

# Tightbeam 370

## July 2025



Kitty Bar by Alan White

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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, ...

The Editors are:

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The Art Editor is Jose Sanchez. Art Contributors include Alan White, Cedar Sanderson, Tiffanie Gray, and Artist Fish.

Anime Reviews are courtesy Jessi Silver and her site [www.s1e1.com](http://www.s1e1.com). Ms. Silver writes of her site "S1E1 is primarily an outlet for views and reviews on Japanese animated media, and occasionally video games and other entertainment." Cedar Sanderson's reviews and other interesting articles appear on her site [cedarwrites.wordpress.com/](http://cedarwrites.wordpress.com/) and its culinary extension. Jason P. Hunt's reviews appear on [SciFi4Me.Com](http://SciFi4Me.Com) Jim McCoy is now found at [Jimbossffreviews.substack.com](http://Jimbossffreviews.substack.com). Heath Row publishes The StF Amateur.

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](mailto: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.

Memberships with TNFF via email are \$6; memberships with The National Fantasy Fan (TNFF) via paper mail are \$18. Zines other than TNFF are email only.

Additional memberships at the address of a current dues-paying member are \$4.

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

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## Editorial

This issue of Tightbeam reflects several substantial changes. The most important change is that we are rearranging coverage to emphasize reviews of fannish activities. A number of fannish editors have lamented the decline of fanzines, that activity long being recognized as the most central of all fannish activities. The N3F is not particularly guilty of contributing to this decline, as witness the launch of yet another N3F fanzine, *A Gentle Stroll*, but I asked myself what we might do to reverse the trend. It occurred to me that, fifty-some years ago, board wargaming fanzines routinely listed the other zines that they had seen recently. I'm not sure that's a complete solution, but I think that you are more likely to read, comment on, write for, and subscribe to other fanzines if you learn that they exist.

Courtesy of Garth Spencer, we have a list of the zines he received in the past month. I'm not sure that this feature will repeat every month – that's up to Garth -- but the list is a feature that other fanzines should consider emulating as an important contribution to our joint hobby.

Following our fanzine list, we have a convention report on a fannish convention.

The change most trying for your lead Editor is that my Microsoft Office installation decided that it should keep crashing, so this issue of Tightbeam is being composed on LibreOffice Writer, which I have never used before. Computer reboots, file deletion and replacement, and the Windows Repair did not help make Office work again. Fortunately the functionalities of Writer and MS Word are not radically different, except that Writer (unlike its predecessor OpenOffice Writer) will not speak to my usual voice-to-text software, Nuance Dragon.

## The Back Cover

Mystery at the Mausoleum by Jose Sanchez-- A strange black specter is seen hovering next to a maosoleum. Caught on camera, it jolts upwards as if it has been startled. It appears ti have no head and it sort of resembles a cross between an octopus and a mop with long wispy tentacles situated at the end of either what looks like thin tails or arms that hang under it. It's shadow can also be seen beneath it.

## Fanzines

A look by Garth Spencer at the fanzines Garth receives, and how he describes them:

*Alexiad* #24:1, May 2025, c/o Lisa & Joseph Major, 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, KY 40204-2040, USA, [jtmajor@iglou.com](mailto:jtmajor@iglou.com), <http://efanzines.com/Alexiad/index.htm>. A classic personalzine ranging over interests as diverse as Memorial Day; minimalism; horse races; Joseph's books available from Advent Books and Amazon; the state of TV "reality" shows, famous deaths such as that of British Antarctic Expedition martyr Lawrence Grace Edward "Titus" Oates, and the more recent demise of former KGB resident Oleg Antonovich Gordievsky CMG on March 4, 2025; monarchist news; writers who don't understand how the Worldcon works; book reviews; technophilia; conreports; Worldcon and NASFiC bids; award winners and nominees; letters, letters, and letters; and a bit of fanfiction, in which



the NCIS team triumphs over Slippery Jim DiGriz. Interspersed with illos from Trinlay Khadro, Alexis Gilliland, and Marc Schirmeister.

*Ansible*® 456, July 2025, from DAVID LANGFORD, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU, UK. Website [news.ansible.uk](http://news.ansible.uk). Is *Ansible* a monthly personalzine, a newszine about British fandom, or a writers' market newsletter? Maybe it's all at once, in a cheerfully fannish form of schizophrenia, leavened with Langford's famous wit. Featuring a mostly-British convention calendar, award winners, even fan funds, a bit of publishing news, and many, many obituaries. Also featuring classic malapropisms of science fiction in the legendary column, "Thog's Masterclass"!

*Captain Flashback* #79, June 13, 2025, a fanzine "composed for the 468th distribution of the Turbo-Charged Party-Animal Amateur Press Association, from the joint members Andy Hooper and Carrie Root, residing at 11032 30th Ave. NE, Seattle, WA 98125. You may e-mail Andy at [fanmailaph@aol.com](mailto:fanmailaph@aol.com), and you may reach Carrie at [carrieroot49@yahoo.com](mailto:carrieroot49@yahoo.com)." Reviewing a recent fantasy novel set in Wisconsin; comments to the previous Turbo-APA; a letter column; a Key to Interlineations (in the previous issue); and William Breiding on mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century "Mimetic" fiction.

*Pablo Lennis* #451, June 2025, a monthly SF and fantasy fictionzine issued by John Thiel, 30 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, Lafayette, IN 47904, USA. Paper only, not available on the Internet. Editorials, serial and stand-alone stories, poetry, and black-and-white illos, with a colour (AI) cover by Cedar Anderson.

*CyberCozen* 35:6, June 2025, newsletter of The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy, editor Leybl Botwinik, e-mail: [leybl\\_botwinik@yahoo.com](mailto:leybl_botwinik@yahoo.com). This month's contents include: Special Wartime Issue (#21) – The Final front? The War with the Ayatollah, Dictator of Iran; SHEER SCIENCE – "Are We Living In a Simulation?" – In memory of Aharon Sheer (1936-2015) – Founding editor of *CyberCozen*; Our usual tidbits from the Web, Pictures by J. Sanchez, and two movie reviews.

*FANAC FanHistory Newsletter* 25, June 24, 2025, editors Edie Stern and Joe Siclari, [fanac@fanac.org](mailto:fanac@fanac.org). The FANAC organization is generally known for attempting to conserve the history of fandom: specifically by a range of programs listed on their website, such as going to conventions and scanning paper fanzines into digital form. For more information, see FANAC.org at <https://www.fanac.org>, Fancyclopedia 3 at <https://fancyclopedia.org>, and Fanac YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/c/FanacFanhistory>, among other links.

