

# FINNISH WEIRD 4

## CALL OF THE WEIRD



MAGDALENA HAI • J. S. MERESMAA • VIIVI HYVÖNEN

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## SEDUCTIVELY WEIRD

As Finland celebrates 100 years of independence this year, Finnish science fiction and fantasy literature is in outstanding shape. In the year 2000, **Johanna Sinisalo**'s Finlandia Prize for her novel *Troll: A Love Story* (published as *Not Before Sundown* in the UK) was something that the sceptics could write off as just a momentary anomaly in a field dominated by realism.

History has proven them wrong. Since then, the Finlandia Prize has been awarded to many works that could fall under the umbrella of speculative fiction. Attitudes have changed both in publishing houses and among readers. The grassroots are thriving, launching the careers of many unique sf/f voices, and many mainstream authors have adopted the tools of speculative fiction in their own work. The trailblazers of Finnish fandom, both professionals and passionate amateurs, have created opportunities and spread the word about Finnish Weird.

The border between realism and fantasy has blurred. It is this desire to explore the borderlands between reality and fiction and a dose of northern melancholy that are the wellspring of our unique Finnish form of weird literature. Finnish speculative fiction is not a solitary island, but an integrated part of the mainstream. Part of the reason for this is probably that we never developed commercial markets for people wanting to publish nothing but genre fiction. We have had to infiltrate, adapt and fight for room in the mainstream. It is this underdog experience that has taught Finnish Weird to react to current events and be sensitive to various social issues.

This magazine follows previous issues of Finnish Weird, being the fourth of its name. The past ten years has seen a major boost for Finnish speculative fiction. New names have burst onto the scene and veterans, too, have found the passion to explore reality from new angles.

**Magdalena Hai** is one of this decade's new arrivals. She brought steampunk to Finland by writing our first proper steampunk work. Her *Henry and Gigi* YA series is a bildungsroman set in an alternate Europe. Hai has also gained recognition by winning the Atorox prize for the best Finnish science fiction or fantasy short story and the Estonian Stalker short story award.

**J. S. Meresmaa** is known for her fantasy works, particularly her *Mifonki* fantasy novels, which places power and love on center stage. Meresmaa is equally



at home writing epic fantasy novels and short stories. Hai and Meresmaa are also both members of the Osuuskumma publishing cooperative. Osuuskumma is broadening the Finnish publishing field, giving the writers themselves the opportunity to call the shots.

The publishing scene is changing shape, and writers are slowly becoming something like renaissance artists. In Osuuskumma, they form a collective like a many-headed hydra. In addition to their main craft of writing, each author has some other skill to bring to the shared table. The end result is a publishing house that is not afraid to seek out new voices and perspectives while also maintaining high standards.

The third author presented in this issue is **Viivi Hyvönen**, who began her career in the 1990s. Her third novel, *The Monkey and the New Moon* is a multifaceted, mind-blowing science fiction detective novel, whose private detective, an intelligent monkey named Hanuman, delves deep into humanity.

Finnish Weird is calling out to international readers, waiting for the opportunity to seduce you!

ANNE LEINONEN

Author, editor and organizer





## MAGDALENA HAI

### STEAMPUNK AND CRYPTOZOOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

**M**agdalena Hai arrived on the Finnish speculative fiction scene in the 2010s. She has been called the queen of Finnish steampunk, the author who brought steampunk to Finnish literature.

These are big boots to fill, and Magdalena has not only filled them but taken seven-league strides. She has written for children, young adults, and adults, and the first part of her *Gigi and Henry* trilogy was the first Finnish steampunk novel to be published in hardback. In addition, Hai's short story "The Beautiful Boy" won the Atorox prize as the best Finnish science fiction or fantasy story in 2015.

#### GEEKINESS AS A WAY OF LIFE

The seeds for Hai's life as a writer were sown already in early childhood: she admits to having been a nerdy child. Her childhood games of spies and snow leopards came so alive in her imagination that she could almost believe in them. Soon young Hai shifted her interests from the make-believe things of childhood towards the fantastic sides of the real world. Her interest shifted to science and science fiction, and curiosity drove her to seek miracles in the world.

Hai has always felt the need to create something. To begin with, she found an outlet in crafting, drawing, photography, and sewing. She did not start to write until adulthood, at the age of 28. A university education provided her with the skills to research information and handle large bodies of material, but she never aimed to become a scientist.

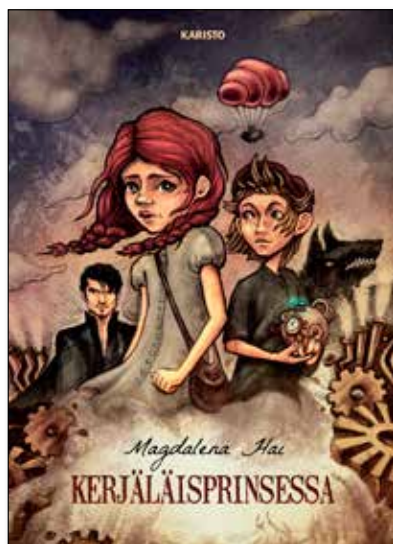
"I realized I enjoyed making things up more than research," Hai characterizes her choice with a laugh.

"I've always spun stories about my environment, it's a very strong feature of my personality. When I was younger, I used to draw people I knew as fantastic creatures. One boyfriend was a gnome being born from the bog, another was a Roman soldier. In a way, this is how I saw them: to me, the story portrayed something essential about them as people. This is probably why I always take my own stories very seriously and write with my heart's blood. I always aim to tell a story that reaches something real through the magical, metaphorical, and symbolic."

Magdalena Hai is a pen name that was born in 2010, when the website "Kryptozoologisia tutkimuksia" ["Cryptozoological Investigations"] was first published online. The website was inspired by the cryptozoological scams of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the tales of the Loch Ness monster, the Cottingley fairy pictures, and the *Book of Imaginary Beings* (1957) by **Jorge Luis Borges**.

"I was drawn to the world and atmosphere of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first Magdalena Hai photos have the vibe of a 1920s archaeologist on a dig. Steampunk did not enter the picture until later."

On the website, the cryptozoologist began to report strange phenomena and observations in the form of small stories. The site balanced on the boundary of fact and fiction, and it included deliberately poorly edited photos of supernatural creatures, toy dinosaurs, and a troll named Börtti. However, the project soon



grew beyond the limits of a smokescreen allowing the person behind the pen name to interact online.

"The cryptozoologist Magdalena Hai shared many features with me, but she was a fictional character at the same time," Hai says.

One reason for starting up a website was that Hai found it very hard to let others read her writing. The Internet was a suitably anonymous way to publish her stories. At the same time, the person behind the pen name grew to be a writer.

"When I wrote a fictional story once every two weeks, writing became a routine, because I was committed to producing text. In the beginning, clicking the Send button made me so nervous that I felt like throwing up. It was hard to give anything of myself up to public view," Hai describes her difficulties starting out.

The website has now changed into an author page that showcases Hai's work, but all her old stories are still available for reading. The stories also provide a window on the process of how a writer becomes a published author.

As for old pictures and legends, Hai is still fascinated by how ready people are to believe in the impossible, in fairy tales and stories. The world of Cryptozoological Investigations was largely based on the idea of what if there were a storyteller who really believed that fairies existed.

"Throughout the years, it has come as rather a big surprise to find how many people ask whether I really believe in fairies and elves. After all, the stories told by cryptozoologist Magdalena Hai are really crazy. But maybe this says something about the strange world we live in."

## STEAMPUNK!

The steampunk phenomenon has been criticized as trendy. However, steampunk is more broadly connected to a culture in which fans want to be more than passive consumers: they want to participate, make their own accessories, and become active producers who shape the field according to their own tastes.

Hai discovered steampunk in a natural way, just by being herself.

"At a burlesque event, a new friend of mine noted that my clothes were steampunkish in style. My inter-



est in history and my hobby of sewing costumes also made me a steampunker."

Having found a common name for her random interests, it was also easy for her to start looking at movies and literature in a new way. Hai lists many works important to her.

"*The Difference Engine* (1990) by **William Gibson** and **Bruce Sterling** must have been the book that finally converted me. Other influential works include **China Miéville's** *Perdido Street Station* (2000) and **Mark Hodder's** *The Strange Affair of*

*the Spring-Heeled Jack* (2010)."

In steampunk, Hai was most drawn to mixing and breaking boundaries. In works of fiction, the portrayal of the 19<sup>th</sup> century might be very detailed and accurate, but suddenly the story would break down and something strange would happen. Steampunk was not only fantasy, science fiction, or history, but a mixture of them all. And the genre with all its features was connected to Hai's own ideas and objectives.

