug addict. She got hooked on Oxycodone due to injuries and guilt from a car wreck that killed her sister, an accident she is convinced she caused. She switched to heroin because it was lots cheaper than Oxycodone, and the slide downhill was very rapid. But thanks to the intervention of a dedicated brother figure at a half-way house she is well on the road to recovery, or so she believes.



With the help of her mentor she applies for and gets a job as a summer nanny for a five year old boy named Teddy who lives with his parents in a very upscale community after they recently returned from Barcelona, Spain. Parents Ted and Caroline Maxwell agree to hire her conditionally, with some limitations on her behavior and movement, all of which she readily agrees to. She gets a little converted cottage behind the big house to live in, and soon bonds with young Teddy. She likes the community, goes for nightly runs to stay fit, watches Hallmark movies on her tablet, and hopes that this summer seasonal job will turn into a full time employment situation.

Teddy is very shy and resists socializing with other children, but, like a lot of kids he loves to draw. He is seldom without his pad and set of crayons, but some-

times when he draws there is a black, shaggy, bestial figure in the picture. He says this is his imaginary friend Annie. Confronted he cheerfully admits that he knows Annie isn't a real person, but the images continue to appear in the kid's drawings and then one day there is a picture of a man dragging a woman by the hair thru the woods. Then Teddy's drawings began to become more detailed and more sophisticated, demonstrating artistic talent far beyond the ability of a five year old child, while the subjects become increasingly more sinister.

Mallory sets out to discover what these images mean, and why Teddy is drawing this stuff, which leads to information about a decades old murder of a local artist that took place on the property, in the very tool shed that has become her own converted cottage living space.

This is a very well written story that appears to progress at a leisurely fashion with plenty of characterization of the heroine and all the supporting characters, but this is a deceptive skill of the author, because the story plots move along very rapidly indeed.

Aiding the development of the plot is the able assistance of artists Will Steele and Doogie Horn-er who provide black and white illustrations to go along with the narrative. These drawings, supposedly done by Teddy and carefully positioned thruout the book, graphically and eerily display the rapidly changing mood that is driving the crux of the story.

Unraveling the mystery, trying to find why Teddy is being used as the human sketching machine for the unknown seemingly supernatural creature, and what it all means is the ongoing plot of the story. Answers do not come easy, and there are false steps along the way as the tension begins to mount. This is a brilliant mix of ghosts, murder mystery, supernatural possession, high tension thrills, and unusual plot twists, all built around the personal challenges Mallory faces as she tries to rebuild her life. The climax and its aftermath are both realistically and supernaturally satisfying.

This is one terrific book, a title I recommend without hesitation. Just make sure you give yourself plenty of time once you start reading, because this is one of those novels that once you begin you are not going to want to put down until you finish it. I fully expect this book to be among the top contenders for all of the awards in the supernatural/horror/thriller categories, and it is a story that will stay with you long after you have read that final page.

## SerCon

### Ross Rocklynne Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

N3F Historian

Ross Rocklynne (February 21, 1913 – October 29, 1988) was the principal pseudonym used by Ross Louis Rocklin, a science fiction (SF) fan and author who was active during the Golden Age of Science Fiction.

While at boarding school, he wrote for his school's monthly publication. As a young fan, he





was a member of The Hell Pavers -- the informal pre-World War II group of Cincinnati, Ohio, SF fans that much later became the Cincinnati Fantasy Group -- of which he was one of the founders.

In 1941, Rocklynne was one of the Founding Members of our club, the National Fantasy Fan Federation.

### Personal Life

Rocklynne was the product of a broken home, and was placed in a boys' school where he stayed for five years. While there he was introduced to both Edgar Rice Burroughs and Amazing Stories.

He married Frances Rosenthal in 1941. They had two sons before divorcing in 1947.

Before becoming a full-time writer, he held a wide variety of jobs, including working as a story analyst for a literary agency and as a writing consultant for the Warner Brothers Studio in Hollywood.

### Awards/Honors/Recognitions

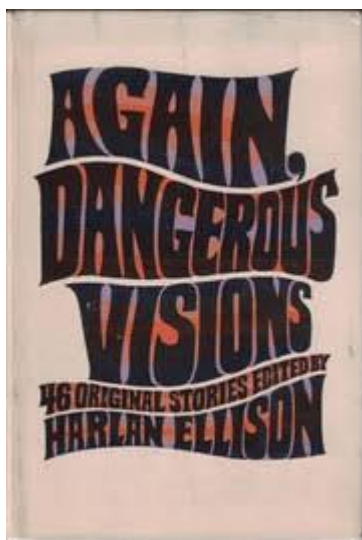
Rocklynne was a professional guest at the first World Science Fiction Convention in NYC in 1939.

He was one of the principal speakers at Westercon 3 in Los Angeles in 1950.