*Impulse* #28:5, June/July 2025, News Bulletin of the Montreal Science Fiction and Fantasy Association (MonSFFA), c/o 29 Harold, Kirkland, Québec, Canada H9J 1R7; *Impulse* mailing address: 125 Rue Léonard, Châteauguay, Québec, Canada J6K 1N9; Keith Braithwaite ed., [Keith1958@live.ca](mailto:Keith1958@live.ca). Recent and upcoming events, not limited to the club, sometimes related to science fiction.

*Jenzine* #12, June 2025, Jen Farey ed. A personalzine edited, and produced by J. L. Farey, covering recent travels and events, and reviews of TV series and movies that stayed with her. LoCs, requests to be added to the mailing list, etc. can be sent to [fareyjen@gmail.com](mailto:fareyjen@gmail.com).

*My Back Pages* #32, Richard Lynch ed., P.O. Box 3120, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20885, USA; email [rw\\_lynch@yahoo.com](mailto:rw_lynch@yahoo.com). A personalzine featuring, as the masthead says, "articles and essays by Rich Lynch," previously published (with citation) in other fanzines.

*The N3F Review of Books incorporating Prose Bono*, June 2025, George Phillies ed., published by the National Fantasy Fan Federation, PO Box 143, Tonopah NV 89049 and is distributed for free to N3F Members and archival sites. Editor: George Phillies, 48 Hancock Hill Drive, Worcester MA 01609, [phillies@4liberty.net](mailto:phillies@4liberty.net). Enough book reviews and literary criticism to choke a Ravenous Bugblatter Beast of Traal.

Oates #1 and #2, Kelly Oates, [kelly@oates.one](mailto:kelly@oates.one). A new personalzine! Issue #1 features articles on how Kelly became aware of fanzines, as opposed to rock music commentaries; ruminations on the *I Ching* and Tarot; relevant illos, a recipe, and what I presume is a hoax science article on arboreal jellyfish. Issue #2 features more about the *I Ching* and Tarot and visiting the Wayne Thiebaud exhibition at an art gallery.

*Opuntia* #600 (June 1<sup>st</sup>) and #601 () from Dale Speirs in Calgary, Alberta, email [opuntia57@hotmail.com](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com). Recent Calgary civic events including birdwatching and blooming flowers (all with photographic evidence); reviews of mystery novels, and some plays; letters, and abstracts of recent scientific papers. (Why don't more fanzines feature science abstracts?)

*Ornithopter* (Mark Vc) "is the fanzine that flaps around, not always to great effect. It is brought to you by Leigh Edmonds, contactable at [leighedmonds01@gmail.com](mailto:leighedmonds01@gmail.com), and is available for 'the usual'." Leigh Edmonds is a past President of Fantasy Writers of America, and this edition of *Ornithopter* narrates his trip from Australia to France and the British Isles, which I brilliantly infer was a Get-Up-and-over-Fan-Fund trip report. Many transportation adventures. Multo pictures. Corflu in England and Eastercon in Ireland. Much fannishness.

*Perryscope* 54, May 2025, is an issue of a personalzine published mostly monthly by Perry Middlemiss, 32 Elphin Grove, Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia 3122. E: [perry@middlemiss.org](mailto:perry@middlemiss.org). A remarkable gathering of travelogues, reviews of recent reading, television shows and film, personal journalism by Martin Field as well as Perry Middlemiss, and a note about the "Two Chairs Talking" podcast, hosted by Perry and David Grigg. And, of course, letters from Well-Known Fans.

*Random Jottings* #22, May 2025, by Michael Dobson, [editor@timespinnerpress.com](mailto:editor@timespinnerpress.com). A vast collection of Mr. Dobson's writing. This collection revolves around many subjects, periodically returning to the frustrations of correcting one's information as listed on Wikipedia. We begin with a strange parody of an illustrated child's book featuring Skippy, a familiar robot, correcting its birthday listing with the aid of Wikipedia - a parable warning all of us not to use self-published sources.

Ray X *X-Rayerx-Rayer* #184, 19 JUNE, 2025, Ray Palm, [raypalmx@gmail.com](mailto:raypalmx@gmail.com). A short, entertaining collection of short items of popular culture, fandom, recent politics and letters from Well-Known Fans.

*SF Commentary* #120, June 2025. A 126-page genzine edited and published by Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard Street, Greensborough, VIC 3088, Australia, email address: [gandc001@bigpond.com](mailto:gandc001@bigpond.com). Personal journalism, pictures of dinners with friends, book reviews, obituaries and remembrances for Race Mathews (not only a local politician but also, as a teenager, one of the founders of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club; obituaries for well-known fan, writer and editor Damien Broderick, with his impressive bibliography; an article on first-contact stories; and wide-ranging book reviews. Engrossing reading for hours.

*SMOF News* #4:40-43, June 2025, a weekly e-zine from Petréa Mitchell, [smofnews@gmx.com](mailto:smofnews@gmx.com). SMOF News is dedicated to convention news and, of course, listing upcoming conventions.

*This Here...* #87 & #88, Nic Farey, 2657 Rungsted Street, Las Vegas NV 89142, or Email [fareynic@gmail.com](mailto:fareynic@gmail.com). Conrunning recollections, personal news, news about Corflu (the fanzine fans' convention!), reviews of contemporary bands, movies and television, British railways, comics, and (of course) letters.

*The Stf Amateur* #21, June 2025, Heath Row (moving to Portugal!), [kalel@well.com](mailto:kalel@well.com). Presently a collection of Heath's several contributions to Amateur Publication Associations, but Heath is requesting

SF, fantasy, and horror news; fanart, illos, and fillos, as well as cover art; poetry, folk songs and lyrics, short fiction, articles and essays; fanzine, book, movie, television and other reviews; con reports, jokes, letters of comment ... and other material.

*Tightbeam* 369, June 2025, Editors: George Phillies, 48 Hancock Hill Drive, Worcester, MA 01609, USA, [phillies@4liberty.net](mailto:phillies@4liberty.net), and Jon Swartz, [judgeswartz@gmail.com](mailto:judgeswartz@gmail.com). *Tightbeam* is a newsletter of the National Fantasy Fan Federation, “the fanzine that tries to cover all tastes in fandom, such as anime, comics, cosplay, films, novels, biographies, poetry, music, short stories, food, ...”