"At that point, I was thinking about writing a science fiction novel for children of about ten and older. I had even heard the claim that Finnish publishers do not want science fiction—this was during the golden age of paranormal romance in Finland."

"It was late 2009 and I was thinking of the kind of story that I myself would be interested in when steampunk just sucked me in. I sat down and the protagonist Gigi introduced herself to me through the keyboard. During one weekend, I wrote about 20–30 pages and realized that it was going to be a book. It was so painless, and even the central characters came to me just like that. Perhaps the entire world of the book already existed in my subconscious."

To begin with, Hai did not know she was writing a trilogy, but the whole story took shape during the writing. *Kerjäläsprinssessa* [*The Beggar Princess*] (2012) is meant to be read as a stand-alone story, but essential elements for the sequels are hidden within the plot.

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**"PERHAPS THE WORLD  
ALREADY EXISTED IN  
MY SUBCONSCIOUS."**

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“Gigi appealed to me as a character perhaps because she is treated badly during the course of the story. At the same time, she is an ordinary girl who grows up to be a very extraordinary young adult. How the exceptional grows out of the everyday is fascinating to me: how a person’s experiences and the effect of other people build the personality of an individual.”

The first part of the series introduces the reader to an alternative Europe of the 1860s. Instead of Greenland, there is a flourishing Green Island and a city named Keloburg. A change of direction in the GulfStream has affected the climate in the area, and the place is abustle with traders, smugglers, and werewolves.

Gigi comes from a royal family, but she and her family have had to flee the revolution in Umbrovia and now live in conditions that are considerably poorer than their former glory. Gigi’s father is a talented inventor whose skills arouse the interest of many parties. When the family is struck by tragedy, they find themselves persecuted again. Gigi has to use her resourcefulness and contacts to protect her family.

“From the start of the story, Gigi holds the seeds of courage and persistence, but it takes a tragic event to make her bloom. Her family, her friends, and her pack are the most important things to her.”

The *Gigi and Henry* trilogy also emphasizes the fact that often people have to take responsibility in surprising situations.

“The joy and pain of adulthood consists of having to take responsibility but also having the freedom to make independent choices. Gigi has to make terrible decisions much too early.”

Hai thinks sometimes our modern society also demands too much of children. It is commonly assumed that all children have caring parents, even though that is not always the case. Many girls and young women have identified strongly with Gigi, but the series also appeals to boy readers.

“Boys don’t even think of the fact that Gigi is a girl. They don’t care about who is having adventures in a book, as long as the adventure itself is fascinating.”

On a strongly gendered market, this is great news for any writer.

Hai drew the maps of her world herself and used them to immerse herself in creating a consistent world. In the *Gigi and Henry* series, the reader gets to enjoy the alternative world of Keloburg.

“I get a lot of fun out of drawing maps and doing background research. I especially enjoyed researching 1860s Paris for *Susikuningatar* [*The Wolf Queen*] (2014), and perhaps I will be able to visit it again with another story.”

“For me, the milieu and the world are of paramount importance for the story. They have to feel



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 Kerjäläisprinsessa (*Gigi ja Henry* 1), 2012  
 Kellopelikuningas (*Gigi ja Henry* 2), 2013  
 Susikuningatar (*Gigi ja Henry* 3), 2014  
 Haiseva käsi ja muita kauheita tarinoita Uhriniituntakaisesta, 2016  
 Kurnivamahainen kissa, upcoming 2017

## TRANSLATED SHORT STORIES

“Vaskmõrsja” (Soomelulme 2, 2014)  
 (Estonian)  
 “The Brass Bride” (Usva International, 2015)  
 (English)  
 “Corpsemarch” (Finnish Weird 3, 2016)  
 (English)  
 “La novia fría” (Luces del Norte – Antología de ciencia ficción finlandesa, 2016) (Spanish)  
 “The Beautiful Boy” (Never Stop – Finnish Science Fiction and Fantasy Stories, upcoming 2017) (English)

real, and that requires total immersion. On the other hand, one may ask whether this kind of writing style is simply due to my habit of doing everything to the fullest. Using a pen name is a part of this characteristic of mine. When I'm in the role of a writer, I'm kind of like a different person. What touches the writer also touches the reader."

"In steampunk, I was fascinated by the combination of literature and aesthetics. I could write steampunk and also enact it visually in my own life. On the other hand, I tend to think of writing steampunk and the steampunk aesthetic as different parts of my own life. Steampunkish clothes are related more to my crafting and costume history hobbies, whereas my writing is based on my longer 'career' as a science fiction reader and writer."

### SMELLY HORROR FOR TEENS

Short stories have been a part of Hai's repertoire since the very beginning.

"Short stories are refreshing to write. They enable me to try out different things and genres in a limited space. Short stories come easily to me and I have a habit of writing them as a pastime in between novel-length manuscripts."

Hai notes that many of her short stories have allowed her to expand her audience to adults.

Hai is working on a novel-length urban fantasy that requires time to mature. In the meantime, she discovered she could write horror. Hai's most recent short story collection is a book of horror tales for young people, *Haiseva käsi ja muita kauheita tarinoita Uhriniituntakaisesta* [*The Smelly Hand and Other Dreadful Stories from Uhriniituntakainen*] (2016). The book was nominated for the Topelius prize as one of the best books for young people published in 2016.

"Just for the fun of it, I started to write short stories that are clearly aimed at young people. I was inspired by the TV series *American Horror Stories* and on-line ghost stories."

The book is aimed at teens from about 12 to 16. The stories are set in a place called "Uhriniituntakainen", which could be translated as "Beyond the Field of Sacrifice". This place is the prototype of a small Finnish town with a few thousand inhabitants. Strange things happen

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## "THE EVIL DOLL IS THE MOST VERSATILE OF MY FICTIONAL PERSONAS."

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there: the dead come back to life and a good witch battles the forces of evil, but humor is always involved.

"The *Smelly Hand* project continues my enthusiasm for and interest in stories that are claimed to be true. It was incredibly fascinating to read ghost sites on the Internet, Creepypasta and stuff like that. They are hugely popular in spite of the fact that the traditional ghost story is a really formulaic type of story. The surprise never comes as a surprise because the formula of a ghost story is simply so straightforward. Instead, a feeling of horror is created by ideas of 'what if?' and the reader's disbelieving belief in the impossible. What if the story about the living doll were true? What if Bloody Mary really did look out of the mirror?"

Hai describes how horror can be used to discuss real problems in the daily lives of young people, but externalized to a safe level through a supernatural element. The stories in her book deal with loneliness and bullying, for example, but also things that children and teens read about in the news and hear adults discussing.

"Adults would like to think that the problems of the adult world do not concern young people, but kids have to face these problems from a very early age whether they want to or not."

Hai views the short story as providing a vehicle for experiments related to form, length, and themes.

"The *Smelly Hand* collection includes a couple of horror stories told in the traditional ghost story format, because I wanted to try and see how this form of story works," Hai says. "But a ghost story told at the campfire as a 'true' story can't really include other levels or themes, there's just the boo factor. Most stories in the collection are clearly more literary: they have themes, plots, and carefully constructed characters."

School visits convinced the author that there is a demand for horror stories among young people.





“The short form is suited for classroom use, for example. Even my novel *The Beggar Princess* is narrated at a swift pace so that easily bored readers will not be put off.”

Hai considers it important to keep the quality equally high regardless of whether she is writing for kids or for adults. A young readership doesn't mean shoddy writing.

## OUTSIDERS AND SHAPESHIFTERS

On the level of themes, Hai writes a lot about feeling like an outsider and being different. In her stories, the characters do not feel at home and have to grow up and take responsibility. Already in her children's book *Mörkö Mõö ja Mikko Pöö* [*The Monster and the Boy*] (2012), a monster and a little child meet each other and their viewpoints are treated as equal. Many of Hai's stories also include shapeshifting, a good example of which is a short story about dragons, “Hänen kuvansa” [“In Her Image”] (2015).

Hai's photographic projects also consist of shape-shifting of a kind. In addition to a steampunk scientist, she has pictures of herself as a Mad Max type desert warrior, a werewolf, and Evil Doll, a pretty but lethal doll character.

“Evil Doll is the most versatile of my fictional personas. Even though she was born on a whim, she clearly has substance. She's appeared in a couple of photo projects and in **Shimo Suntila's** short story ‘Bibliofiili ja pahanukke’ [‘The Bibliophile and the Evil Doll’] (2015). I have given other writers permission to use the character in their projects, because she clearly has a life of her own.”

Being photographed is a form of carnivalism and playing with roles.

“I think my characters and alternate personas are parts of some kind of inner project of being seen. From the very beginning I have rebelled against the idea being just a writer.”

Where does Magdalena Hai find inspiration for her work?

