

Tightbeam 367

April 2025



Mars Coming in for a Landing
by Jose Sanchez

Tightbeam 367

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What is Tightbeam? We are the N3F literary fanzine, not the novel and anthology fanzine, but the fanzine that tries to cover all tastes in fandom, such as anime, comics, cosplay, films, novels, biographies, poetry, music, short stories, food, ...

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

The N3F offers four different memberships. To join as a public (free) member, send phillies@4liberty.net your email address.

To join or renew, use the membership form at <http://n3f.org/join/membership-form/> to provide your name and whichever address you use to receive zines.

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Public (non-voting) memberships are free. Send payments to Kevin Trainor, PO Box 143, Tonopah NV 89049. Pay online at N3F.org. PayPal contact is treasurer@n3f.org.

Editorial Note

We particularly thank our regular contributing authors, including Heath Row and Cedar Sanderson. Heath Row's many works are collected by him in The STF Amateur, issues of which are found in The N3F FrankinZine. Cedar Sanderson is cedar.sanderson on Facebook and cedarwrites.com elsewhere. Michael Gallagher and other fine reviewers appear in Upstream Reviews.

Table of Contents

Art

Front Cover ... Mars Coming in for a Landing by Jose Sanchez
Back Cover ... Dangerous Doors by Tiffanie Gray

Letter to Editor

4 ... Lloyd Penney

Comics

4 ... Frank Herbert's Dune: The Graphic Novel ... Review by Thomas E. Simmons

Films

5 ... The World, the Flesh and the Devil ... Review by Heath Row
6 ... Flow ... Review by Heath Row
7 ... The Gorge ... Review by Heath Row

Novel

8... Sherlock Holmes and the Shadwell Shadows by James Lovegrove
Review by Michael Gallagher

Sercon

10 ... L. Sprague de Camp Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

Gourmet Bureau

13 ... Recipes of Famous Author Cooking by Cedar Sanderson

Anime

16 ... Mononoke Week 5: Nue (Japanese Chimera) Review by Jessi Silver

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Letter to Editor

Dear George and Jon:

Thank you kindly for Tightbeam 366, the leap year issue. It's been so busy lately getting books finalized for publishing, so this loc should be a fast one. I will start that Alan White's cover is great. Could it be he's getting even better?

My loc...I finished working that provincial election, just in time to start getting in gear to work a federal election. We are paid to work these events, and as a senior, the extra money is always needed and necessary.

One of the books I hinted at in the initial paragraph is *Amazing Stories: Best of 2024*. Steve Davidson and I have written some introductions, I think Kermit Woodall will get something in, too, and Kermit is also working on the final preparations done to get it released ASAP. The cover art is by Bob Eggleton, so it is guaranteed to be spectacular.

My thanks to you, Jon, on your bio of Richard Matheson. He was one of our favorite authors, due to his novels *Bid Time Return* and *What Dreams May Come*, and both were made into memorable movies. Plus, we also appreciated his talents on the original *Twilight Zone*. We have nearly all of his early books. We especially liked his appearance as *The Astonished Man* in *Somewhere in Time*.

I knew it would have to be fast. Our schedule gets so complex sometimes, I think we could use a secretary. Pipe dream, so we have to write everything down. Thank you for this issue, and I will get to the next *Real Soon Now*...

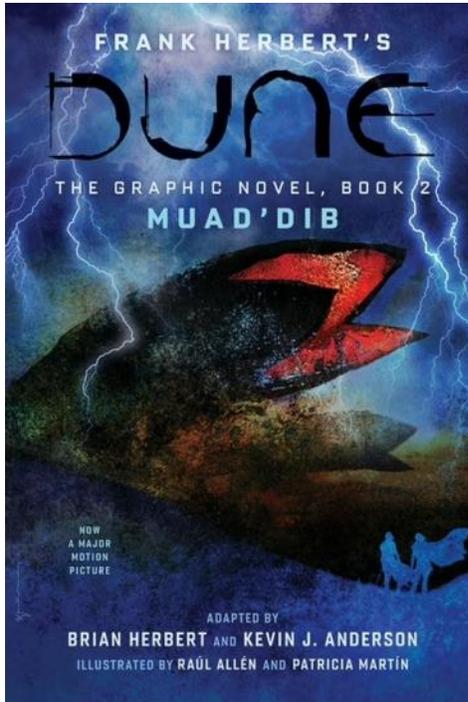
Yours, Lloyd Penney

Comics

Frank Herbert's *Dune: The Graphic Novel, Book 2*, by Frank Herbert Review by Thomas E. Simmons

As most readers know, Frank Herbert's *Dune* was originally conceived as a three-part novel. This is the second graphic novel adaptation in said trilogy (titled *Muad-dib*). It covers the timespan of the first weeks of Paul Atreides' and his mother's new life with the desert-dwelling semi-nomadic Fremen. (The third graphic novel is titled *The Prophet*.)

This represents the most engaging segment of the *Dune* saga and co-adapters (Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson) hit their stride in *Muad-dib*. While the first and third parts of the novel are more militaristic and grander – even space-opera-esque – the narrative sandwiched between them is more romantic and softer. Its scope is narrower; many scenes take place within the enclosed space of a cave. And it's a sort of fish-out-of-water tale with Paul and his mother adapting to a new life and a new culture. Paul even adopts a modest Fremen name, *Muad-dib* – the Chakobsa term for a desert mouse “wise in the ways of the desert.”



Yet there's also an underlying foreshadowing of Paul's expanding mystical consciousness and the bloody jihad to come. Facing the consequences of a knife duel with Jamis, Paul initially wants to reject the water recovered from the loser's body. His mother, Jessica, instructs him that given their new cultural milieu with the Fremen, he must accept it. Paul sees the wisdom in her counsel and quotes, "From water does all life begin." Jessica, in a captioned voice-over, exclaims, "A verse from the Orange Catholic Bible! Why does he quote from that now?"

The funeral for Jamis which follows is powerfully portrayed. The primary palate shifts from red to blue. Chani, using Jessica's Chakobsa title, calls her to join the women: "Come, Sayyadina, we must sit apart." The men, meanwhile, stand separately.

As the ceremony begins. Jamis' corpse (whom Paul has just slain in combat) lays on the stage lit with torches. One by one, the friends of Jamis take the stage and participate

in a somber celebration of life, recollecting the decedent's character and taking an item from the pile of the decedent's chattels.