*The National Fantasy Fan* #84:6, June 2025, Editors: George Phillies, 48 Hancock Hill Drive, Worcester, MA 01609, USA, [phillies@4liberty.net](mailto:phillies@4liberty.net), and Jon Swartz, [judgeswartz@gmail.com](mailto:judgeswartz@gmail.com). Published monthly by The National Fantasy Fan Federation. News by, for and about SF and fantasy fans, the N3F and its several publications and activities, the 2025 Laureate Awards for SF, fantasy, fanzines, art, etc., and the 2025 N3F short story contest.

*WCSFA June 2025 Newsletter*, [socialmedia@wcsfa.org](mailto:socialmedia@wcsfa.org). At present, the West Coast Science Fiction Association is still recruiting, and raising the profile of several fandoms in Vancouver, Canada, with a view to reviving VCON. Based upon this issue, they are announcing meetups for online gaming, as well as a one-day event in November at the British Columbia Institute of Technology featuring informative panels, craft workshops, a vendors’ hall, and a gaming room.

## Fan Conventions

### Con Report: Madison Comic Book Convention Report by Heath Row

While messaging with Hank Luttrell of 20th Century Books (<https://www.southparkbooks.com>) late last week, he mentioned that he’d be going to a “comic book show” that weekend—so I looked into what comic book conventions might be happening in the Madison area. Indeed, the Madison Comic Book Convention (<https://www.epguides.com/comics>) was scheduled to occur at the MainStay Suites Fitchburg. The event even rated a notice on the Isthmus Web site.

Organized by a man named Alan who might be Alan Morton, author of *The Golden Age of Telefantasy* (Brass Hat Mind #6), the Madison event last Saturday ranks among others largely scheduled in the Quad Cities located on the Iowa-Illinois border. After having some documents notarized at a



nearby credit union Saturday morning, Caitlin ventured out to explore the Dane County Farmers' Market, and I drove to the hotel—planning to meet back up for the No Kings march midday.

It was a small show—more a sale or dealers' room than a full convention—but the kind of comic show I miss (and enjoy thoroughly). As comic book conventions such as the San Diego Comic-Con and L.A. Comic Con become more infused with pop culture, more real estate is given to movies and television programs, anime, and cosplay—and back issues can be challenging to find. This event reminded me of the comic book vendors I encountered as a child at the antique fairs that would sometimes be held at the Janesville mall (now Uptown Janesville).

Madison also hosts MadEx, the Madison Comic & Pop Culture Expo, (<https://madisoncomicexpo.com>) in August, and the Madison Comic Con (<https://mcconventions.com/the-madison-comic-con>) in November, so I'll have to check those out, as well, if we're in town.

Upon arrival, a man I assumed to be the organizer —perhaps Morton himself—encouraged me to fill out a contact card at a makeshift registration table that also offered a display of free comic books, some of them Free Comic Book Day titles. There were quite a few people browsing, though the event wasn't crowded, and I made my way around the room to get a sense of what was on hand.

One seller, Bill Nereson, had several boxes of black-and-white magazines such as *Creepy*, *Eerie*, *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, and assorted Marvel magazines, so, after consulting my collection catalog on my mobile, I almost completed my run of *Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction* and picked up a few \$2 comics. Another vendor down the way also had a few boxes of such magazines, which were priced slightly higher than Nereson's wares. (Word is that the more expensive vendor also maintains space at an antique mall.) That seller also had a box of underground comics, which were good to see. I'd previously spied a handful at the Frugal Muse (<https://frugalmuse.com>)—Weirdo and Zap—and prices were relatively consistent.

Continuing around the room, my eyes were drawn to an assortment of coverless comics. They were priced very reasonably (between one to five issues for \$1 total, with prices listed for up to 80-100 such comics, encouraging bulk purchases), and I flipped through the boxes looking for doubles, giants, \$1 comics, and other such specials. I walked away with 15 80- to 100-page DC and Marvel comics from the 1970s for \$3. When checking out, I briefly discussed such issues with the seller—again, perhaps Morton. He remarked on how such issues often contain more reprints than new material (that's why I buy them!), how the Golden Age artwork didn't always suit everyone's tastes when they were first published, and that some people use them to either make buttons and pins, or to repair other back issues.

Me? I read them. I generally buy reading copies, and coverless comics are fair game. They can make for such wonderful reading. So far, I've read a coverless *Giant-Size Avengers* #5, which includes several fannish references (Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, and Sherlock Holmes); *Batman* #238, which features a Jack Cole Plastic Man reprint and Ramona Fradon Aquaman art; and several others. Not bad for \$3, and I'm just getting started on the small stack.

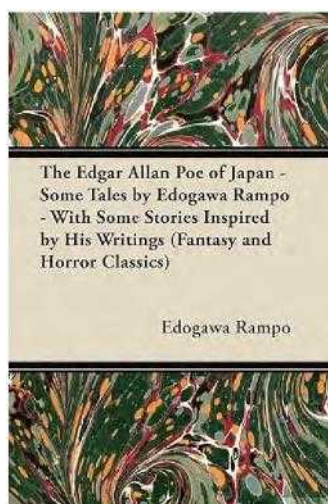
The Madison Comic Book Convention is definitely a worthwhile market for buyers and readers, and the show is 100 percent comics. Even though I need to read and release more than acquire additional comics at this point, I'll return in the future. The next such event is scheduled for Sept. 27.



## Books

### The Edgar Allan Poe of Japan by Edogawa Rampo and Lafcadio Hearn

Review by Heath Row (The STF Amateur)



Inspired by watching the movies *A Certain Killer* and *A Killer's Key*, I started trying to track down the novel on which the first film was based: Fujiwara Shinji's *Zenya*. Asking for guidance from a friend in Japan led me to the crime fiction of Seicho Matsumoto, whose *Inspector Imanishi Investigates* I subsequently read—and the writing of Edogawa Rampo, which was entirely new to me. The pen name of Tarō Hirai, an early practitioner and proponent of Japanese mystery and thriller fiction, Edogawa Rampo is a transliteration of sorts of Edgar Allan Poe.