“In real life, of course. Many of the stories in the *Smelly Hand* collection had their start in the sorrows and fears of real children and young people, even though the stories have been worked over many times in the engine of my imagination. What is ultimately left between the covers is completely a work of art created by me, not stolen snatches of other people's lives and experiences. Inspiration is the key.”

“I'm also inspired by art made by other people. Music, movies, paintings. Works of art create atmospheres and insights that can be used to start building something of my own. Just like a book can transport



## FAVORITE BOOKS

- ★ Hal Duncan: *Vellum*
- ★ Mihail Bulgakov: *The Master and Margarita*
- ★ Ray Bradbury: *Something Wicked This Way Comes*
- ★ Neil Gaiman: *American Gods*
- ★ Leena Krohn: *Tainaron*

## FAVORITE MOVIES

- ★ Orlando (1992)
- ★ Labyrinth (1991)
- ★ The Princess Bride (1987)
- ★ Only Lovers Left Alive (2013)
- ★ The Grand Budapest Hotel (2013)
- ★ Interstellar (2014)

## INSPIRATIONAL PLACES

- ★ Old churches and castles
- ★ Scotland
- ★ Central Vietnam

the reader to another world, music can transport the writer.”

Hai’s tastes in music are broad. She often chooses to listen to heavy metal: Disturbed, Rammstein, and Die Antwoord have been recent favorites. On the other hand, she also likes swing and electro swing, such as Caravan Palace. She also listens to music from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

“It often feels like I inadvertently tend to listen to the same artists or songs over and over again while writing a certain story. YouTube’s autoplay feature is a useful tool here: sometimes it takes me to strange places and gives me new insights. On the other hand, certain songs do tend to imprint strongly on my writing for a long time afterwards. For example, if I hear **Emilie Autumn**’s *Faces Like Mine*, it sweeps me away to the world of the *Wolf Queen* with *Gigi*.”

Playlists help Hai keep her projects separate. A certain musical style or atmosphere gets her firmly anchored to a certain manuscript.

“My working day begins when I put on a playlist. On the other hand, if I switch styles in the middle of the day when I’m working on two things at once, changing the music helps me avoid getting the worlds of the two stories mixed up or bringing the atmosphere of the first story over to the second. Some characters have their own songs, but not nearly all of them, and not necessarily in their order of importance. A side character may have a song of their own, but the protagonist won’t.”

“Music videos don’t work in the same way as plain music, because the music and the video together already tell their own story that I have nothing to contribute to. There are a few exceptions, though. My not-so-secret vice, K-pop, appeals to me in part because of its excessive visual style. **Melanie Martinez** was the artist whose music inspired me when I was writing the *Smelly Hand* stories. In her album *Cry Baby*, I was fascinated by the combination of her music and



her persona as a performer. The album is a successful collection of disturbed tales of an unhappy childhood, but in such a way that it inspired me to write.”

## WRITERS IN TRANSITION

The role of a writer is in transition because the publishing field has become so fragmented. What does Hai think of this age of renaissance writers, who can transition from storyteller to editor, graphic artist, or publishing company salesperson?

“There are still many writers of the traditional kind with just one contact person in a publishing house, and that’s fine. But it was a role that I wasn’t entirely comfortable with. I need a broader connection.”

With respect to the do-it-yourself ethos, Hai points to the *Osuuskumma* publishing cooperative, of which she is an active member. A cooperative organization allows members to learn the ropes of the publishing business by doing things themselves, and membership in a small publishing house is also a route to doing experimental things. The traditional genre divisions of the publishing world mean that most large publishers still automatically classify speculative fiction as books for children and young adults.

“This affects the kind of literature that gets published in Finland and the way in which manuscripts selected for publication are edited to suit various target groups. At *Osuuskumma*, we wanted to provide a professional publishing route, including editing, layout, and distribution channels, to manuscripts representing speculative fiction for adults, often considered more marginal.”

*Osuuskumma* publishes thematic anthologies of short stories and two or three short story collections or independent novels per year. The books cover the entire spectrum of speculative fiction: science fiction, alternative history, steampunk, fantasy, and new weird.

“Finnish speculative fiction must become more professional, and that is exactly what’s happening right now,” Hai states.

“Fandom has a large variety of skills that big publishers have failed to appreciate. Even good stories may not be accepted. In addition to publication channels, it is important that there are more and more adult readers who have grown up never thinking that speculative fiction is something just for children.”

Now that publishers are starting to understand

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“FANDOM HAS A LARGE VARIETY OF SKILLS THAT BIG PUBLISHERS HAVE FAILED TO APPRECIATE.”

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that things can be said in many ways and good stories can be told in any genre, how could readers be encouraged to discover Finnish speculative fiction?

“Speculative fiction has become more mainstream, but I still run into walls,” Hai notes. “Surprisingly often I meet people who say that they only read about things that are real”

Finnish literature is sold abroad as realistic even though speculative elements may be present. At the same time, a fantasy author may find out that fantasy books won’t sell in Finland in spite of fantasy being the bestselling genre in other countries.

“Genres of speculative fiction that are successful in other countries are still considered somehow suspicious when approached by a Finnish author. Foreign bestsellers are marketed at huge volumes to Finnish readers at the same time as similar works by Finnish authors are rejected because ‘fantasy doesn’t sell.’”

Hai also challenges readers to face up to their prejudices.

“We’ve relied so much on fantasy written in English that consumers might not even realize yet how much is happening in Finland. It’s still not uncommon to encounter the idea that Finnish books in the genre are few and of inferior quality.”

“Finnish readers assume that any random Finnish speculative fiction book that they pick up should

cater exactly to their reading tastes. If it does not, they conclude that all Finnish fantasy is boring.”

Paranormal tales of werewolves and shapeshifters have found readers, but Hai hopes that awareness of the myriad offerings of speculative fiction will increase through means such as educating teachers of Finnish and making school visits.

“When the first part in the *Gigi and Henry* series came out, gamers and other people working in computers knew the genre, because the visual look of steampunk was familiar to them. On the other hand, practically nobody in the traditional field of literature seemed to know anything about the subject.”

Hai has seen the many possibilities of steampunk in Finland.

“It has also appealed to people who might not read fantasy because steampunk includes the historical aspect.”

Finnish steampunk has taken off in a big way. Osuuskumma has published three steampunk anthologies, as well as **Anni Nupponen**’s novel *Kauheat lapset* [*The Terrible Children*] (2015) and **J. S. Meresmaa**’s novel *Naakkamestari* [*The Jackdaw Master*] (2016).

“In my opinion, the strength of science fiction in general lies in believable and special characters, the description of gender and sexuality, and a certain strangeness caused by being an outsider. The Finns are a small people that are culturally separate even from their next-door neighbors, the Scandinavian countries and Russia. We’re used to looking at things from the outside, as observers.”

“On the other hand, we have a historically strong ideal of a society of equality. Even though there is still room for improvement in certain things, women have long been equal to men and held visible roles in Finnish society. This is why Finnish prose, especially speculative fiction, contains so many strong female characters. Descriptions of gender and ethnicity could also be said to be very pluralistic, natural, and fluent.”

Hai notes that another reason that our speculative fiction is lively and versatile is probably because the general level of education in Finland is rather high and we are a technologically oriented people.

“In her book *Not Before Sundown* (2000), **Johanna Sinisalo** has conveyed something essential about Finland and the Finns: we are idealistic futurists in the skins of trolls.”



**ANNE LEINONEN**

Translated by **Sarianna Silvonen**  
Updated version of an article published  
in *Tähtivaeltaja* magazine 3/2016





MAGDALENA HAI

FAIRYLAND

Radio operator Alvin Holtzer's gloved hands buttoned the top button of his coat with difficulty. The buttonhole had worn loose and he didn't know how to fix it himself. The moisture in his breath coated the windows of the forward gondola with frost. Beyond them was nothing but darkness.

Alvin heard the monotonous murmur of four powerful *Maybach HSLu* engines from outside the gondola. He could feel their steady thrum in the large muscles of his back and legs. Only a thin layer of wood and duralumin stood between him and a nearly two thousand meter drop to the damp, chalky English soil below.

Alvin pressed the earphone tighter against his head trying to hear the voice that had whispered to him a moment ago through the empty static.

*Baby killers.* That's what the English called them. For two years, the glorious zeppelins of the Kaiser had cast their shadows over Great Britain, sowing fear and terror in the hearts of the realm beyond the Channel. But the new bullets spit forth by the hornet-like British BE2c biplanes ripped through the outer envelopes of the airships and exploded, setting alight the hydrogen inside. During the last two months, the British had succeeded in bringing down a total of three L class airships, most recently Commander Mathy's L31. Joining a zeppelin crew had always been considered an assignment for madmen. During the autumn of 1916, it had become to all intents and purposes a suicide mission.

