

Oh, Noh!



Kanami Tabuki was in high spirits as he entered the foyer of Osaka Central Theater. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries had agreed to bankroll his motorcycle airbag invention, and the American restaurant chain, Denny's, was warming to his "coelacanth crisps" breakfast entrée. He greeted several acquaintances warmly and briefly flirted with a comely usherette on his way to his front-and-center seat. As the lights dimmed, he quickly ate his celery phone and locked his tray table in the upright position. Then he sat back as *Moshi watashi ni akai zubonsuri* – the Tale of the Red Suspenders – unfolded on stage. At first, he delighted in the way the Godzilla shadow puppet had so much trouble donning his suspenders, however mirth turned to melancholy as the monster settled down to ravage the country. But Kanami's gloom was to be expected. He was attending a Noh drama, a Japanese play intrinsically tragic in mood. Oh, there were flashes of levity as the monster got tangled up in the elastic straps, but overall, the tenor of the play was grim. At intermission, two sake spritzers helped loosen him up, and by the time he was back in his seat, he was ready to cheer on Godzilla. But as the play moved into the second act, Kanami noticed it wasn't adhering to convention. Traditional priest and warrior god characters were supplanted by little green aliens and animatronic vegetables. SpongeBob SquarePants made a cameo. And although Noh plays were customarily the purview of adult actors, a slew of moppets now filled the stage. They were behaving very badly, too – running around higgledy-piggledy, wholly ignoring the red suspenders. At one point, an especially grubby urchin drew up his kimono and partially mooned the audience. Kanami was scandalized! He was not a fan of the current U.S. administration's education policy, ergo it perturbed him to see the Noh child's left behind! Thenceforth, things went even more rapidly downhill.