This anthology collects “some tales” by Rampo along with “some stories inspired by his writings.” The book features Lafcadio Hearn's “The Boy Who Drew Cats,” Bram Stoker's “The Red Stockade” (oddly uncredited in this volume), and several stories by Rampo. The Hearn and Stoker pieces—the latter “a story told by the old coast-guard”—are enjoyable bits of weird and adventure fiction, but the Rampo pieces are the main attraction. Rampo's “The Hell of Mirrors” concentrates on an amateur scientist who focuses his attention on optical instruments that involve mirrors. His home laboratory experiments progress over the years until he encloses himself in a globe with a mirrored interior. That way lies madness!

“The Caterpillar” tells the tale of an ill-fated couple. A young woman takes care of her limbless deaf mute husband, injured in a war. The uneven power dynamics, spousal jealousy, and a general inability to communicate leads to a tragic ending.

And Rampo's “The Human Chair” offers another oddity: A story about a craftsman who constructs furniture he can inhabit. Framed by sections addressing the writing of magazine fiction and correspondence, the piece comes closest to what is termed *ero guro*, or erotic horror.

Rampo is clearly inspired and informed by the writings of Poe, and his work resonates with that of H. P. Lovecraft and similar writers. I might also suggest that the manga of Junji Ito (*Telegraphs & Tar Pits* #111 and #139) is a direct descendent of Rampo's fiction. The stories included in this anthology tend more toward weird horror than the erotic, but Rampo—and similar authors—bear further investigation.

## Films

### The Color Out of Space Review by Heath Row (The STF Amateur)

After assessing the state of genre-friendly specialty streaming services (Snow Poster Township #21), I watched this 2010 adaptation of the H. P. Lovecraft short story on Screambbox, primarily on my mobile phone while in our very small Airbnb with my wife. Directed by Vu Huân, the German black-and-white film—originally titled *Die Farbe*—is an excellent adaptation. It might be a better adaptation than the 2019 movie starring Nicolas Cage. (In fact, no less than S. T. Joshi described the movie as “the best Lovecraft film adaptation ever made.”)

For the most part, the flick, the result of an Indiegogo campaign, is a faithful retelling of the Lovecraft tale, with a couple of notable exceptions. While the protagonist of sorts has a connection to Miskatonic University in Arkham, Mass., the movie— set in 1975—takes place in Germany. The son of a World War II veteran travels to the Swabian-Franconian Forest in search of his father, who’s gone missing after returning to where he was stationed after the war.

Much of the story is told in flashback, with a neighbor of a farm family sharing his memories with the young man who’s looking for his father. (The neighbor had met his father immediately after the war and knew exactly why he’d returned.) The flashback is mostly what you’d expect—the plotline of “The Colour Out of Space,” from the point of view of the neighbor, who also experiences the meteorite’s landing and witnesses its effects on the farm family.

It’s a gentle, slow-paced adaptation, and the black-and-white atmosphere lends itself well to the unfolding narrative. I’m not entirely sure what was gained by setting the movie in Germany—other than being able to employ a local cast and crew—but the end result indicates the flexibility of Lovecraft’s writing. That is not dead which can eternal lie, and with strange aeons even death may die—anywhere around the world, not just in Massachusetts. Or Brooklyn, for that matter.

The movie also ends in a way that suggests the danger posed by the alien visitor(s) might not be over. Highly recommended. Incidentally, “The Colour Out of Space” is the source of the fan name in my fanzine *indicia*. While the phrase “blasted heath” was used by William Shakespeare and John Milton before him, Lovecraft’s use of the phrase has always been a source of enjoyment for me. As was this movie.

### Aelita, the Queen of Mars Review by Heath Row (The STF Amateur)

On our third night in Madison, early this week, my wife and I watched this 1924 Soviet silent science fiction film directed by Yakov Protazanov. The movie is available streaming on Klassiki —

supported by Roku — which concentrates on Eastern European cinema. The movie is based on Alexei Tolstoy's 1923 novel *Aelita, or The Decline of Mars*.

It's a beautiful movie, and the actors' eye makeup is impressively evocative. Two storylines converge. In one, an engineer designs and constructs a rocket ship while involved in several largely dissatisfying relationships with his friends and neighbors in post-civil war Russia. His wife draws the attention of a minor official known for his bourgeois tastes and dishonesty. (That dalliance leads to an unfortunate murder—or does it?)

In a parallel storyline, on Mars, Queen Aelita spies the engineer through a viewing device. Aided and encouraged by her servant—who is delightfully playful and wears the most fascinating trousers—Aelita strives to learn as much as she can about society on Earth, including the art and science of kissing. Though Queen, Aelita doesn't actually rule, serving as a figurehead for the Elders, who oversee enslaved laborers who are put into cold storage when they're not needed. The scenes in which the bodies of laborers tumble down a conveyor belt in order to be stacked like cordwood rank among the more notable visuals. (Along with those trousers!)

Eventually, the engineer travels to Mars, where he meets Aelita and falls in love before helping to lead a working-class revolution. But it was all a dream, an imaginary story. Though I've only read the introduction to Natalija Majsova's *Soviet Science Fiction Cinema and the Space Age* (Lexington, 2021), the book already includes multiple references to *Aelita*. I look forward to exploring other Russian sf flicks—and novels.

As one of the earliest full-length movies focusing on space travel, *Aelita*'s visuals—including constructivist Martian sets and innovative costuming—are breathtaking. The movie reminded me of Art Deco and German expressionism throughout. Very much worth watching. I strongly recommend it.

## The Curse of the Aztec Mummy

### Review by Heath Row (The STF Amateur)

Before watching a movie with a friend in Los Angeles last week—we've returned to our pandemic approach to weekly screenings: streaming the same movie individually while texting each other throughout—I watched this relatively short 1957 Mexican horror flick on YouTube. Directed by Rafael Portillo, it's the second film in the *Aztec Mummy* series, the sequel to *The Aztec Mummy*.

I haven't seen the first movie, and this is apparently a direct continuation of its predecessor. A villain known as the Bat, escaping from the police (who probably caught him at the end of the first movie), strives to obtain the valuable accoutrements of an Aztec princess. The movie is primarily an action adventure flick—kind of a noir crime film—in which a group of academics, anthropologists, and archaeologists try to keep the Bat from succeeding. They are aided by a masked hero called the Angel.

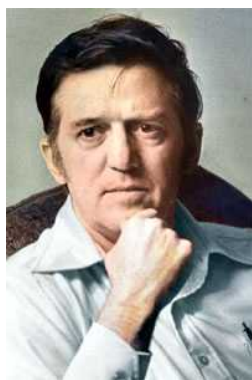
While the Angel is dressed like a professional wrestler, the actor is not actually a luchador, so, though similar, this movie doesn't qualify as a luchador or masked wrestler film like those featuring El Santo, Mil Máscaras, or Blue Demon. Regardless, it'll scratch that itch, for sure.