"Commander!" Straub growled from the front of the gondola. "Commander Adler!"

The hairs on Alvin's neck stood up as Adler passed close by in the narrow gondola. Adler was a 34-year-old, tall and broad-shouldered man, the epitome of an Aryan soldier. He kept his hair cropped short at the sides and combed back on top. Lieutenant Commander Heinrich Adler.

At that moment, Alvin thought of his father.

Father had brought home a magazine confiscated from some club in the city. Alvin was not meant to

see it. He was sure he wasn't. Following the Harden-Eulenberg scandal and its aftermath Hermann Holtzer had made it clear to his family what he thought of the godless pastimes of the Kaiser's inner circle.

"Do you know, Alvin", his father had said, "what men like that do to one another?"

Alvin had shaken his head. He had been fourteen, still childish for his age and only just discovering those indiscreet parts of himself that felt far too good to touch.

"Hermann..." his mother implored. "Please, that sort of thing isn't suitable for his ears..."

Father had slammed his fist into the table. "They are if I say so! They shove their shafts in the shitholes of other men, Alvin."

Alvin had blushed violently.

"Do you call that manly behavior? Well, do you?"

Later, when Alvin had been looking for a fresh nib for his pen on his father's desk and had found the magazine, his father's words were still fresh in his memory. Without them, Alvin probably wouldn't have understood half of what the articles in the magazine were about. The words they used were too fancy. The mere son of a policeman had no understanding of the academic style, but he had admired the beautiful lettering on the cover and the pictures in which nude devils danced and wrestled with young Greek heroes. *Der Eigene*. The Unique. That had been the name of the magazine. Of course, to Alvin it had been something else entirely. *Der Eigene* had been a window into a world he had had no idea existed. The magazine had been a window into himself.

Later on, Alvin had wondered whether his father had done it on purpose. Left the magazine out like that. Had his father guessed Perhaps that magazine had been some kind of test meant to expose Alvin's degeneracy. His membership in the Kaiser's Guard.

"Come, boy. *Puerpuerpuer*."

Alvin started. The radio crackled. Alvin could hear words in the pulse of the carrier wave.

"*Buachail...*"

"England is the land of great tales," his mother used to say before the war.

Mrs. Holtzer's maiden name was Barrett, being half English on her father's side. When Alvin was small, his mother read him bedtime stories from her old homeland. Through them, Alvin, the son of a policeman from Hannover, had found Narnia, come to know Alice's adventures behind the looking glass and learned to quote every line of Puck, his favorite character from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Over the years, Alvin had come to think of England and the other lands it ruled—Wales, Scotland and Ireland—as his mother did, as *Fairyland*, a country of miraculous and charmed events.

His father had, of course, blamed his mother for Alvin's soft and gentle nature.

"Little wonder he's a pillow-biting, snot-nosed cry baby. You've done nothing but spoil him like a girl!"

Mother had lowered her gaze to hide her tears.

The discovery of the nearly worn-out copy of *Der Eigene* under Alvin's mattress had only served to prove his father right.

When the war started, Alvin applied for a posting to a zeppelin crew. Just to prove to his father, and maybe to himself, that he was a man after all. Only the elite of the German army, the bravest of men, were selected for the zeppelin corps. To a certain point, a zeppelin was invincible. It flew high and fast, dropped its bombs and slipped away under cover of darkness like a ghost. But to improve their speed the zeppelin's had been stripped of all excess weight, including parachutes. If the worst happened the crew had only two options: jump or burn.

His mother had cried when Alvin had been recruited on the crew of LZ-44.

His father had merely shaken his hand.

"I've never been so proud of you, son," father had said and added, "Come back a man."

Alvin had nodded. He had promised to bury the memory of *Der Eigene*.

The first person Alvin had met at his new post had been Heinrich Adler. And against all expectations, against all the solemn vows he had made to himself and his father, for the first time and at first sight, Alvin had fallen head over heels in love.

"Luran... Buachaill... Puerpuerpuer..."

Alvin started. This time the message could be heard clearly through the static, but he didn't understand what it meant. The words sounded like the blathering of an idiot.

Alvin took off the headphones and walked to the front of the gondola, where navigator Dreschner

stood at his station behind Straub and Rosenbaum, who operated the zeppelin's controls.

"Navigator Dreschner, sir!" Alvin said. He always used the formal address with superior officers, more out of genuine respect than requirement.

The navigator turned, stiff in his thick leather jacket, with his hands clasped behind his back. "Yes, Holtzer, what is it?"

"I've picked up some radio interference that is not... well... typical."

"Did you break radio silence, stupid boy?" Dreschner snapped.

Alvin blushed "No! I just..."

"What kind of interference?" Commander Adler's voice asked behind Alvin.

Adler's proximity affected Alvin like a gunshot.

"I don't know exactly Commander," Alvin stammered. "Words... just words, but not English. At least not entirely."

"An encrypted message?"

"Possibly." Alvin began to feel foolish. The steady gaze of the two older men were too much for him. "But I don't think so. They were just individual words."

*Come, boy. Baby killer.*

Alvin shivered.

Adler measured him with his eyes. Alvin shriveled beneath that ice blue gaze.

"Write them down the next time you hear them," the Commander said finally. "I'll come soon to see what it is."

Alvin bowed. "Yes, Commander Adler!"

The senior officers exchanged glances.

Alvin returned to his station, cheeks glowing red with shame.

At three thousand meters, the night was clear. LZ-44 floated over grey stratocumuli, sometimes passing by pillars of cloud rising higher than the rest, sometimes piercing them with its long hull. Above them, the moon was a shining half-circle of silver. Alvin sighed when he saw it. This high up, the sky was heartbreakingly beautiful. They were travelling among the stars. Alvin sat back down at the radio table, rubbed his hands in their thick leather gloves and tried to get the blood flowing back into his fingertips.

"Have this to warm you up." A coffee cup was placed by Alvin's hands. Commander Adler watched him now with a friendly, calming expression. The man leaned on the radio room's table with a steaming cup of his own in his hands.

Alvin accepted the coffee with gratitude, held it between his palms, and enjoyed the warmth seeping through his gloves.



"Drink up, before its gets cold." Adler raised his cup to his lips without taking his gaze off Alvin.

The hot liquid flowed over Alvin's tongue and down his throat, spreading its lively caffeine through his body.

"These voices..." Adler said.

Alvin's muscles tensed. He didn't want to talk about the voices. Not with Adler.

"How long..." Adler's blue eyes watched him through the steam rising out of the cup. They weren't ice, but sapphire. How deep inside could the Commander see?

The first time Alvin had heard the voices was on the night of his fifteenth birthday, in a dream. They had recurred since then, over and over. Alvin would wake screaming, because he couldn't understand the visions that the voices were showing him. Alvin's mother had wanted to help him. His father had wanted to beat the madness out of him. Now, in this infernal machine sailing above England, with the silver moon lighting their way across the clouds, he could hear the voices louder than ever. Alvin could not admit any of this to Adler. He might as well confess to being insane. Unfit. Broken.

"Is everything alright?" Lieutenant Commander Adler stood beside Alvin.

The officer's hand brushed Alvin's hand.

Alvin coughed. "Just some interference, Commander."

Adler's hand remained close to Alvin's. Alvin realized that to touch him, all he would have to do was extend his leather covered little finger.

Adler stared into the black night outside the airship.

"Good." Adler finally looked at Alvin, straightened his back, and patted Alvin on the shoulder. "The night is clearing up. We don't need extra trouble."

Alvin mumbled something incoherent and felt ashamed of his cowardice. The Commander drank his coffee, put his cup down on the radio table next to Alvin's cup, and remained standing behind Alvin.

"Puer..."

The voice jolted Alvin in the spine. "Commander..." Alvin grunted.

Adler took the headphones from Alvin's ears and set them on his own. Adler furrowed his brow, but his blue eyes remained cold and steady.

LZ-44 glided through the silver and black night. Their breath formed crystals in the air.

Alvin had dreamt of Adler the night before. About Adler's godlike Aryan body wrapped around his own, legs marble white, the hard-working muscles on his

upper body tanned brown. The Commander had taken him in front of the men on the middle bridge of the airship. He had done it the same way he led his crew, with a steady hand, discipline and love. Adler was from a traditional part of the German countryside. The thought of the Commander as a lover made Alvin tremble all over.

"I can't hear anything," Adler said.

Alvin accepted the headphones back.

Adler leaned closer to him. "We're all afraid." Adler spoke in a low voice that wouldn't carry to the others over the drone of the engines. "Especially after what happened to Mathy and his crew. I know you are... different. I saw it the first time we met. You're lucky to be in the navy. The army can be a harsh place for a boy like you." Adler's jaw stiffened. "But when we're in the air, we don't differentiate the navy from the army, one airship from another. Here we are not... men. We are not individuals. We have one mission: to serve as His Imperial Majesty's dogs of war and carry out our orders. We bark when ordered to bark. When we are set on the enemy, we bite hard. Do you understand?"