Paul wonders to himself whether he is supposed to also take the stage, proclaim he was a friend of Jamis, and take an item from the pile. He asks himself, "How can I say I was his friend?" But the Fremen men insist. So Paul Muad-dib climbs the steps to the stage and says, haltingly, "I ... I was a friend of Jamis. Jamis taught me ... that ... when you kill ... you pay for it" and picks out Jamis' stringed instrument, a baliset.

Later, Muad-dib begins to pluck the baliset and plays it for Chani.

Soon thereafter, the graphic novel concludes, setting the stage for the uprising to come in the final chapter. A conclusion to *Dune* is necessary. But this segment is difficult to improve upon.

Films

The World, the Flesh and the Devil Review by Heath Row

Inspired by one of the movie advertisements I reprinted in a fanzine, I watched this 1959 film a few weekends ago. Harry Belafonte portrays a coal mine inspector who's trapped in a cave-in during a worldwide disaster. When he emerges, the town in which he worked, in Pennsylvania, is vacant. The people are gone. Buildings are empty.

After discovering what might have caused the unexpected depopulation, he travels to New York City, where he's more likely to find a critical mass of survivors. There, he learns even more. Eventually, he encounters and befriends two other survivors, a man and a woman.



The flick does an excellent job exploring what one might do in such a situation and the inventiveness necessary to take advantage of any surviving technology. Belafonte's character is an impressive jack of all trades. It's also the story of the tensions present when there's an overriding need to repopulate the world. Would you be attracted to the only other survivor if it came down to just two people who could couple heterosexually? Would that matter?

The mine inspector and the other surviving man compete for the attention and ardor of the surviving woman, who would prefer to interact with them in another manner and at another level.

It's also a story about the expectations and limitations associated with interracial relationships at the time of the movie's making. Before the second male survivor is located, the growing friendship and love between Belafonte's character and the young white woman is much less complicated. Post-apocalyptic loneliness and depression would be very real. With the introduction of another man—a white man—Belafonte's character presumes that his place in society will return to his racial status before the societal collapse.

The movie is visually excellent. Its use of a seemingly abandoned New York City is wonderful, the background paintings and other effects utilized to portray the city from aerial vantage points are interesting and inventive, and the hero's initial approach to the city, the bridges and tunnels blocked by abandoned cars, is quite effective. That reminded me a little of the tunnel scene in Stephen King's novel *The Stand*, though the film is less oppressive and horrific.

Oddly, no corpses are ever seen, and the scientific explanation for the megadeath doesn't quite seem plausible. But the movie is an excellent character study, an inspiring story of rebuilding urban infrastructure and human relations, and therefore a reminder of the healing value of friendship and mutual aid—as well as the potential importance of ham radio. An excellent movie.

I might have seen this once before, but if so, only aspects of the beginning seemed familiar. I can't imagine that I'd forget the heavy-handed comedic use of the mannequins!

Flow Review by Heath Row

A few weekends ago, my wife and I watched the 2024 animated film *Flow*, which recently won Academy Awards for Best Animated Feature and Best International Feature Film. Consider it a post-apocalyptic or post-deluge *The Incredible Journey*.

While the remains of a human society—human structures—are visible throughout the movie, viewers never see them and don't know what happened to them or where they went. All we know is that there's a deluge, a flood, and that a number of animals gather together to navigate and survive in the newly watery world.



The main character or focal point of the story is a cat who encounters several dogs, a capybara, a ring-tailed lemur, and a number of secretary birds. Each animal character has its own personality, characteristics, and desires. They don't always comfortably align.

Relatively linear in its storytelling, the movie follows the group from place to place and event to event, in what might be a parallel to the story of Noah's Flood. Some of the remaining structures—including statues, towers, and a mountaintop temple—are quite grand and awesome, providing excellent opportunities for the ol' sense of wonder.

The animals largely look out for each other's well being, often at some cost to themselves or loss in social standing among their own kind. And there's one scene in which the element of the fantastic is quite strong.

The production of the movie is also notable. A collaboration between animators in Latvia, France, and Belgium, the film was animated using Blender, an open-source software program. It reportedly took five years to make, and the result is wonderful.

The Gorge Review by Heath Row

While finishing the second season of Severance on Apple TV+, the streaming service was actively promoting this 2025 movie. So I watched it last weekend while folding laundry. It was surprisingly fun. The gist of the movie is that since the late 1940s, world political powers have been secretly collaborating to maintain and staff two watchtowers overlooking a mysterious gorge.

Every year, a single military veteran or person with similar experience staffs one of the two towers—one on one side, one on the other. There's no communication with each other or the outside world, they don't even know where in the world they are, and they spend their days maintaining the gorge's defenses, mines and gun embankments. The facility is technologically hidden from satellite view.

You see, there are things trying to get out of the gorge. And that would be bad. Over the course of the movie, two people newly assigned to the towers—both expert snipers experiencing difficulties practicing their craft—break protocol in order to fend off loneliness six months into their shifts. They find themselves in the gorge accidentally. There, they discover just what is happening, why, and what needs to be done in order to survive and end the decades-long cycle of lies.



While largely a horror movie similar in some ways to Silent Hill, the movie includes sci-

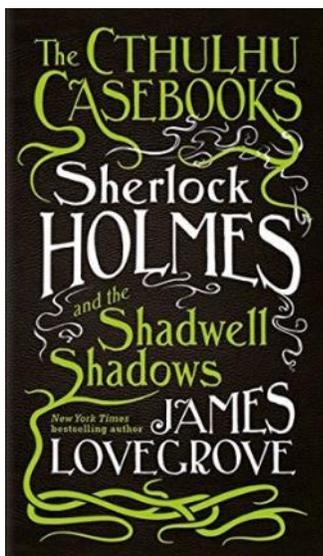
ence fictional elements, as well as its alternate history take on the Cold War. The gorge's mystery—and its dangerous inhabitants—are the result of biochemical weapons research disrupted by a seismic event. That disaster leads to some intriguing genetic mixing among the life forms in the gorge, plant and animal alike.

The movie does a good job establishing the characters of the two protagonists, developing their friendship and relationship over time. And the scenes at the bottom of the gorge are wonderfully atmospherically creepy and shrouded in mystery. Also of note are the scenes inside the research facility.

I think it deserves a broader theatrical release. Streaming only feels so direct to video.

Novel

Sherlock Holmes and the Shadwell Shadows by James Lovegrove Review by Michael Gallagher



Sherlock and Cthulhu: while seemingly a crossover that should sell itself, few creative types of any stripe have managed to hit commercial gold with it -- until now. James Lovegrove has, in my unreserved opinion, emerged the uncontested master of a niche pairing that almost no one manages to get right.