There are a couple of supernatural elements present in the movie. A woman abducted by the Bat is supposedly the reincarnation of the Aztec princess. And there is indeed an Aztec mummy. It doesn't show up until near the end of the movie, and it's not on screen for long, but it's present. The mummy is

pretty cool and worth the wait. And, just as The Aztec Mummy led into this movie, this film leads into its sequel, The Robot vs. The Aztec Mummy.

## SerCon

# Michael Shaara Bio-Bibliography by Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D. N3F Historian



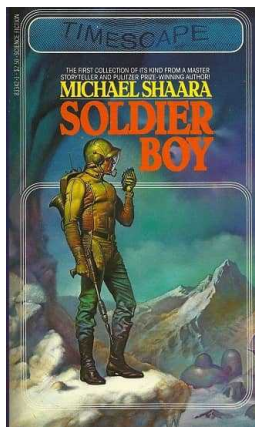
Michael Joseph Shaara, Jr., born on June 23, 1928, was an American writer of science fiction (s-f), sports fiction, and historical fiction.

### Personal History

He was born to Italian immigrant parents (the family name was originally spelled Sciarra) in Jersey City, New Jersey. He graduated in 1951 from Rutgers University, where he joined the Theta Chi fraternity; and then he served as a sergeant in the 82nd Airborne division prior to the Korean War.

Before Shaara began selling s-f stories in the 1950s, he was an amateur boxer and a police officer. He later taught literature at Florida State University while continuing to write fiction. The stress of this work and his heavy smoking led to his having a heart attack at the early age of 36; but he fully recovered.

### Genre Writing/Editing Career



He had s-f stories published in several prozines, including Astounding, Orbit, Galaxy, Fantastic Universe, F&SF, Planet Stories, Satellite Science Fiction, Fantastic, Space Science Fiction, and Imagination. “All the Way Back,” in Astounding, was his first published s-f story. He was an associate editor for Science Fiction Adventures in the mid-1950s.

### Radio Adaptations

“Soldier Boy,” originally published in Galaxy, was broadcast on NBC’s X-Minus One on October 17, 1956, starring Larry Haines, Ralph Bell, and Bob Hastings.



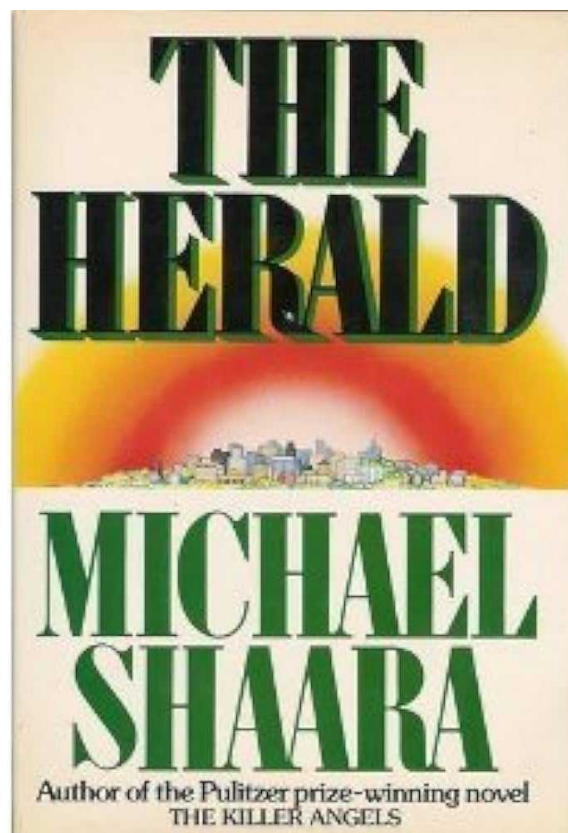
In South Africa, “Grenville’s Planet,” originally published in F&SF on October, 1952, was heard on SF 68 as the last show in the series.

### Genre Books

Shaara’s genre books included the novel *The Herald* (1981), and the collection *Soldier Boy* (1982). *The Herald* was re-published as *The Noah Conspiracy* in 1994.

### Short Genre Fiction

*All the Way Back* (1952)  
*Orphans of the Void* (1952)  
*Grenville’s Planet* (1952)  
*Be Frutiful and Multiply* (1952)  
*Soldier Boy* (1953)  
*The Book* (1953)  
*The Sling and the Stone* (1954)  
*Wainer* (1954)  
*The Holes* (1954)  
*Time Payment* (1954)  
*Beast in the House* (1954)  
*The Vanisher* (1954)  
*Come to My Party* (1956)  
*Man of Distinction* (1956)  
*Conquest Over Time* (1956)  
*2066: Election Day* (1956)  
*Four-Billion Dollar Door* (1956)  
*Death of a Hunter* (1957)  
*The Lovely House* (1958)  
*Citizen Jell* (1959)  
*Opening Up Slowly* (1973)  
*Border Incident* (1976)  
*Starface* (1982)  
*The Dark Angel* (1982)



### Awards/Honors/Recognitions

His novel about the Battle of Gettysburg, *The Killer Angels*, won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1975.

Today there is a Michael Shaara Award for Excellence in Civil War Fiction, established by his son, Jeffrey Shaara, and awarded yearly at Gettysburg College.

### Some Concluding Comments

Jeffrey Shaara is also a writer of historical fiction; most notably sequels to his father's best-known novel. His most famous novel is a prequel to *The Killer Angels*, *Gods and Generals*. Jeffrey got his father's last book, *For the Love of the Game*, published three years after Michael's death. Shaara's daughter, Lila Shaara, is also a novelist -- with such works as *Every Secret Thing* and *The Fortune Teller's Daughter: A Novel*.

### Death

Michael Shaara died of a heart attack on May 5, 1988, aged 59.

### Sources

Clute, John & Peter Nicholls. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, 1993.

Mallett, D. F. & R. Reginald. *Reginald's Science Fiction and Fantasy Awards*, 1993.

Tymn, M. B. & Ashley, Mike. *Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Weird Fiction Magazines*, 1985.

Note: Various Internet sites were consulted, including Wikipedia, ISFDB, and Fancyclopedia 3.

## Short Stories

### Review by Heath Row

The STF Amateur

I obtained a PDF of the November 1954 issue of *Imagination* (Vol. 5 #11) and read it. In addition to other editorial features, the issue includes four short stories, a novelette, and a "complete novel."