Alvin nodded.

Adler placed his palm on the back of Alvin's gloved hand. Alvin opened his mouth, but didn't know what to say. Adler did.

Adler patted Alvin's hand and said, "Forget yourself. Adapt. It's the only way to survive. Here – or down below."

Alvin stared at the Commander's back, straight and stiff from a career in the navy, as he returned to the front of the gondola.

Though they had crossed over the salt coast of Maldon some time ago, Alvin recalled a poem about an ancient battle fought there in which the Anglo-Saxon warlord Byrhtnoth drove the Vikings from his shores. Alvin's mother had recited the poem to him when he was a child, knowing that her boy adored its warlike rhythm and images of bravery and valiance. Although Byrhtnoth, the hero, died in the story—surrounded by his men defending their god, country and king—it did nothing to dim his halo in young Alvin's eyes, quite the opposite. He only grew in honor. Alvin could still remember the beginning of the poem by heart, in the words his mother had used.

*Then Byrhtnoth began to array men there,  
rode and gave counsel, taught warriors  
how they must stand and that stead hold,  
bade them their round-shields rightly hold  
fast with hands, not at all frightened.*

Byrhtnoth and Adler merged in Alvin's imagination into one and the same man. *Not at all frightened*, they whispered to Alvin. But was Adler really fearless? Didn't it take the greatest courage to admit the truth of oneself?

For the first time Alvin wondered whether he had joined the crew of LZ-44 just to hide his cowardice under the mask of heroism. Did he wish for death?

The voices began their rhythmic song in his headphones once again:

*Da þær Byrhtnoð ongan beornas trymian,  
rad and rædde, rincum tæhte.*

*"Onæpling... Hello, Hel-lo... Can you hear me?"*

Alvin pressed his palms against his temples and squeezed his eyes shut. "I'm just tired. That's all." He considered taking a dose of liquid oxygen from the bottle next to him, but dismissed the idea. He already had a reputation as being weak amongst the rest of the crew.

The navigator reported that LZ-44 had passed south of the city of Chelmsford. Alvin pressed his forehead to the frost-speckled window and tried to see the Essex countryside below. During peacetime the lights of the city would have revealed its location somewhere to their right. A year ago they might have still shone in the night. But the English had learned their lesson. The people of Chelmsford, the elderly, the women and the children, had hidden themselves behind black curtains.

Like his father, Alvin's mother had made Alvin swear to come back home to her. But not as a man. Not like the Spartans. Not with his shield or carried upon it. "In one piece," his mother had said. The pallor of creeping illness was already showing on her face.

Alvin's eyes began to droop. This late in autumn the temperature inside the zeppelin could easily drop to thirty degrees centigrade below freezing. The cold penetrated the flesh, and no amount of wool or leather seemed to keep it at bay.

The quiet of the night put the men's nerves on edge. Half asleep, Alvin heard Straub berate Rosenbaum. Rosenbaum took it all in his stride. Rosenbaum, as a Jew, had to prove his right to fight for a united Germany, just like Alvin did. Alvin rubbed the sandy feeling from his eyes and thanked his luck that at least his aberration wasn't immediately obvious from his face.

But in his dream, he met Adler.

"What do you want from me?" Adler whispered to him.

Alvin had no answer. What did he want?

Lights flashed in the British night like glow-worms. Alvin felt faint. Adler glanced behind him and pushed him to the back of the gondola out of sight of Straub and Dreschner.

Adler leaned closer and licked his lips. Quickly. "Young Ganymede."

Alvin's head filled with coupling fauns, Roman wrestlers, young poets reading nude in the shade at the foot of trees.

"I..." Alvin licked his lips, an involuntary mimicking of Adler's gesture.

"Don't smile," Adler said, but grimaced. A nervous, bare tooth smile while looking over his shoulder. "Don't say a thing."

Alvin's breath formed clouds around Adler's ears. The friction of their leather jackets rubbing together built up pressure inside Alvin. He was a bubbling kettle. Adler's lips brushed the skin beneath his ear. The older man smelled of cologne and himself and Alvin wanted to explode.

*"Baby killer... We are coming for you."*

Alvin snapped awake. His headphones clattered to the table.

"Wake up, idiot!" Dreschner bellowed.

"Drop the flares," Adler snapped hoarsely.

They had arrived over London. The oily ribbon of the Thames split the blacked-out city in two. The clouds had evaporated and the moon lit the city below as well as if someone were shining a lamp on it. The streets below them a map grid of blue and black lines. Alvin still felt the dream Adler's weight on his thigh, in his lap, and the clumsy grip of Adler's thick glove on the taught, restricting surface of his leather jacket. Alvin was afraid the redness of his cheeks would reveal their sin to the whole crew. His sin. Alvin turned his head to the radio table and put the headphones to his ears.

The world exploded.

He heard neon lights as sound. Visions of the future. Voices screaming at him in ancient tongues trying to make him understand. To make him listen, make him hear.

Searchlights surrounded LZ-44 in a pyramid of light.

"Commander Adler!" the navigator yelled.

A biplane appeared on the horizon as a buzzing hornet. It was tiny compared to the massive hull of the zeppelin, but entirely capable of bringing them down despite its size—or perhaps precisely because of it.

More and more beams of light pierced the air above the city, each one looking for them. Without the cloud cover they were exposed.



LZ-44's hull began to turn. Alvin could feel his knees lurch as the zeppelin tried to rise beyond the reach of the small airplane.

All around him, men were yelling, giving and requesting orders. They were all fighting for their life. The hornet closed in. Moment by moment it gained altitude.

Slowly. They were rising too slowly.

Lights passed by the zeppelin. Small points of light, like the spots in one's vision after physical exertion. The voices screamed at him. The creatures danced back and forth on the level of the radio room. Alvin could see small faces and limbs that were delicate and strong at the same time. Limbs covered by the blue lines and spirals of tattoos. They had flowers in their wildly flowing hair. Cornflowers and roses and pale lilac blossoms.

"Puer," they said. "*Come, baby killer. Come buachaill.*"

Finally, Alvin understood what they were trying to say. In many different languages, living and dead, singing, whispering, and shouting, they called to him.

"*Come, pretty boy. Join us.*"

"No... I can't."

The biplane pounced on LZ-44. It buzzed passed the window of the radio room, scattering the fairies, and banked up towards the zenith of the hull.

"Drop the bombs! Drop them all!" Adler shouted. "Now!"

Automatic machinegun fire tapped its pitiless rhythm into the structure of the airship. The first round exploded, but Alvin didn't hear it. Instead he heard a swoosh as one of the hydrogen bags inside the hardened outer envelope caught fire and began the inevitable chain reaction. Alvin could see the despair take hold of the faces of the rest of the crew.

Adler lowered his head. "Dear God." The Commander took a deep breath and straightened his back. Adler's profile made Alvin gasp for breath. That man... they would do anything for him. They already had. They had gone on this journey in the full knowledge that they may never return.

"Radio Officer Holtzer," Adler snapped. "Send word to Berlin."

Alvin sat at his station and tried to contact home.

"*Come, lover boy. Come buachaill. Come luran!*"

The high voices were joyful. The delicate and strong bodies of light danced in the air currents. Alvin's hand froze on the controls. The window by the radio station slammed open and rained shattered glass onto the floor of the gondola.

"*Du bist ein Eigene!*"

Fire roared in Alvin's ears, and amidst the fire, screams and the buzz of the mechanical hornet as it

turned away from the burning zeppelin. The air was filled with the bitter stench of melting plastic and scorched metal.

"Your name is Alvin," his mother had said as he took his place on the crew of LZ-44. His mother had kissed him on the forehead then, as if he were a child. "*Alvin. Friend of fairies. They will protect you. Fairyland won't let you die.*"

The heat of the burning hull took turns with the chill air on Alvin's cheeks. *I will either burn or fall. I'm not coming home, mother.* His feet climbed onto the radio table as if they had a mind of their own, his hand grasped the window frame. Alvin turned to look back. Adler stood there behind him, stiff and unmoving.

"Come." Alvin held out his hand. "Heinrich. Please. The fairies... don't you see their light? They've come for us. You and me. They will take us to safety."

Alvin didn't know if what he said was true. His mother had taken the road of the fae a few months earlier. Fairyland had claimed back its daughter through pneumonia.

The all-consuming furnace of the gas hull was so close it made the outer layer of Adler's clothes steam. In the intersecting light, Alvin could see in the man's face what the future could hold for men like them. He saw memories as yet uncreated; glimpses of days that would never come, visions of a life with Adler. Berlin after the war, champagne bubbles, pink and gold. The fairies were promising them a world in which even the Commander could be a different, braver man. Unique. It was close. So close.