Attempts to pit the avatar of New World deductive intellect against the agents of primordial forces beyond the ken of man have largely been fumbling at best and awful at worst. In 2003 the anthology *Shadows Over Baker Street* made an attempt with none other than Neil Gaiman heading the list, but the hard-to-find compilation yielded only a few decent stories.

Perennial mid-tier jobber PC studio Frogwares produced the glacially slow and atmosphereless *Sherlock Holmes: The Awakened* in 2005 to zero acclaim, and since then nothing much has blipped the radar. Then, in 2013 Lovegrove cracked his knuckles and started churning out darker-edged Holmesian fare at the rate of a title a year or more. 2016-2018 saw a trilogy that had Sherlock and Watson squaring off against the agents of Lovecraft's rogue's gallery, and I can say easily that no one does it better. Our journey begins in the slum back alleys of Shadwell.

The story

Lovegrove is, in my unreserved estimation, the writer that can positively nail the tone and feel of the characters from Doyle's own works. We join Dr. John Watson going AWOL with a company of his men in an effort to find glory in the form of rumored ruins hidden in the forsaken wastelands of Afghanistan. Their efforts are tragically successful, given that Watson is the only survivor; he barely manages to escape the race of underground monstrosities they've disturbed. His compatriots are slaughtered and he is maimed, saved only making it into the light of the sun they so fear. Haunted by frequent nightmares, he scurries into the soothing lie that they fell victim to an ambush party to cope with the trauma.

He is alone and close to destitute when he is introduced to Holmes in disguise trailing a suspect in a pub, who happens to be an old university colleague of Watson's. Becoming more closely acquainted after a resulting back alley foot chase, Watson eventually moves into 221B Baker street proper, in need of distraction and friendship. It doesn't take long before their attention is drawn to a series of deaths in the Shadwell district of London. Victims turn up, their corpses gaunt and emaciated despite having only recently gone missing. Holmes quickly deduces that the deaths are occurring on each new moon, and when an opium-addicted suspect of theirs starts shrieking in a tongue Watson hadn't heard since that fateful day in Afghanistan, their trail takes them into the grimy depths of London's opium dens and far, far worse.

The characters

Lovegrove's core cast of characters will suit even the stodgiest of Holmesian purists. These are the characters played in the classic (and in my opinion, best) sense, wholly free of gimmickry. Holmes is in the infancy of his career, a bit younger and bolder than we may be used to, but the probing, pensive mind and all-seeing, all calculating eyes are very much there. Watson is every bit his role as trusted sidekick; no peer of Holmes in a deductive sense, but a war-toughened confidant who doesn't shrink from a fight and whose knowledge is vital to supplying key medical insight and advice. Inspectors Gregson and Lestrade also make their appearances. Gregson plays the everyman. His position in Scotland Yard can sway police attention away from or towards the groups' schemes as need be. Lastly, Mycroft Holmes joins in as the only member of the group able to intellectually knock Sherlock down a peg occasionally, and whose resources and contacts at the private and exclusive Diogenes Club become valuable to their aid.

Oh, the villain of the book? Yes, he is very much present, and he's working with powers of eldritch sorcery this time around.

The world

It's 1880 Victorian London in all its gray, dirty squalor. Shadwell is a particularly run-down section of the city, evoking a similar feel to Whitehall during Jack the Ripper's reign of terror. Poverty is life here, and its many drug-addled, poor and unknown denizens make for easy victims under cover of night. The gaslight lamps that line its streets do little to push back the darkness, and the long, black shadows they cast offer plenty of places for dangers both natural and supernatural to hide in.

The politics

None.

Content warning

In terms of violence, what's on the page is adventurous and pulpy, with more gruesome fates happening off screen or described in some muted way. The story is never even remotely in danger of swearing or including anything carnal. It's frankly a great gateway read to help get an adolescent interested in the character and perhaps into Doyle's classic stories -- with one caveat.

Magic: More specifically, occult magic, is featured heavily and is the primary means by which our heroes combat their enemies. While this is true to Lovecraft's own worldbuilding (The

Dunwich Horror is perhaps the best example of this), anyone who has strong aversions to this sort of thing should take this into account before getting the book. Lovecraft's world is one in which the Christian God does not exist in any real sense. Doyle was a lapsed Catholic who turned to Spiritualism. Holmes as written was functionally an atheist. It was this aspect of his character that partially inspired G.K. Chesterton, a Holmes fan himself, to create his own iconic detective figure in Father Brown. Chesterton admired Doyle and enjoyed Holmes' adventures, but disliked his ascetic and cold methodology, divorced from the human heart's chaotic passions and sinful nature.

While there is always some dim feeling of the urge to roll my eyes when reading about the might of the Great Old Ones & Co., it's something I can safely set on the back burner of my mind to simmer while I enjoy a Lovecraft story unimpeded. Divine assistance is not available, so magic must suffice; okay, fine. For a short while, it's a trade off I can make. If it's something you're not sure you'll want your kids reading, you might want to give it a read beforehand. Otherwise, what's inside is standard lovecraftian magic.

Who is it for?

Most obviously fans of Sherlock Holmes and/or Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos who have been waiting since forever to see this pairing done justice.

Why read it?

It's as good as Doyle's own work, with better and more snappily written action sequences. Lovegrove's writing transcends mere pastiche to Doyle and Lovecraft; it is honor. The lore and characters are treated with utter respect, the rules dictating the supernatural are kept painstakingly intact. I'm halfway through the sequel, Sherlock Holmes and the Miskatonic Monstrosities, and it's proving just as good.

SerCon

L. Sprague de Camp Bio-Bibliography

by

Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D.

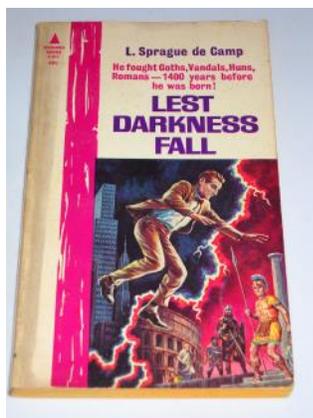
N3F Historian



Lyon Sprague de Camp (November 27, 1907 – November 6, 2000), better known as L. Sprague de Camp, was an American writer of science-fiction (s-f), fantasy, and non-fiction. In a career spanning 60+ years, he wrote over 100 books, including biographies of other authors. He was a major figure in American s-f during the 1930s - 1940s.