Alan J. Ramm's short story "Trouble Near the Sun" is set on the Inner Planet Fleet's *Cerebus III*, a salvage vessel on a mission to locate another spacecraft, the *Regis*, and rescue its crew. The *Regis*—and an inspector on board—became endangered while investigating whether nuclei were being illegally dredged from a sunspot. Navigating through the corona of Sol into the chromosphere, the *Cerebus III* encounters challenges of its own. Navigation in the sun is tricky business generally, but when crew members aren't cooperating —instead, competing— with each other, it becomes downright dangerous.

In "Eight Million Dollars from Mars!", Winston Marks tells the tale of a smuggler who tries to evade detection. Having betrayed his accomplices, he rushes to board a ship scheduled to depart for Mars. Bypassing one of the preparatory steps for his voyage, he unwittingly guarantees a very uncomfortable trip. (Very uncomfortable indeed!)

Richard Maples's short story, "The Frightful Ones," focuses on a child forced to face alien invaders. The identity of the child—and the invaders —might surprise you. And in "The Missing Disclaimer," Sam Sackett offers a story in which a writer for the fictional *Atomic Science Stories* unwittingly fends off an alien invasion because of an editorial error.

In S. M. Tenneshaw's novelette, "Let Space Be Your Coffin," a man who suspects his girlfriend of disloyalty plots the death of a mutual friend and colleague. His plan gangs agley—as they apt do—and the fate he intended for his rival falls, instead, to him.

Finally, Geoff St. Reynard's (a pen name of Robert W. Krepps) novel, "Don't Panic!," is a very fun piece focusing on humanity's response to an alien invasion. Shades of *Starship Troopers*, *V*, and *The War of the Worlds*, there's a wide range of emotions and responses experienced and exhibited by the survivors. One man decides to stand up to the invaders, enlisting the aid of other surviving humans. Krepps's portrayal of the developing romance between the hero and a compatriot was particularly affectionate.

An editorial sheds some light on Madge's decision to feature "calendar type pinup[s]" on its covers. Henry Bott offers reviews of then-current books. But Mari Wolf's column "Fandora's Box" is the real treat of the issue. Wolf considers some of the different approaches to reviewing fanzines and whether rating them is a worthy endeavor. A Los Angeles-area fan, she reviews several National Fantasy Fan Federation clubzines, Richard E. Geis's *Psychotic*, Walt Willis's *Hyphen*, Terry Carr's *Vulcan*, and other items. The column, occasionally written by Robert Bloch, ran from 1951-1958 and provides a treasure trove for fanzine fen and fandom historians alike. I need to learn more about Wolf, who was a member of LASFS.

In the letter column, a correspondent proposes three distinct types of prozines: the waste of money type, pleasant reading, and true science fiction. Other topics include whether sf fen are prone to communist sympathies (a pink outlook) and misleading anthologies. But why letter writer Jimmy Walker, then of Amarillo, Tex., doesn't like the "Fandora's Box" column, I do not know. It might be the best thing in Madge!

Because, otherwise, *Imagination* sits squarely in the "pleasant reading" category as far as I'm concerned. It's not a waste of money, but its stories—at least in this issue—don't seem to deserve the laurels of "true science fiction." (I hesitate to say that because I don't actually think I'd take a position on what true science fiction is. There's enough different kinds of sf to satisfy all fen.)

Of the stories in this, I enjoyed them all. There wasn't a stinker in the bunch! In honor of Wolf, I'll rank the pieces from best to least best—and rate them totally subjectively and somewhat arbitrarily: Ramm (Rating: 9), Tenneshaw (8), Marks (7), Sackett (7), Reynard (6), and Maples (4). "Fandora's Box"? A perfect 10.

## Videos

### Killing Mary Sue Review by Jason P. Hunt

On the surface, it's a silly premise: Mary Sue Harper (Sierra McCormick) is the troublemaker step-daughter of Senator Bradley Weiner (Durmot Mulroney), who's re-election campaign is suffering because Mary Sue keeps getting into all manner of trouble with her sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll lifestyle. So he decides the only way to eliminate the political problem is to eliminate Mary Sue.



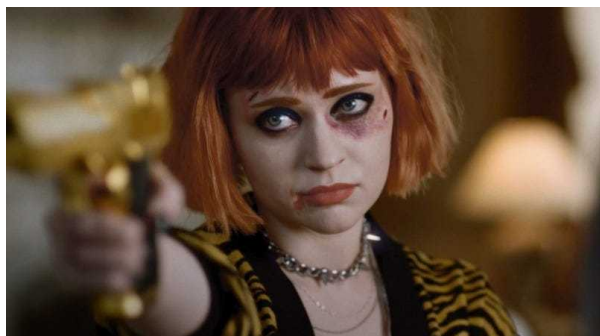
But it turns out, Mary Sue is remarkably hard to kill. Because... well, Mary Sue.

It's an action comedy straight out of the 80s, with tongue planted firmly in cheek as Mary Sue uses her Fortnite skills to fight off the various assassin squads, facilitated by Knox (Martin Kove). Starting with the legendary assassin Cable Henry (Sean Patrick Flanery), the attacks escalate to the point of the ridiculous. The bullets and the blood (copious

amounts, mind you, all fake) fly as Mary Sue takes matters into her own hands to fend off danger at every turn.

Made with a very low budget, shot just weeks before the actors strike, *Killing Mary Sue* is a throwback to those over-the-top straight-to-VHS flicks we had in the 80s, like *Lovely But Deadly* or *Ninja III: The Domination* — drive-in schlock with heart and a sense of fun driving all the performances. It's a pretty good bet everyone had fun on this shoot, even the ones who did it for the paycheck before the strike kept them from working.

Oddly enough, it's Jake Busey who gives an unexpectedly low-key performance as the Senator's campaign manager Wes, who would happily off the little brat himself. Well, it's low-key for Busey, anyway...



The idea of a Mary Sue character originated in *Star Trek* fan fiction many moons ago, and now has several iterations and variations, but essentially the core definition of the type has remained the same: a female character who seemingly has all of the skills and abilities, which she hasn't earned, and no discernable flaws or weaknesses. Originally written as a parody of a

trend Paula Smith noticed while editing the fanzine *Menagerie*, the concept has transcended fan fiction and now applies to those female lead characters — usually a self-insert — who can do pretty much anything all while being protected by Plot Armor.