Commander Adler's hands tightened into fists inside his leather gloves.

Alvin sobbed, "Heinrich?"

Alvin held out his hand one last time. *Take it, Alvin begged with his whole being. Grasp me now. Grasp this chance.*

Adler turned his back.

Alvin closed his eyes. Delicate but strong hands pulled him away with them. For a moment, LZ-44 shone like a sun and turned the London night into burnished day.

MAGDALENA HAI

Translated by J. Robert Tupasela

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Translation of excerpt from *The Battle of Maldon*  
by Jonathan A. Glenn







## J.S. MERESMAA

### FANTASY OF POWER AND LOVE

**F**innish fantasy is booming right now. One of its heralds is J.S. Meresmaa, who was born in 1983 and lives in Tampere.

Meresmaa's *Mifongin perintö* [*The Legacy of Mifonki*] was published in 2012 by established Finnish publishing house Karisto. The novel was the first in a series, which reached its fifth book in 2016.

The *Mifonki* series represents timeless fantasy set in a world of kingdoms and pirates. The mythological part of the series includes the Mifonki, powerful creatures, whose blood was mixed with humans a long time ago. The novels depict a time when mythical beings become real and battles are fought to gain power to rule kingdoms.

The *Mifonki* series can be considered Meresmaa's main work so far. In addition, she has written the book *Keskilinnan ritarit* [*The Knights of the Mid-Castle*] (2016) which consists of three novellas as well as *Naakkamestari* [*The Jackdaw Master*] (2016) which tells of an alternative Tampere. She is also constantly writing short stories.

Meresmaa says that she became a writer almost by accident. Storytelling has always been in her blood, though. She told her stories to her classmates already during elementary school, but never thought of writing them down. Even though she read widely, she never even dreamt about becoming an author.

"I read constantly as a child, but I only seem to remember the *Famous Five*, the *Kultainen Salama* [*Golden Lightning*] series, **Roald Dahl's** books and the *Nummela ponitalli* [*Nummela Pony Stables*] series. I do remember liking **J. R. R. Tolkien's** *The Hobbit*, but *The Lord*

*of the Rings* was too slow for me. Traitor to the fantasy authors that I am, I've never finished Tolkien's epic."

Meresmaa confesses to reading quite little fantasy, even though as an adult she has studied the genre more purposefully.

"I'm quite a slow reader with a poor memory. Maybe my memory capacity has its limits and I use imagination to fill in the holes. Some books I immediately forget and only remember whether I liked them or not, or I only remember a certain part of the book. Other stories linger in my brain a bit longer."

A turning point was when Meresmaa noticed some of the translated fiction in romance genre in Finland was either poor or badly translated.

"Why shouldn't I write myself something better to read?" laughs Meresmaa. "I already had materials in my head, so it was easy to get to work."

There was time to write as Meresmaa had just finished her studies and had three more months until her summer job started. After a tough crunch, she suddenly had a hundred thousand words of manuscript ready. She asked for feedback from author **Anneli Kanto**, who

was a friend of her family.

"I didn't really understand what a monumental request that was. Anneli's main feedback was that I do have talents as a storyteller, but still lots to do with finding my own voice and style."

Kanto suggested that Meresmaa get training as a writer and Meresmaa got a spot in the Kohti mestaruutta ("Towards championship") course at Orivesi Institute. There she learned about both structure and style.



“Even then, I didn’t think I would be a writer. This was just a project to do a book. The dream slowly got more concrete. After the course I was almost possessed; I had to write and get the characters’ story told.”

After the manuscript was finally finished, Meresmaa sent it to the publishers. A year and a half later, she got a publishing contract.

## POWER AND LOVE

Few authors are able to define just who they are as writers and what they are drawn to right after their first novel. Meresmaa has slowly learned these answers.

“Often authors say their creation process is very chaotic. But the work always contains editing and that’s a good place to comb through the work. At the same time, you can highlight the themes in the text. So that’s the point where any author thinks about how the text works as a whole.”

Meresmaa feels she cannot decide the thematic of the story beforehand, but instead her subconscious works during the process.

“Writing is not an analytical process for me, but instead very intuitive and emotional, character-focused work. I find the point of the text later.”

The most important theme for Meresmaa is power.

“Power is present in everything we do and how we live. It has a great deal to say about society, relationships between people, exclusion and equality.”

Power is closely connected to the author’s other favorite theme, love.

“Love is trivialized in our everyday lives, we talk about fluff. But there’s so much power in love. Love

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## “I WANT TO WRITE ABOUT DIVERSE FEMALE CHARACTERS.”

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between siblings, a mother’s love, love between two grown people, passionate love, affection... All these hold people’s lives together. The readers need to see beneath the superficial surface of entertainment and find the deep meanings of love.”

These two themes are intertwined in *Keskilinnan ritarit*. The trilogy tells the story of the knight Yehrem Kovdas and his squire Konno of Nasova and their tale is full of power and love.

Yehrem fires his squire and puts him into a bad position, both financially and regarding his reputation. Yehrem tries to protect himself against possible accusations and at the same time, he fears his relationship with Konno will advance to a forbidden area. Konno is deeply hurt by Yehrem’s actions.

Despite this, the men cannot stay apart, but the relationship of authority between them is constantly brewing. The trilogy has been lauded for its brisk and passionate combination of gay erotica and fantasy.

Meresmaa is able to slip into the skins of different types of people and she is especially interested in the fates of the less fortunate. Often they are children or women.

“I want to write about different types of women, also women of action. Women who, despite their many flaws, have a reason for existing.”

Meresmaa notices that this goal is in conflict with the tradition of romantic entertainment, where women are often depicted through their relationships with men. But traditions are meant to be broken.

The *Mifonki* series has many strong female characters. For example, Ardis turns out to be a tenacious and determined person when she needs to protect her children or defend her lover Dante. Dante’s sister Linn, on the other hand, has taken to the seas and moves independently from one danger to the next.

“Once you realize that history is molded by whoever is interpreting it, the whole world looks different.”





It is inevitable to run into clichés when writing fantasy and romance and one just has to find a way of dealing with them.

“You can’t be saved from clichés and I didn’t even think of avoiding them in the beginning. Thanks to my editor and beta readers, some of the most obvious clichés have been removed from the text.”

In *Mifongin perintö*, the first meeting between the main characters, Ardis and Dante, has sparks flying. They feel immediately attracted to each other, despite their age difference and being raised in different cultures. Despite the obstacles, the relationship develops and grows. In some ways, this is a very clichéd situation, but Meresmaa sticks to it.

“Since I had experienced a connection with another person at first sight in my real life, I didn’t hesitate including it in the novel for a minute. I have received feedback that the scene is unbelievable and fully impossible, but it is true for me.”

Meresmaa describes a relationship that lasts for decades, changes over time and gets different emphasis. Sometimes it resembles more friendship or loyalty than love.

“This choice may be difficult for some readers as they do not get the romantic satisfaction they are used to in the romance genre.”

Meresmaa feels it is important for authors to do things their own way and believe in themselves, even when bordering clichés.

“All stories have, after all, already been written, but it is still important to re-tell them from the modern viewpoint of a contemporary person. There are those who criticize placing strong female characters in historical novels. I rebel against such thoughts!”

One of the themes in the *Mifonki* series is motherhood. Ardis has twins and is separated from one of them against her will, which causes her to go through strong emotions. Many other characters are also motivated by mother’s love. Meresmaa writes about the subject with talent and pleasure, although she is childless by choice herself.

“I’ve never felt the maternal instinct or the need to have children. After a certain age, other people start expecting you to have children. I have had to deal with this, as a woman needs to go through that process in about her thirties. The famous biological clock never started ticking for me.”

Meresmaa has watched her friends become parents and says she enjoys it from afar, indirectly.

“Children provide lots of love and goodness. There have to be choices in life and for many being a mother and mother’s love is just what they want. But I cannot help thinking about history. My heart breaks every time I read about women who had the talent, but who



### FAVORITE BOOKS

- ★ Maria Turtschaninoff: Maresi
- ★ Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen: The Rabbit Back Literature Society
- ★ Johanna Sinisalo: Troll – A Love Story
- ★ Roald Dahl: The Witches
- ★ Ellen Kushner: Thomas the Rhymer
- ★ William Wharton: Birdy

### FAVORITE MOVIES

- ★ Attack the Block
- ★ Interstellar
- ★ Princess Mononoke
- ★ Romancing the Stone

### PLACES OF INSPIRATION

- ★ Forests and rapids
- ★ The industrial milieu of the Tammerkoski rapids
- ★ Iceland and Scotland



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“The Heart That Beats in A Dream” (Never Stop – Finnish Science Fiction and Fantasy Stories, upcoming 2017) (English)

– because of their families – had no chance to use their potential. It is so great to be a modern woman who can make her own choices.”