Science Fiction

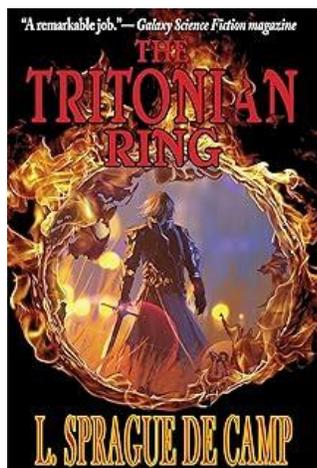
De Camp's s-f showed his interest in linguistics, history, and the philosophy of science. His first published story, "The Isolinguals," appeared in



Astounding (September, 1937), the last issue edited by F. Orlin Tremaine -- before John W. Campbell, Jr. took over the prozine.

Most of de Camp's early stories were unrelated to each other, the exceptions being his popular "Johnny Black" tales about a bear with human intelligence and his "Drinkwhiskey Institute" -- tall tales involving time travel. Campbell's other prozine, Unknown, was more suited to de Camp's sense of humor; he had ten novel-length stories published there (half of them as collaborations).

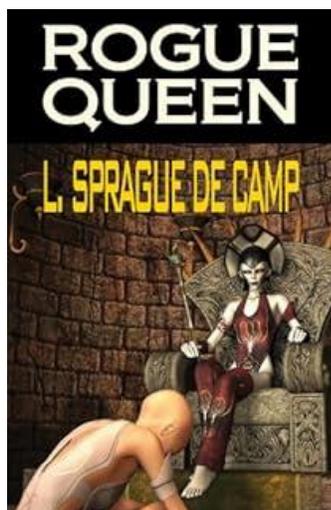
His treatment of time travel and alternate history in stories such as *Lest Darkness Fall* (1939), "The Wheels of If" (1940), "A Gun for Dinosaur" (1956), "Aristotle and the Gun" (1958), and *The Glory That Was* (1960) challenged the popular notion that history consisted of an arbitrary series of accidents. Instead, de Camp systematically demonstrated how technological advances could determine history. His display of technological determinism in historical recreation is considered his tour de force.



His most extended work was his "Viagens Interplanetarias" series, set in a future where Brazil is the dominant power, particularly a sub-series of sword and planet novels set on the planet Krishna, beginning with *The Queen of Zamba*. His most influential Viagens novel was the non-Krishna work *Rogue Queen*, a tale of a hive society undermined by interstellar contact, one of the earliest s-f novels to deal with sexual themes.

He wrote a number of lesser-known works that explored such topics as racism, which he considered to be more accurately described as ethnocentrism. He pointed out that no scholar comparing the merits of various ethnicities has ever sought to prove that his own ethnicity was inferior to others.

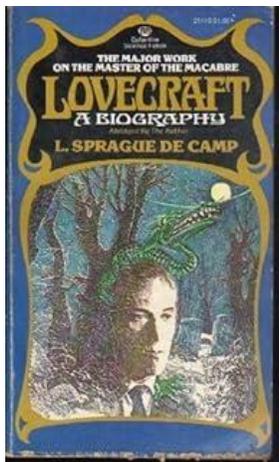
Fantasy



De Camp was best known for his light fantasy, particularly two series written in collaboration with historian Fletcher Pratt: the Harold Shea stories (from 1940) and Gavagan's Bar stories (from 1950). Genre critic Floyd C. Gale said that they "were far and away the finest team of fantasy collaborators."

De Camp and Pratt also wrote some standalone novels similar in tone to the Harold Shea stories, of which the most highly regarded is *Land of Unreason* (1942).

De Camp was also known for his sword and sorcery tales, a fantasy genre revived partly by his continuation of Robert E. Howard's Conan series of stories. De Camp also edited a series of fantasy anthologies that were credited with helping to spark the renaissance of heroic fantasy.

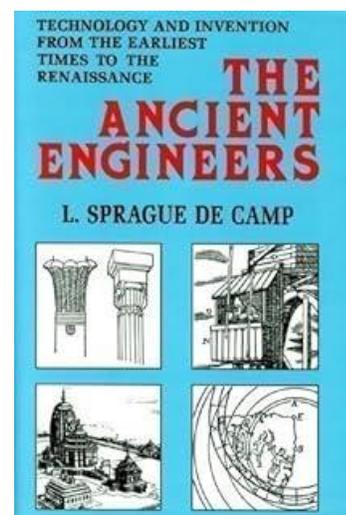


Non-Fiction Works

De Camp wrote several non-fiction works during his career, some of them in collaboration with his wife Catherine. *Science Fiction Handbook* (Hermitage, 1953) was one of De Camp's early non-fiction books (revised edition, 1975). His *Lovecraft: A Biography* (1975) won a World Fantasy Award in 1976. His *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers: The Makers of Heroic Fantasy* (a collective biography on the formative authors of the heroic fantasy genre), was first published in 1976 by Arkham House. De Camp later wrote a biography of Conan's creator, Robert E. Howard, titled *Dark Valley Destiny* (1983).

Awards/Honors/Recognitions

- 1946 – GoH, First Post-War Eastern Science Fiction Conference
- 1953 -- International Fantasy Award
- 1954 -- Best Related Book Retro Hugo
- 1956 -- Best Feature Writer Hugo
- 1966 -- Tricon
- 1969 -- Balticon 3, 1969 Open ESFA
- 1972 – Boskone 9
- 1973 -- Pat Terry Award for Humour in SF
- 1975 -- PgHLANGE 7
- 1976 -- Lifetime Achievement Gandalf Award
- 1977 -- Lunacon 20, Philcon 1976, Forry Award
- 1979 -- Just Imagicon, Fool-Con II, SFWA Grandmaster
- 1980 -- Marcon XV
- 1981 -- URCON III, X-Con 5
- 1983 -- Balticon 17, Rivercon VIII InConJunction III, RoVaCon 8
- 1984 -- World Fantasy Convention Award
- 1987 -- LibertyCon 1
- 1989 – First Fandom Hall of Fame
- 1990 – 16th World Fantasy Convention, InConJunction X
- 1991 – LibertyCon 5
- 1993 -- Conversion 10, Raymond Z. Gallun Award
- 1995 -- Sidewise Award: Lifetime Achievement
- 1996 -- LibertyCon 10
- 1997 -- 1997 Best Non-Fiction Book Hugo
- 1998 -- Pilgrim Award



Lan's Lantern 24 (November, 1987), a fanzine published by s-f fan George Laskowski, Jr., was an L. Sprague de Camp Special Issue.