Writer/director James Sunshine deliberately leaned into the absurdity of the Mary Sue archetype, giving his lead character an uncanny ability to escape death with ease, handle weapons better than your average Navy Seal, and spout F-bomb laden snark with the best of 'em. Of course she's the best at everything.

But to balance that, she's got a major flaw, and it's almost her undoing. That gives this Mary Sue an added layer that you normally don't find in the Kathleen Kennedy self-inserts of the world: a vulnerability that someone learns to exploit. You start out rooting for the girl because of the absurdity of the premise, and it's just silly fun, but then you get a chance to see that emotion-driven layer.



As the danger mice continue to circle Mary Sue, escalating the danger, at the same time tension is rising for the Senator, who finds his own situation growing more and more dangerous as his step-daughter continues to be Not Dead. What would happen if his opponent found out he's been using Mary Sue as a go-between with the Russian banana farm oligarch Volkov (French Stewart)?

It's absurd. It's a little more f-bomby than I usually care to see. The violence is cartoonishly over the top with the guns that almost never have to reload... But it's a fun stomp through a style of filmmaking that's almost not done anymore, and it's well worth the trip.

## Anime

### Mononoke: Noppera-bou (Faceless Monster) Review by Jesse Silver (s1e1.com)



Ochou is in prison, awaiting the execution of her sentence for brutally murdering her husband and his family. Coincidentally, the Medicine Seller is sharing a cell with her (he had a run-in with a dissatisfied customer that ended poorly for him). In speaking with Ochou, the truth of her guilt begins

to come into question. She doesn't appear as though she'd be able to murder a group of people on her own, and she doesn't recall exactly what actions she took to kill them. But she confessed her responsibility to the authorities, resulting in her death sentence. The Medicine Seller's instincts prove to be sound, however; soon a mononoke with a roughly human appearance reveals himself and claims Ochou's act as his own. He wipes away the Medicine Seller's identity and takes Ochou to another realm.

The mononoke begins to court Ochou and reveals that he's kept watch over her. He then asks her to marry him. The celebration is filled with the faces of other spiritual beings who are also said to have watched over Ochou. She feels as though a new path has opened up to her. But the Medicine Seller reappears and, through his presence, information about Ochou's relationship with her mother is revealed. This destroys the mononoke's illusion. As the Medicine Seller and mononoke fight with one



another, the Medicine Seller's mirror breaks through the illusory masked faces of the mononoke. What is the true form of the creature who has taken root in Ochou's heart?

The Medicine Seller seals away the masked mononoke under its extreme protest, and presents Ochou's life to her in four acts, through which he hopes to come to a conclusion about the actual mononoke's truth and reason. All the while the sword of exorcism is chomping at the bit, teetering at the threshold of its release. Ochou relives memories of her childhood, learning to play the koto as her mother looked on. Ochou loved her mother, but her mother seemed more content to groom Ochou to marry into wealth than to nurture her with kindness. Her love only went so far as Ochou was obedient and accomplished at her studies. Her mother's greatest joy seemed to manifest when Ochou was married into a samurai family at last; now her mother could go to the family grave without the shame that came along with losing everything.

The Medicine Seller continues to prod Ochou, asking her who she really killed, as it appears that this was anything but a straightforward murder. Because her love for her mother runs so deep, she's loathe to admit the fact that in working to please her, she gave up every last one of her own desires. The fact is that the only person Ochou ever killed was herself, over and over and over again, as she molded herself to others' desires. This reveals that the mononoke is actually the life she never lived, the choices she never



made, and the prison she constructed out of her own situation. She is the mononoke. Having finally made peace with that, Ochou opens herself to the sword of exorcism. Suddenly, she's back in her home's kitchen, listening as her husband and his family demand more sake and berate her. This time, she looks out the window at the sky that gave her a small bit of joy so many times. Then, she's gone.



### Thoughts and Reactions

As the Medicine Seller repeats multiple times throughout the story, if you feel trapped in a place it becomes a prison, but if you don't want to leave it becomes a palace. As the masked mononoke interacts with Ocho, it offers her an array of kind words and eventually welcomes her into marriage with him. The wedding has all the luscious trimmings and Ocho is hypnotically drawn in by the festivities. In the whirlwind of sake and dancing she seems ill-equipped to realize that all of it is nothing more than a distraction from the core of her predicament. A marriage makes a good comparison with a prison or a palace; though it's just a pact between two people there are many aspects of the legal and emotional binding together of individuals that make leaving it a non-trivial act.

The mononoke is better served keeping Ocho happy on the surface and allowing her to wear her mask, because if she begins to question anything within herself or becomes more focused on self-acknowledgement it will likely demolish the darkness in her heart that keeps him sustained. Letting herself be distracted by the bright colors and the mononoke's proclamations of love helps her hold onto a brief (but ultimately false) sense of well-being. She believes this marriage to be an escape from her prison, just as many of us believe that marrying might be an escape from financial hardship, loneliness, or familial pressure. A successful, meaningful marriage requires so much more than that from the people involved, though – mutual respect, honoring one-another's boundaries and choices, a belief in the other's fundamental human dignity and a respect for the person that they are. If these things are missing and the act is just a move to escape from something else, then it becomes a trap.

The Medicine Seller references human faces as the facades or "masks" that we put in place to present only what we want the world to see (or what we want to convince ourselves is the truth). The faces we share with the world might be the ones that make us feel safe and protected, or they may be what we believe to be true about ourselves; it's a dubious skill of human beings to be able to choose the persona that serves them. In this story arc this concept is represented well by the use of Noh masks. If you're unfamiliar with Noh theater, it has deep ties with Japanese spirituality, and the characterization is conveyed exclusively through strictly-codified dance movements and traditional masks worn by the main performer. The masks each represent either a character archetype (child, young woman, spirit etc.) or even specific characters in some cases. The masks are constructed of one type of wood and painted by hand. An incredible amount of effort goes into creating these visual facades that provide almost all the information that one would need to know about the person being portrayed. Human beings spend years constructing their own personal masks; Ocho's mask began to manifest in childhood and became so much a part of her that it was eventually indistinguishable from her own face.