Meresmaa points out that there are, of course, those who say that she will regret this later.

“I somehow doubt that if you live the life you enjoy that you will regret it later.”

## ALTERNATIVE TAMPERE

Meresmaa’s steampunk stories describe an alternative Tampere, which has a history as a workers’ factory city.

“I feel my roots are so deeply in Tampere, it would surprise you!” laughs Meresmaa. “And Tampere is in itself such a steampunk city. The industry of the 19th century molded the city and the population boom was huge. Even though some of the factories have been torn down, most of them still remain.”

The industrial Tampere has international roots. The **Nottbeck** family, who ruled the region for 80 years, was a cosmopolitan family who brought some life into the backwater town.

The Nottbecks owned the Finlayson cotton mills and had their own currency and their own schools. They were the reason why many inventions entered Finland through Tampere. Their son, **Carl von Nottbeck**, studied under **Thomas Alva Edison** and brought the first electric lights to the Nordic countries.

Meresmaa mentions that Tampere is also geologically interesting. The city is located between two lakes and it is connected by water all the way to the Baltic Sea. The ground also contains interesting things.

“Tampere once hosted an international meeting for a geological society. Important men from all over the world came to wonder at the rocks of Tampere.”

It is no wonder Meresmaa is interested in Tampere. However, the perspective she has chosen is in the history of the forgotten ones. A good example of this is the novella *Naakkamestari*.

“The main character of *Naakkamestari*, Enni, is an auction child. It was very difficult for me to read about the fates of the auctioned children. They were not necessarily orphans, but their parents could not afford to keep their children, so children became merchandise.”

The themes of *Naakkamestari* are marginalized groups and minorities. The story begins when the orphaned and crippled Enni finds an injured jackdaw who later disappears into thin air. This leads Enni to a strange invention: something makes the jackdaws behave strangely, as though someone was giving them orders.

The novella expands into a description of the exclusion of an entire people. It also deals with an alternative history. The reality of the novella’s world is colored by



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## “TAMPERE IS, IN ITSELF, A STEAMPUNK CITY.”

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realistic newspaper clippings as well as news between the main population and a tribe of so-called Ursines.

“I made up Ursines, as I felt it was not my place to write about any existing minority group.”

Meresmaa describes reading about the genocide in Armenia while writing the novella. She was horrified about how methodical it all was.

“It’s insane that we assign characteristics to a group of people and then use those to call them bad and expendable. We are unable to see the individuals who form a loose group, but we dehumanize them all as being the same. And alienation leads to violence.”

*Naakkamestari* reveals the rottenness and selfishness of those in power. They spew lies, demonize people, and ban their customs and religion. Finally, their fortunes can be seized and the dissidents can either be isolated or destroyed.

Resistance is, however, possible. Enni plays a pivotal role in the story.

Meresmaa has also used the alternative Tampere as the setting for her short stories “Hyvä emo” [“The Good Mother”] (2015) and “The Heart that Beats in a Dream” (2016).

In “Hyvä Emo” Meresmaa takes her readers to the Nottbeck manor and speculates what sorts of fantastical things have been hidden underneath Tampere. “The Heart that Beat in a Dream” describes parallel universes and an invention, which enables communication between dimensions. Both stories describe the days gone past as lively and realistic times. The nuances of the language, the use of old words and the flowing storytelling grab the readers.

Meresmaa can smoothly carry different stories and worlds inside her head simultaneously.

“Although the stories are plot-driven, they are character driven in my head. And when I anchor myself to the characters, I’m automatically in their world. However, I cannot see how the same themes bleed into other stories while I’m writing them. In the past few years

I’ve been toying a lot with the theme of death in my writing. Maybe it’s my age showing; I am becoming interested in death.”

## THE AIR THAT I BREATHE

Writing speculative fiction comes naturally to Meresmaa.

“I’ve always had a very vivid imagination and I’m constantly encountering things that feed it. We are surrounded by so much everyday magic. That’s why all the ideas and stories I find are speculative. It is not a conscious choice, but the air that I breathe.”

As a reader, Meresmaa describes herself as an escapist. She believes in imagination and its ability to reach both the past and the future.

“People’s memories are linked to imagination and are, in their way, fiction. Stories build people and people build stories.”

The relationship between fact and fiction fascinates her. People want to believe in the facts, but do not realize how fictional things really are. Meresmaa thinks speculative fiction is the best genre to depict all the planes of reality.

“Fantasy, for example, is timeless. There are no cultural connections. There is no risk of encountering the much talked about cultural appropriation. You can write with your own voice from your own starting points.”

On the other hand, Meresmaa is aware of how conservative fantasy worlds are.

“Readers are used to a kind of certain medieval fantasy, the Anglo-Saxon tradition. If there is an agrarian



society or a kingdom, the readers immediately label it as medieval, even though there are other eras with similar circumstances. If you want to break the preconceptions, the story must be spearheaded by the variation.”

Meresmaa feels strongly about cultural appropriation. She thinks one must think about whose voice to use in writing, but telling stories and building mythologies is everybody’s right.

“If we claim that only a certain type of writing is allowed, that maintains the cultural segregation.”

## MULTIPLE ROLES

Meresmaa is a writer of all trades, because in addition to writing, she can create covers, edit, and draw maps. She has started working as a full-time literary professional this past autumn. Is the authorship she represents the direction where the whole trade and authors are going?

“Of course my way of working is not the only right way to work as an author, but I do like to keep all the tools in my own hands.”

The first volumes of the *Mifonki* series were published by Karisto, but when the publishing house let the series go, Meresmaa had to find a new home for it. In the Myllylahti publishing house the authors have much more say over their works, so the change was in a sense a stroke of good fortune.

“The situation forced me to take matters into my own hands. I do not want the story to be discontinued and go to waste because of one publisher’s decision. There must be multiple channels for publishing as my audience is important to me and gives meaningfulness to my work.”

While doing the layout and maps, the author can see what the book will look like as a physical object. Meresmaa has also learned many other new things.

“Actually, it’s really good to understand the book business from a wider perspective than just that of the author. On one hand, it is great to be able to focus just on writing, but on the other hand, it makes you vulnerable. If the support from the publisher fails and the script is suddenly rejected, what is an author to do then?”

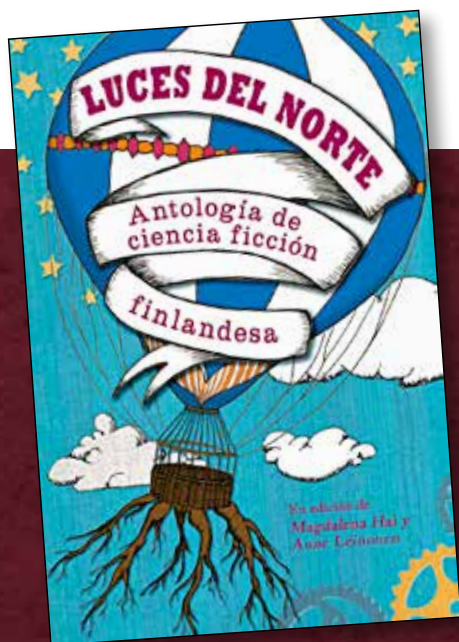
There are more and more professional writers out there whose scripts cannot find a publisher. At the moment, Meresmaa is the chair of the *Osuuskumma* publishing cooperative and looks at the field from the publisher’s perspective as well.

“Having a cooperative is ideal because it gives you control over the tools being used. It enables more risks in the artistic work as well. Freedom improves the possibility to develop as an author. If you’re constantly afraid of not being accepted anymore, the creative fire may die out.”

Out of all Meresmaa’s works, *Keskilinnan ritarit* is the most niche. For that story, being published by a small publishing house felt natural.

“I knew better than to offer my erotic gay fantasy novella just anywhere. However, *Osuuskumma* enabled me to get the story to the readers. And based on the feedback I’ve got, it seems there’s more demand for this type of literature.”

Meresmaa also applauds small publishers for not pigeonholing speculative fiction authors but instead allowing them to write about different themes and to their desired target groups.



## LUCES DEL NORTE & NEVER STOP

The Spanish *Luces del norte – Antología de ciencia ficción finlandesa* (2016) and the *Never Stop – Finnish Science Fiction and Fantasy Stories* (published in English in 2017) are anthologies published by the *Osuuskumma* publishing cooperative. The anthologies showcase two collections of short stories from the rising generation of Finnish science fiction and fantasy writers. Among the writers there are established authors, with several books to their name, as well as new talents.



## FINNISH FANTASY IS CHANGING

Although Meresmaa is still young as a writer, she feels she is living during a significant period in time. How does it feel to be a Finnish speculative fiction writer right now?