Marriage/Children

De Camp married Catherine A. Crook (1907 - 2000) in 1939, and they had two sons. He and Catherine collaborated on both fiction and non-fiction works during their marriage.

Some Conclusions

De Camp was one of the principle contributors to the Golden Age of s-f, and he is remembered as such by many genre enthusiasts today.

Genre critic Darrell Schweitzer has written: “In De Camp’s fiction human foibles and pretenses are prominently displayed, but rational, sensible types always prevail. If there is any message, it is that reason is the only effective way to solve problems. A De Camp hero never gets anywhere until he starts using his head. Then the results surprise everyone, particularly the reader.”

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Clute, John & Peter Nicholls (eds.). The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, 1993.

De Camp, L. Sprague. Time & Chance, 1996.

Laughlin, Charlotte & Daniel J. Levack. De Camp: An L. Sprague de Camp Bibliography, 1983.

Tuck, Donald H. The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Volume 1: Who’s Who, A-L, 1974.

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

Gourmet Bureau

Recipes of Famous Author Cooking by Cedar Sanderson

Naan

This will make rather a lot of naan, so feel free to reduce the recipe. I can easily feed a dozen with this, as it makes about 24-28 small naan.

5-6 cups flour

3 cups plain full-fat yogurt (note that I generally use Greek Yogurt, which has a lower liquid content)

3 tsp yeast

1 tbsp sugar

Olive oil (if needed)

1 tsp salt

egg (if needed)

I’m not giving you precise amounts, because the moisture content of your flour, and your yogurt, are going to cause variations and you’ll need to be watching the dough as it comes together to know whether to add more oil, more egg, or more flour.

Start by mixing together the yogurt, yeast, and sugar. Best if yogurt is at room temperature or you will inhibit your yeast development.

Mix in 3-4 cups of flour. Add an egg. Add two if you like. Add the salt. Add another cup of flour. At this point, your dough should be a very firm dough, forming a clean ball that does not stick to the sides of the bowl. If you are mixing by hand you'll have abandoned a spoon and be working with your hands and fingers. If the dough is still too dry - not balling up, flour visible - add a drizzle of olive oil and work it in until the dough ball forms.

Knead until the ball is elastic and springs back when a finger is pressed into it. I do this in a stand mixer and it takes about ten minutes at lowest speed, or at least that is how long I let it go.

Place the dough ball in a lightly oiled bowl and cover with a damp cloth. Allow to rise until roughly doubled in size. In a warm kitchen this can take as little as a half hour, much longer in a cold kitchen. Punch the dough down, turn out onto a floured surface, and using a board blade, cut it into pieces - larger pieces make a larger bread, smaller are good for eating with a meal where you are using them as a utensil. I prefer a stick rolling pin, as I can quickly manipulate it under my palm and roll these out quite thin.

As you are ready to roll out the pieces into flat breads, put a cast iron skillet on to heat at medium high. Turn on your vent fan full blast - this is going to get smoky! Place a rolled-out-thin bread on the hot pan, roll out the next one, flip the first one and add the second, and repeat. If you have smaller breads and a nice big flat skillet, you can get a good production line going.

They cook well with about a minute per side. As you take them off, brush one side with ghee, or melted butter. Serve warm or if you have a bunch of people milling around in the kitchen, they will vanish from the plate almost as fast as you can roll and cook them.

I served kebabs, rice, and Naan for supper. We'd also had olives, dolmas, and other condiments to accompany the meat and veg.

Lemon-Quince Cake

I'd been looking for a way to really highlight the Meyer Lemons I grew last year, but at only two left, and needing to be used up quickly, I had limited options. My lemons were amazingly sweet, almost as sweet as some oranges. So you could do this cake with oranges, or a combination of orange and lemon or really any citrus. Also, this is a cake which doesn't need complete cooling or frosting, so it's a quick cake if you need to make one in a hurry.

Preheat oven to 350F.

Cake:

- 1 box yellow cake mix (just the dry part)
- 2 goose eggs, or three large chicken eggs, beaten (I blew my goose eggs)
- 1/3 c olive oil
- 1 c water
- 1/2 tsp orange blossom water

1 tbsp dried finely chopped lemon peel

beat together the liquid ingredients, then the cake mix and lemon peel. Divide batter as evenly as you can into two round 9" pans. I prepare mine with a circle of parchment paper (you can buy this precut, it is so useful!) and then a light coating of grease (usually butter, but many things will work here). Bake at 350 for about 24 minutes, until a tester comes out cleanly. Cool in pans for a few minutes, then turn out of the pans onto a rack to finish cooling.

Syrup:

1/2 cup fresh-squeezed lemon juice
1/2 c sugar

This was about what my two lemons gave me, but you can adjust this as you like or need, just make up equal amounts of sugar and juice. Heat together until the sugar is fully dissolved. Completely cool the syrup.

Filling:

4 oz quince preserves
lemon zest from two lemons (reserve a little for the topping)

Puree the preserves with the lemon zest. Quince is very firm, almost hard, so it tends to be chunky in the jar, which doesn't work well for smoothing over a cake layer, and the lemon zest really wakes up the between-apple-and-pear flavor of quince.

Topping:

3/4 c plain Greek Yogurt
fine lemon zest
garnishes

Once your cake layers are at least no more than warm, place one on the plate or cake stand. Cover this layer with the quince puree, not going too close to the edges as it will be smooshed out a bit with the next layer. Place the second layer on top. Poke holes with the tip of a knife, or cake tester, all over the top of the cake. Slowly start to pour your lemon syrup over the top of the cake, letting it have a chance to soak in. Some will flow over and pool at the bottom, this is fine, it will soak in and flavor the whole cake. When you are done with the syrup and have given it a couple of minutes to rest and soak in, prepare the yogurt by beating it smooth. Spread the yogurt in a thin layer over just the top of the cake. Don't add sugar - the tartness will offset the sweetness of the rest of the cake!

Finish the cake with a little sprinkle of fresh lemon zest, and whatever garnish you like. Traditionally it would be chopped pistachios, I chose to use a few violas from the garden on mine last night.

Serve in small slices as it is rich and sweet. This is not your ordinary cake. You can of course do variations on the filling, a lemon curd would really lean into the citrus, or seedless raspberry preserves, or... there are so many options!