Ocho has the Medicine Seller's play to help her realize the truth of her situation; it allows her to come to the correct conclusion since the truth becomes obvious as it's laid out for her. One of my



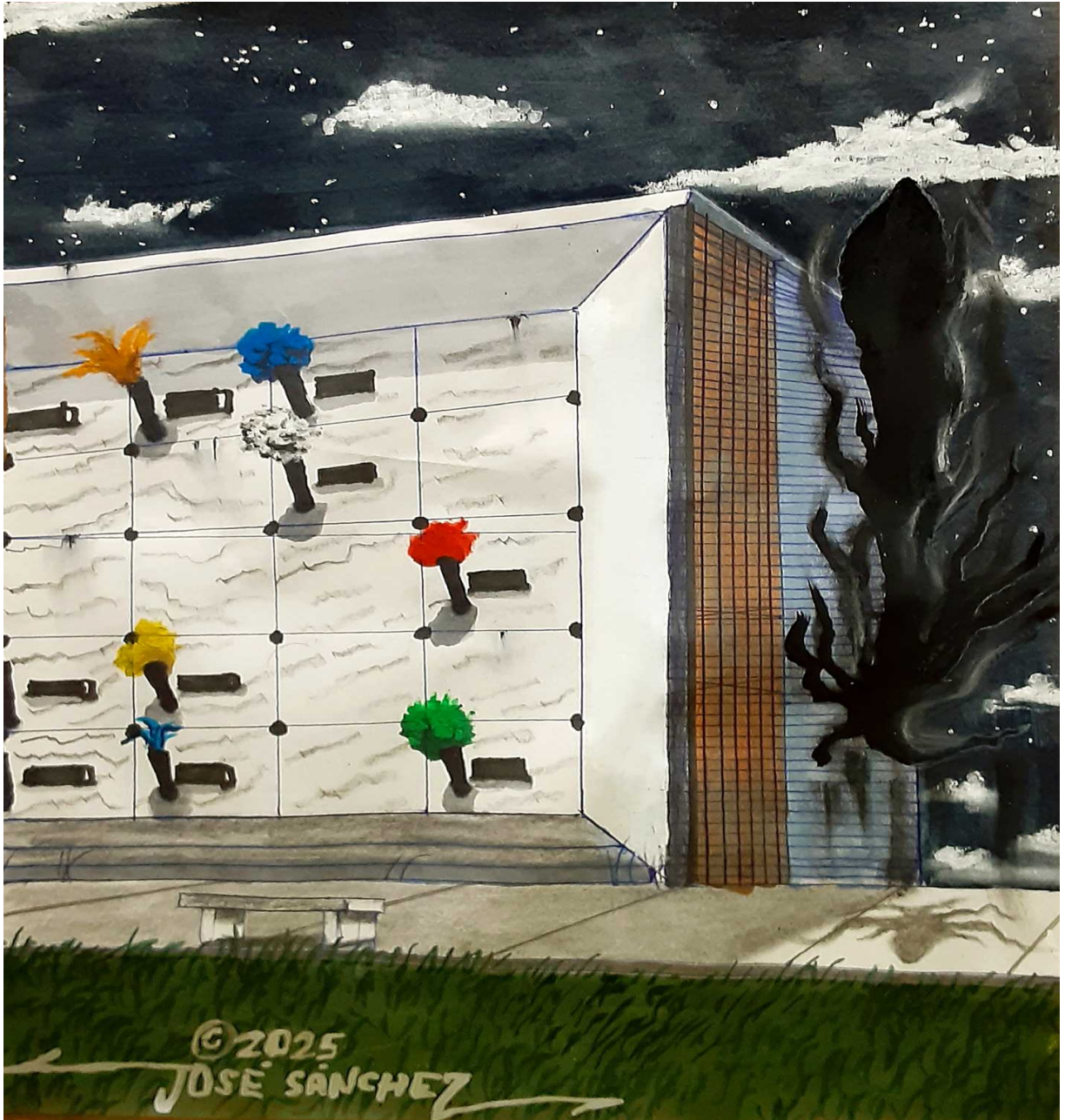
favorite things about this story arc is that it's never stated outright how real (or not) the fox-masked mononoke's form is. Just as the entire episode walks the line between staged fantasy and reality, his actual existence is called into question throughout. He resembles the Medicine Seller's alternate form enough that the common interpretation is that he's either a spirit conjured by the Medicine Seller for the purposes of interacting with Ochou, or his other form itself. Because this episode is so focused on the rift that formed between Ochou the "mask" and Ochou the person, I find the thought that the Medicine Seller may have split his own aspects apart in some sort of solidarity with her to be comforting.

The pipe he smokes is kind of the big tip-off for me; I don't believe we see him use it in other story arcs (he does carry it in the cool figurine I have, however), but it's prominently featured as a tool of the mononoke and the Medicine Seller takes a long draw from it at the end of the episode before leaving. There are tantalizing clues to support several theories, but as a general fan of the show and someone who's intrigued by the Medicine Seller as a character, what I've always liked to believe is that the mononoke is some aspect of himself, and that he came to know of Ochou somehow and through his knowledge of her situation really did fall in love with her.

There's also a lot of imagery that references split existences. I don't usually talk all that much about film-making techniques here, but this series actually utilizes the frame in interesting ways to emphasize (even before we realize it) that Ochou has been of two minds (and perhaps two existences) throughout her ordeal and beyond. The quick cuts where half of her face is on the left side and the other half on the right side of the screen are just long enough to leave a striking impression on the viewer. They don't linger, but their presence is enough to be disorienting. It's a good compliment to the ghostly images of Ochou that represent her true self and unfulfilled desires. To me, there's something powerful about the belief that, if we don't honor ourselves to some extent, or even go so far as to deny our desires in pursuit of goals that aren't our own, some piece of our psyche breaks away to make itself happy in our absence. Perhaps its why years of self denial (and even depression) feel more like emptiness than sadness.

Lastly, I'd like to mention Ochou's (お蝶) name, which simply means "butterfly." While I believe a lot of the character names in this series have some kind of meaning that can be interpreted from how they're written, I think this one is a good example since it's so short and to the point. I find it telling that her name references a creature who can fly; the one mental escape Ochou has from her abusive husband's family is the sight of the sky through a kitchen window. Only a small creature like a bird or butterfly could fly out through its wooden slats. She looks a bit like a butterfly too, with her large obi and brightly-colored clothing. Butterflies are usually short-lived creatures, their lifespans averaging something like a month in good circumstances. This may serve as a reminder to us – life is so short already, so why choose to spend it enclosed and suffering? In the final scene Ochou disappears from the room, seemingly without going through a door. There is something poetic about imagining her taking wing and leaving.





Monster at the Mausoleum by José Sánchez