Despite his numerous appearances at conventions and solid writing, however, he never quite achieved the fame of many of his contemporaries such as Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and L. Sprague de Camp.

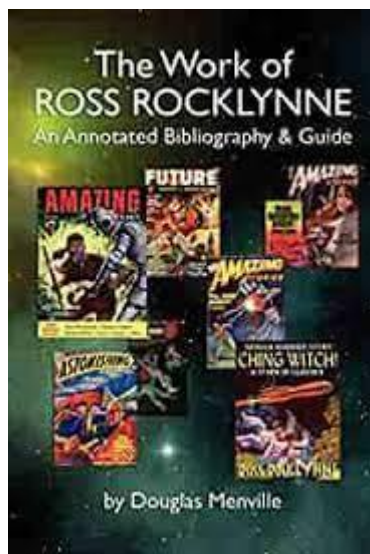
### Fiction Writing

Rocklynne was a regular contributor to several SF pulp magazines including Amazing Stories, Astounding Science Fiction, Fantastic Adventures, Startling Stories, and Planet Stories. He once said that he sold his first story "after four years of spasmodic writing." This first SF publication of his was "Man of Iron" that was published in the August, 1935, issue of Astounding.



He was a popular author with fans, and wrote such well-known stories as 1938's "The Men and the Mirror" -- which was part of his "Colbie and Deverel" series in Astounding -- and 1941's "Time Wants a Skeleton," which has been reprinted in several anthologies, including Isaac Asimov's Mammoth Book of Golden Age Science Fiction.

Rocklynne specialized in space opera and time travel stories whose plots centered around scientific puzzles.



### Retirement/Return to Writing

Rocklynne partially retired from writing in the late 1950s – when he became interested in L. Ron Hubbard’s new “mental science” of Dianetics -- but made a notable return in the 1970s when his story “Ching Witch!” was included in *Again, Dangerous Visions* (1972), an original anthology edited by Harlan Ellison.

The story is an ironic tale about the curious morality of a man who, as a result of genetic engineering, has a lot of cat in him. This story was later nominated for a Nebula Award.

### SF Books

Rocklynne’s published book-length works were *The Sun Destroyers* and *The Men and the Mirror*, both issued in 1973 by Ace Books. Ray Bradbury said of the first: “I particularly liked 'The Sun Destroyers'. It surely was unusual and unexpected.” The second book was a collection of some of Rocklynne's best stories, including three from his “Colbie and Deverel” series.

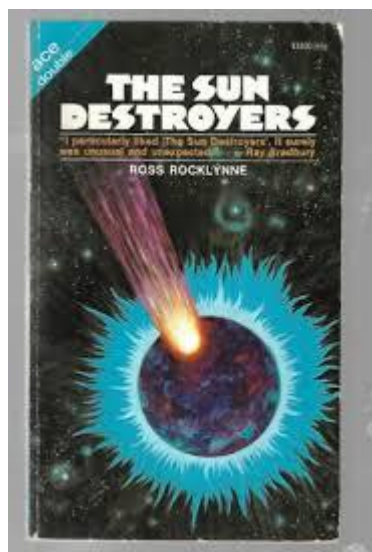
### Pseudonyms

In addition to Ross Rocklynne, Rocklin used the pseudonyms of H. F. Cente, Carlton Smith, and R. Rocklinne.

### Radio Appearance

His story “Jaywalker” was broadcast on NBC’s *X Minus One* on April 17, 1956, with Bob Hastings and Raymond Edward Johnson in the cast.

### Critical Appraisals



A genre critic once wrote that Rocklynne “had one of the most interesting, if florid, imaginations of the pulp-magazine writers of his time, and wrote very much better than most.”

Fellow SF author Chad Oliver once described Rocklynne as follows: “He was a major creator of the science fiction of the past, but he was also one of those who pointed the way ahead.”

Harlan Ellison, in his introduction to Rocklynne’s story in *Again, Dangerous Visions*, described him as “a fine writer who has come through all the years of his life with his talent intact....”

### Some Conclusions

His photo appears, in a group of fans, on page 99 of genre historian Harry Warner's *All Our Yesterdays*. Rocklynne died in Los Angeles at the age of 75 due to complications of heart disease. Forrest J Ackerman delivered the



Winged Wolf by Angela K. Scott

eulogy at Rocklynne's funeral. Rocklynne was survived by his two sons, Keith Alan (born in 1944) and Jeffrey David (born in 1946).