Anime

Mononoke Week 5: Nue (Japanese Chimera) Review by Jessi Silver



When I took on this particular Book Club project, I underestimated how difficult it would be. It's not hard in that the show itself is somehow impenetrable – I definitely have thoughts on it and it's not like I've been going in cold to this viewing. I've had literally years to think about and interpret these stories. It's a series that hits on a lot of tough subjects, though.

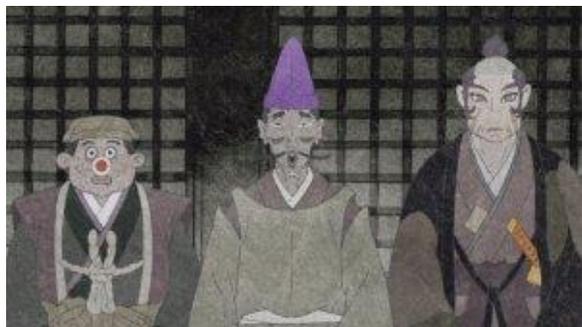
That said, there are also times where I find that my emotions are likely to spill over, and focusing them on anime analysis is just what I need to turn my anger into power. It can be difficult to know where that balance is and sometimes I make mistakes – overdoing it when I should be resting, staying in bed when I should be up and fighting. It's hard to know just when to do what and how best to honor my boundaries when I've also volunteered myself to speak out about difficult topics. Perhaps I'm not as experienced as I like to think I am. Whatever the case may be, I suppose the best thing I can do is to keep trying and learning and improving.

Speaking of this story arc in particular, it's the one that's always left the least impression on me in the past, to the point that I can barely remember the major story beats. It's strange, because even when I haven't watched the show in a while, I can recall at least a few vivid images from each story arc. This one, with its purposefully muted color palette and very esoteric subject matter, is a little bit tougher. Perhaps a deeper look with strengthen my mental connections.

Part 1

Four men are vying for the hand of Princess Ruri in marriage. Ruri is the last surviving heir to a famous incense school, and the man who marries her will be able to revive the school and inherit something called the Todaiji. Three people, a noble named Osawa, a merchant Nakarai, and a samurai named Muromachi, have arrived to make an attempt at winning Princess Ruri's contest. They're waiting on a fourth man but the only person waiting with them is the Medicine Seller, looking for mononoke as usual. Rather than wait around in the cold for their missing companion, they elect to enter the mansion and begin Ruri's challenge. The task consists of playing an incense game called "Genjiko" – Ruri will prepare five incenses and the participants have to decide which of the five are the same or different to one-another. Each of the potential combinations corresponds to a chapter in "The Tale of Genji." As each of the incenses is prepared, all the men have different reactions and begin to second-guess their own perception. When it is over they exit the room, ostensibly to use the restroom, but actually to search the grounds for this Todaiji that interests them.

The Medicine Seller releases his scales to search for mononoke; its presence is questionable and



the scales have trouble indicating any direction with certainty. When the others return to the incense room the situation becomes more intense and the mononoke begins to move. They first discover the location of the missing nobleman, Mr. Jissonji – an adjacent blood-soaked room contains his mutilated body. Next, they open Ruri’s room and watch in horror as she’s stabbed in the neck by a mysterious unseen force. The group rushes into her room, and with little concern for her they begin to pull the

room apart in search of the Todaiji. The Medicine Seller identifies this as a potential starting point for identifying the mononoke, and orders the men to tell him what the Todaiji is.

Part 2

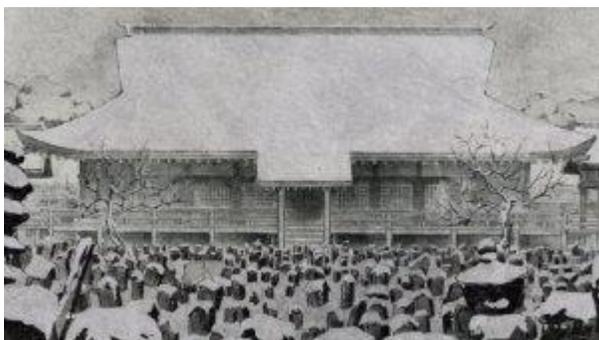
The men explain that the Todaiji is another name for what’s called the Rannatai, a piece of wood said to be incredibly fragrant and which bears the marks of several famous Japanese rulers. The person who holds the Todaiji is said to be destined to lead. They hatch a plan to hold another contest so that a winner can be named and a marriage announced, before anyone finds out about Ruri’s death. The Medicine Seller offers to prepare the incense for a game based on the Princess Kaguya legend – an incense will be associated with Princess Kaguya and another with the Old Man; the players will have to say whether the five incenses following that are Kaguya, Old Man, or neither.

The first incense seems particularly striking to Muromachi. The Medicine Seller says it is made from a paper screen covered in blood. Muromachi hallucinates a memory in which he himself murdered Jissonji, the fourth player in the game. The second incense strikes Nakarai as being made from burnt hair, but whose? It’s then shown that he himself killed Ruri out of jealousy upon seeing her making love to someone else. The third incense is given to Osawa, the only player left. The Medicine Seller implies that it might possibly be made from the Oleander he “accidentally” mixed in with the other scents, but Osawa continues anyway. When he starts to feel ill, he races outside, tripping and breaking his own neck. The Medicine Seller is left alone with the mononoke, who turns out to be the Todaiji itself. For the Todaiji is nothing but a hunk of wood unless there are people around who believe it to be something more – they must perceive it as valuable in order for it to continue receiving attention. When the Medicine Seller defeats it, it becomes wood once again. When burned it releases a beautiful scent unlike anything else, but the graves of all the men who valued it above their own life come into view. The mansion is shown to be in shambles and the Medicine Seller leaves it to decay beneath the vivid cherry blossoms.

Thoughts and Reactions

I mentioned that this story arc has always been one of the less memorable ones for me, but now that I’ve watched it again I realize that I actually recalled quite a few of the details. I think the issue was more that I wasn’t able to connect the events in the story together in any meaningful way, which allowed me to push it aside in favor of the other story arcs that were clearer from the outset. With this viewing, I felt like I got a much stronger impression of what the story was really about, and provided me with enough meat to come up with an interpretation that I was more satisfied with.

The mononoke in this story, a Nue appears to the characters in various forms, and while those forms are sort of unclear until near the end of the final act, I feel like they have some significance. In addition to the frightening mask-like entity that the Medicine Seller eventually battles, the Nue appears to various characters as a young girl, and adult woman, and a blind old crone. While the Neo-Pagan in me has certain go-to interpretations of these three phases of women's lives, I think it's likelier that these forms represent the different ways in which the characters interact with others and also how they feel about themselves. Muromachi seems to have a bit of an inferiority complex – considering his overreaction towards Jissonji's insults in his flashback, it makes sense that his character has some issues that compound the particular nature of those insults. When he encounters the Nue in the garden he sees it as a young girl who appears and disappears just out of his view. A trickster, toying with a man who already feels as though he's being disrespected by others. Nakarai sees the Nue as a young woman in her sexual prime, because that's how he sees Princess Ruri – a woman with whom he seeks to obtain both status and sexual satisfaction (in the guise of what he considers “love”). The old woman interacts with everyone, but she's just there; the characters consider her nothing more than a nuisance or an unimportant background element, not a threat or legitimate obstacle.



Ultimately all of the male characters seem dismissive of the threat of a mononoke in general, and all of them prove themselves to be uninterested in marriage for the sake of the woman at the center of it all, so to consider the mononoke itself as central to this story seems less satisfying than it should. What I think is that the form of the mononoke as we see it is a bit of a misdirect and that the “monster with many forms” is actually more symbolic than it first appears.

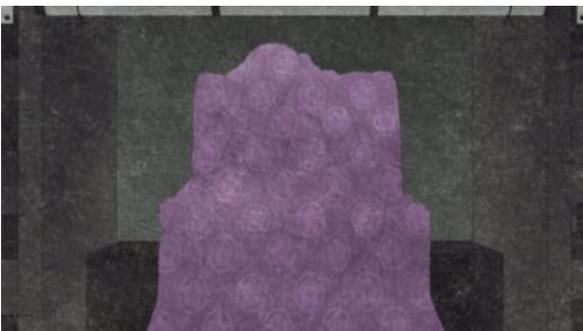
Really I think this story arc is all about the ill-effects of toxic masculinity – the harmful ways in which men are expected to act and the roles in society that they're expected to play, and how many of those roles are detrimental to the men and those around them. “Toxic” masculinity can be difficult to define, because in doing so it's easy to give off the impression that a lot of the things we consider masculine actually aren't that great – in short, they aren't. It's then easy for people to accuse the person speaking out about it of being a man-hater; I'm going on the record right now to insist that I'm not. But I do know very well how much society has glorified certain traits and declined to punish outwardly harmful ones, conflating masculinity with a very rigid set of standards that tends to do more harm than good to pretty much everyone.

Each of the men in the story represents some of these toxic ideals. Jissonji, who we only see in Muromachi's vision/flashback, represents the obnoxious and harmful tendency of men in power to become gate-keepers of that power. Jissonji, a recognized incense expert, derides Muromachi for both his lack of learning, as well as his rank and class. Clearly a low-grade samurai, and a country bumpkin at that, would be foolish to aspire to something as high-class as the Todaiji. This attitude is an extension of the ambition for power and greatness that men are told they have to have, and that they feel they have to keep others from achieving. They are encouraged to value specialization and minutiae to the point that it distinguishes them from the people lacking in access and training. It's the same story with social power and wealth, both things that are coveted by many but protected by very few.

Muromachi represents “problem-solving” through violence. Jissonji is an arrogant jerk, but the only way that Muromachi can identify to confront him about it is through unsheathing his sword and murdering him. It’s this attitude of “might makes right” that we see repeated in macro mode almost on a daily basis as world leaders use the threat of nuclear war to hold each-other to an ever-more-tense stalemate.

Nakarai is the “nice-guy” who claims to actually be in love with Princess Ruri, to the extent that he’s given up his own wealth and status in order to be with her. When he spies her in bed with someone else, his true nature reveals itself; his sense of ownership over her love leads him to kill her out of jealousy. Nakarai represents the truly wretched idea that, if a man does something for the sake of a woman, she then owes him something in return. Whether that something is a relationship, emotional labor, or sexual acts is usually up to the delusions of the man who believes he has something coming to him. Nakarai is all those guys who rant at length about being friend-zoned; men who are nice to women until their advances are declined and who suddenly proclaim all women to be “bitches.” The jilted boyfriends who call their exes “crazy” in order to absolve themselves of their portion of responsibility for the relationship’s problems. The boys who bring guns to school to get back at the girls who turned them down for the prom.

Osawa is a tougher nut to crack. He meets an end that seems much more trivial than the others’ more dramatic fates. What I see in his character, though, is a stubborn and single-minded focus on his craft that places very little value on anything else. Osawa continues playing the incense game despite knowing that one of the scents might be poisonous. Because the potential payoff is so highly-valued and considered a pinnacle of his chosen craft, all other matters become unimportant to him. While all the men in the story are horrifyingly unaffected when they discover that Ruri is dead, wasting little time worrying about her dead body and its implications before literally dismantling the shelves and drawers in her room in search of the Todaiji, Osawa seems to have the most tunnel vision. His worries always seem to be more focused on the men competing with him than the woman they’re ostensibly competing to marry.



It makes a lot of sense that the mononoke in this story is a Nue or Chimera – a being that appears to be various things to various people. I think all of us, both women and men, suffer various ill-effects of toxic masculinity based on what we’re exposed to and with whom we interact. For me, I think Jissonji, the arrogant gatekeeper rings most true. As a woman in a fandom that for such a long time seemed to be dominated by boys and men, my knowledge and expertise have been ques-