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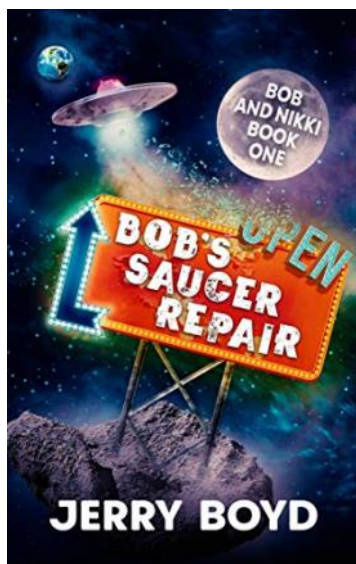
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Note: In addition to the above, several Internet sites were consulted, including Fancyclopedia 3, ISFDB, and Wikipedia.

## Food of Famous Authors

### Eat This While You Read That: Jerry Boyd Cooking by Cedar Sanderson



I asked Jerry Boyd to take part in this series because even though I have not (yet! I promise I will, Jerry!) read any of this series, they look like tons of fun. And the First Reader read all of them. It was a little funny – I manage the Kindle library, and I'd get a text saying 'could you please put another Bob book on my phone?'

The latest book in the series  
Or start here, with book one!

The First Reader says that the series has been a pleasant read, and he's been enjoying it. He says it's not as much 8 separate books as it is one very long serial story, each one carrying on from the other. There's plenty of action, most of the characters are likable – except for the bad guys of course, who are mostly not likable. Lots of adventure, lots of confident people. The one thing he'll mention is that



there are a lot of characters, and if you aren't chain-reading the books, you might lose track of who is who. So this is a great series for binge reading! The books are a lot of fun: popcorn books. The latest is *Secret Squirrels*, but if you haven't yet had the pleasure, start with *Bob's Saucer Repair*.

Well! With one of them in hand... Jerry threw me a curveball with this recipe.

You see, I grew up cooking from scratch. That's not a brag. We were poor. We couldn't afford convenience foods, and Mom was home with us, plus I was homeschooled, so we had all the time in the world to cook food. I know, on an intellectual level, that for ease and convenience there are a lot of things out there for quick and easy cooking. I've even used some of them. But this recipe stumped me a little, so I winged it and did it partly my way!

## Lazy Stroganoff

Frozen beef strips, or frozen meatballs. (Beef strips, about 2 cups, cut into bite-size pieces. Meat balls, 16-20 large, or 20-24 small. Italian, not Swedish, the Swedish have too much flavor on their own.) Cedar's note: this is where I went astray. I have no idea what frozen beef strips are or where to find them. I had a nice beef knuckle I was breaking down to freeze, I just made strips like I would for my stroganoff.

Pasta. (I use a 13.5 ounce box)

½ to 2/3 cup sour cream

1 12 oz. jar of beef gravy (could not get this. State of the stores these days! Made do with a packet)

1 10.5 oz. can of cream of mushroom soup

½ envelope of onion soup mix

1 beef bouillon cube, crushed (mixes better that way) (I don't do bouillon cubes, I used a tsp of my base)

1 ½ tsp. Worcestershire sauce

1 tbsp. Liquid Smoke

1-1 ½ tsp. black pepper

1-1 ½ tsp. paprika

1 1/2-2 tsp. ground garlic

Start some water for your pasta. (If you don't have a favorite method for cooking pasta, you really need to spend more time in the kitchen. If carbs are a problem, Dreamfields is good stuff. Amazon has it if your local places don't.) (We like to use rotini for this, but use what you like.)

Cedar: We like egg noodles. Lots of surface area to hold sauce

I was using fresh meat, because it's what I had, so I started this before the pasta.

While your water is heating, warm your frozen meat in the microwave, and then combine the gravy and cream of mushroom soup in a skillet over low heat. (Combine. That means no





stripes.) Add pepper, paprika, garlic, Worcestershire, Liquid Smoke, and your bouillon cube. Stir that all in, and taste. Remember, sour cream is dairy, and will knock the heat of the dish way down, so you want it pretty spicy at this point. If you don't think it's spicy enough, don't be afraid to go overboard. You can always fix it with a little extra sour cream. (In an extreme case, a spoonful of peanut butter does wonders.) Once you're satisfied, add your sour cream. Once the stripes are gone, add in your warm meat, and serve over the pasta.

Stroganoff might not look like much, but it's good!

Cedar: I started the mushrooms (yes, those are my addition. We like them and I had a package that needed using up) and the beef in the pan, sauteing in bacon grease until browned, then proceeded as Jerry directed up until the sour cream. Before adding that, I put a lid on the pan, reduced the heat, and allowed to simmer for 20 minutes. At that point, I added the sour cream and took it off the heat.



The end result was rich, tasty, comfort food. Jerry's way is much faster than any of the three variations I know (this is my Dad's favorite meal, and I make it a lot. I have a recipe from my Great-Grandma Lily for Hamburger Stroganoff I should put on the blog some time). Perfect for an evening when you don't have the time to fuss in the kitchen! Hopefully you do have time to put your feet up and read Bob's Saucer Repair, though!





Space Installation  
by Cedar Sanderson