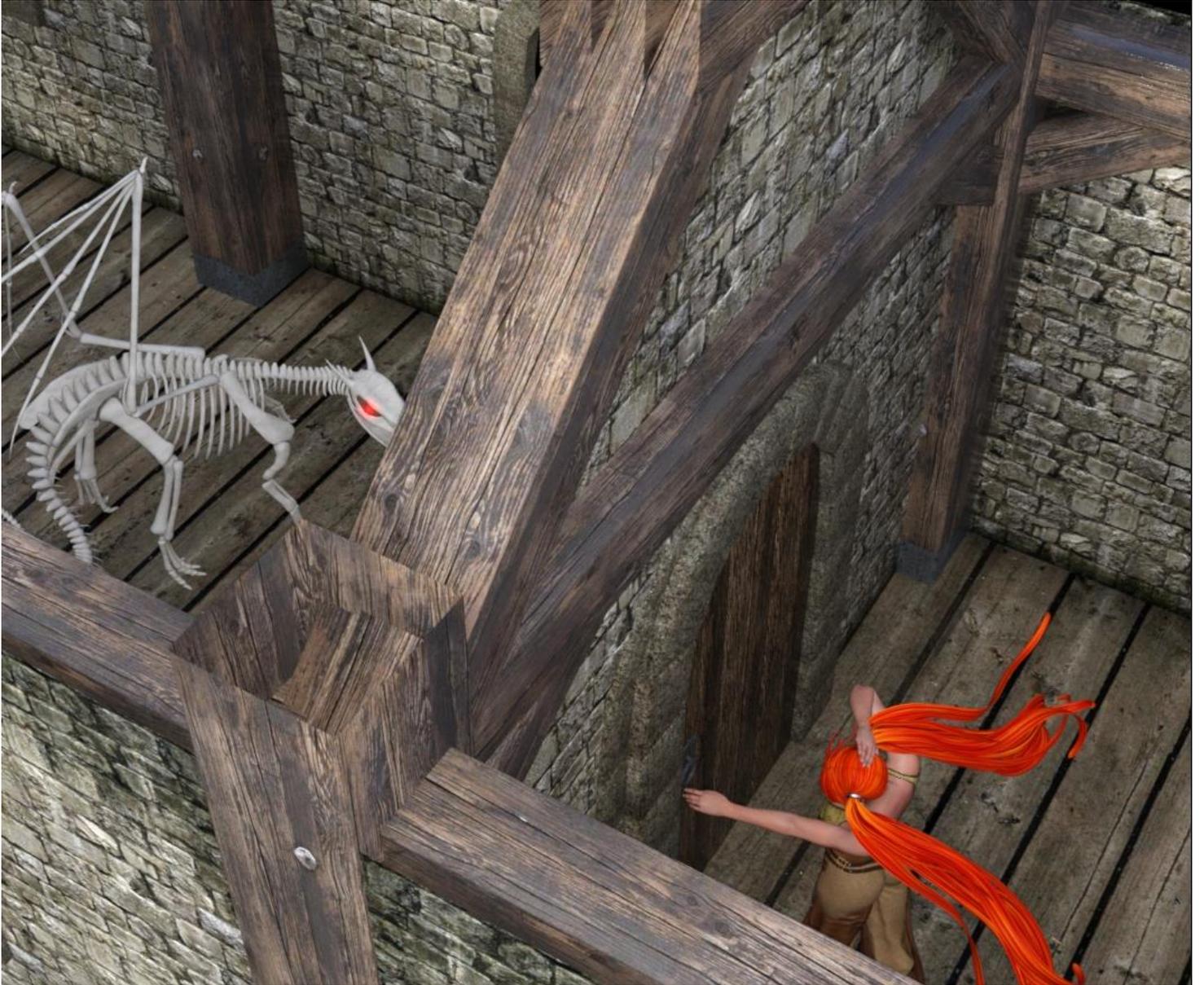
tioned time and time again as a sort of test of my right to be in fandom spaces. I recall many years ago when I wore a T-shirt bearing the name of a popular game franchise to a convention, and a young man cornered me and rudely asked me if I’d actually played that game. I didn’t recognize the situation for what it was back then, but I knew how insulted I felt having to defend myself and my hobbies to someone who didn’t even know me. I find it especially telling that this story is formed around an incredibly esoteric (some may say “geeky”) sort of hobby or activity – the type of thing that men are encouraged to codify, complicate, and turn into a competition. Much like with video games or sports, some men find it their duty to create barriers of entry which outsiders can never hope to penetrate.

I know many women who've seen the monstrous faces of the chimera's various aspects, and though they may look and act differently, they're all rooted in the same problem. What strikes me most about this story and what I think is one of the most important things to mention is the fact that, despite what they may say otherwise, all the men competing for Ruri's hand see her as nothing more than an object to be won or owned or utilized. It's quite upsetting to see how little the men are affected when they discover that Ruri has been killed. Almost without hesitation, they begin plotting how to pass off a false marriage so that at least one of them can still inherit the incense school and Todaiji. I think that itself is the core of all this – men who display toxic attitudes, whether they realize it or not, somehow always seem to believe in the inferiority of women (or anyone who is not a cisgender male). When leadership and respect are predicated on muted emotion, greater physical power, and the ability to memorize and regurgitate minutiae (things that are not limited to men but which women still seem to be discouraged from being, having, and doing), it stands to reason that some men would look at women as trivial creatures. Things to use rather than individuals to know and love as equal partners.

Because this series is, as I believe, comprised of stories that bring to light the injustices that women endure, I wanted to spend a bit of time on a line that the Medicine Seller speaks to the Nue prior to dispatching it. As he narrates the mononoke's truth and reason, he states that, in order to remain relevant and powerful, the Nue, produced from the Todaiji itself, had to continue to be seen as something of value. The legend of the beautiful princess laying in wait for the right nobleman to arrive and prove his worth above all others became like a drug continuing to enthrall men and allowing the cycle to continue. The Todaiji became an object valued by powerful men, collected and hoarded behind closed doors. A hunk of wood that gained value just because men decided that they wanted it. As the Medicine Seller proves, though, wood is meant to be burned; when the Todaiji is allowed to serve the purpose for which it was made (or to be the person it always was, to continue the metaphor), the situation resolves itself. Though men may no longer come to the old mansion in droves, the land is now returned to its natural state. I think at the heart of this is the idea that some women put a lot of energy into appealing to men directly, whether that's through looking or acting a certain way, or sacrificing their own interests in favor of something that might be seen as more in line with men's expectations of them. Ultimately the only person they need to answer to is themselves; people, women included, are their best self when they don't allow their likes, dislikes, or personality to become subordinate to someone else's.

I'd like to leave off with a thought. I've spoken a lot about the toxic aspects of masculinity; the things about men that have harmed myself and others (including men themselves!). I think a lot about what non-toxic masculinity looks like and how men can choose to be the good people I know most of them are. To me, a good man is someone who isn't afraid to show kindness. They don't berate people for crying or showing emotion. They choose to defuse situations rather than physically fighting. They treat others respectfully and choose not to play "devil's advocate" or explain things to people who already know what they're talking about. They are caring lovers but also don't assume that the universe owes them sex with a partner. They use their strength to help others rise up rather than to hold them down. There are terrible messages and bad cultural attitudes all over the place that beat the kindness and gentleness out of men; I think it takes hard work and self-awareness to minimize these influences and feel comfortable making different choices.

Next time we return to Bakeneko in its second incarnation. There are some subtle connections between the two stories that I hope you'll look for when you're watching. I hope you enjoy it!



Dangerous Doors
by Tiffanie Gray