“This is an extremely interesting time. It feels like my debut year 2012 was some sort of a turning point.

**Emmi Itäranta, Magdalena Hai, Jenny Kangasvuo and Katri Alatalo** all started the same year as I did.”

“But still, Finland doesn’t understand what a vast group of speculative fiction writers it has. Or what it is worth globally. **Maria Turtchaninoff, Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen, Leena Likitalo, Hannu Rajaniemi, and Johanna Sinisalo** are just a taste of what Finland has to offer to the world. They are the beacons for the ever-growing group behind them. The groundwork is already so strong that our starting points are totally different. The doors to the world have been opened and the safety net of the previous generations is there for us.”

Meresmaa emphasizes the importance of Finnish fandom, even though she became a writer without knowing about it. She did not feel like a fantasy or science fiction enthusiast and did not network with others in the field.

“Compared to many other genres, the Finnish speculative fiction authors are in a good position. Our collegial support network is well-established, there’s fandom and its magazines, which publish short stories and articles. We also own our own publishing companies, which publish speculative fiction.”

“Finnish speculative fiction has a very rich culture. That’s why I find it puzzling that the knowledge of it has not penetrated to the upper layers of culture. I don’t think the grant system is discriminatory, but the media’s interest is very narrow.”

Meresmaa mentions that she has received grants quite well. However, she wishes that especially exporters of literature would recognize the value of Finnish speculative fiction: it is a good combination of the universal and the Finnish. It is increasingly difficult to get books into the bookstores in Finland nowadays, so potential readers should be sought abroad. The bottlenecks are translations and agencies.

“Speculative fiction can no longer be called marginal literature, as **J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter*** and **George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire*** are very much mainstream. The Finnish field of literature should wake



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“THE NEXT PHASE IS  
DEFINITELY ABROAD.”

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up, because if we published more speculative fiction for the young, it might encourage the young to read more.”

Translated books dominate the speculative fiction genre in Finnish bookstores, and there are far fewer Finnish novels, even though they are of the same quality. Is it a question of resources?

“I’ve never seen Finnish fantasy promoted the same way as, for example, the Norwegian **Siri Pettersen**.”

Meresmaa points out that Finnish publishers could really market their books better. One way to improve this would be to increase the knowledge of the field of speculative fiction in the publishing houses. The path for the future is clear.

“The next phase is definitely to go abroad. I also think that even the old-fashioned Finnish literature people will learn to appreciate Finnish speculative fiction through internationalization.”

ANNE LEINONEN

Translated by **Marianna Leikomaa**  
Updated version of an article published  
in *Tähtivaeltaja* magazine 4/2016





J. S. MERESMAA

## FOREVER, AS ALWAYS

We knew he would come, and as is the way of our knowledge, it comes to pass before long. We have time to wait. We aren't going anywhere. We have been here since time immemorial. All that has been, is now. Yesterday as much as tomorrow. All that has happened will happen again. All that will happen has happened before.

He walked towards us, radiant with life, not knowing what was to come. We took him as our own. Everything becomes ours in the end. He looks peaceful now in his cradle. Hands crossed on his chest, eyes closed. Gone the bleak smell of pain, gone the mark on his forehead. We whisper our secrets to his lips, sowing our seeds. We rock him gently. Back and forth, back and forth. A soft bed for him, in the care of our branches. We shed leaves and beard moss, a few apples and lichen to blanket him.

In winter we offer no comfort. In winter we rest and let the snow fall on us. Under that cloak, what has begun ends and what ends begins. We draw in and gather strength to grow again. And when spring wakes us, everything is as always.

### JOUSIA

Sergeant Jousia Pohjanhirvi used the rearview mirror to glance at his daughter sitting in the back seat. Juuli was staring stubbornly out the window, her stick-like arms wrapped protectively around herself. Her thin body was covered by a thick parka even though it was June.

"We don't have to tell them the real reason why you have to leave early," Jousia said, attention turned back onto the road, both hands on the wheel. The road was straight and low on traffic, but Jousia knew that anything could happen. There were animals on the move at this time of year. Something might happen, and he would have to react quickly. You had to stay sharp – and keep both hands on the wheel. "We can tell them we have some family stuff to take care of."

Family stuff. Jousia grimaced in his mind. Would that have made Juuli think about how there were only the two of them now.

"I don't even want to go."

"Honey, you can't spend all summer indoors. It's not good for you. There'll be friends there."

"I don't have to go if I don't want to."

Jousia wanted to sigh out loud, but made due with gritting his teeth. Since Maria had died, Juuli had become even more sensitive, and now this menstruation and anemia thing was making it worse. Puberty had definitely arrived. Jousia had to tread carefully. He had to listen and be understanding. "That new doctor also said it's fine to see your friends. Go outside, get some sun."

No answer. Another glance in the mirror told Jousia that Juuli was holding back tears. She had flicked her hair in front of her face like a curtain.

Jousia's chest tightened. Juuli hadn't liked a single doctor since Sipari had vanished – when had that been? – nearly a year ago. Some things were so hard to remember. After Maria's accident, time had frozen, then stretched out. The autumn of her death had pulled a black bag over him that he couldn't seem to find his way out of.

Sipari and Juuli had had a unique understanding. Having the same doctor almost from the maternity ward was something that could only happen in a small town. Her first ear infections, tooth aches, allergy tests, blood tests... Juuli had always gone to see Sipari with a smile on her face. Gentle, understanding Sipari. Jousia sighed. "Alright, you don't have to go. We can do something else. How about we send them a video greeting over the phone? How does that sound?"

Her head nodded slightly.

"Then we can watch a movie. How about Brave?" They must have seen the adventures of that red-headed Celtic princess with witches and bears at least a dozen times, but Juuli never seemed to get tired of the movie. Jousia had to admit that the scene where the characters used a rope made of tied together kilts to escape and exposed their bare ass cheeks made him laugh every time he saw it.

The car ate up the hyphenated asphalt as Jousia glanced at his daughter in the mirror. The hum of the engine filled the silence. Eventually, Juuli tucked her hair behind her ear and smiled shyly at her father.

The sound of his phone cut short the wave of warmth Jousia felt spreading inside him. His work phone. Damn it. He fished out the earpiece, put it in his ear, and connected the wire.

"Pohjanhirvi."

*"Lankinen here. Listen, we've got a corpse gig. Some kids found it in the yard of an abandoned house."*

"Where?"

*"I'll send you the specs."*

Jousia checked his mirror and flipped on the turn signal. His phone beeped. He pulled the car over onto the wide shoulder of the road by the edge of a swamp and put on the handbrake. Juuli's frightened eyes looked at him from the mirror. "Nothing to worry about, honey. I just need to take this call."

Nothing to worry about. Jousia rolled the words over in his head as he opened the message from Lankinen. Juuli wasn't a toddler any more. She knew that Jousia's job meant there was always something to worry about. Something bad that had happened. Loss, grief, death. That Jousia would have to go to work and leave Juuli at home alone.

*"Did it come through?"*

"Yeah."

*"You still around?"*

Lankinen knew why Jousia had taken the day off. Once a month, they had a regular appointment at the gynecological department of the university hospital. "On our way back already." As he said it, the map opened up in Jousia's phone. "Looks like this is along the way." Jousia hesitated and looked back. Juuli was sitting still and listening. "Lankinen, I'll call you back in a minute."

Jousia hung up and turned to his daughter. The headlights of a passing truck lit up the car and flashed across Juuli's hair and bone-white skin. So pale, even with the iron tablets. "Honey, I'll take you home, but then I have to go to work."

Juuli shook her head, drawing the curtain of hair again.

"What if I took you to that birthday after all? You wouldn't have to be alone."

"I don't want to see anyone."

Jousia sighed. He drummed his fingers on the wheel. He didn't know exactly what was waiting for him at the scene, but he could leave the car further off to make sure... Lankinen would understand. "You need to promise to stay in the car. I'll try to be quick."

Juuli nodded.

Jousia put on the turn signal. "Promise me you'll stay in the car." He looked at Juuli in the mirror. They didn't need any more nightmares in their life.

"Yeah, yeah."

## KATARIINA

"Imagine if the same thing had happened to Newton. We would never have gotten the theory of gravity." Sergeant Katariina Lankinen looked at her

colleague, using the reception her joke got to gauge Pohjanhirvi's mood after his trip to the hospital.

The wrinkle etched between his eyebrows didn't smooth out at all, and the corners of his mouth seemed dedicated to the frown they were in. Not good. Lankinen scratched behind her ear with the blunt end of her pencil and turned back to her notes. They teased her at the department for not using a smartphone to take notes despite being of the younger generation, but Katariina didn't mind a little ribbing. It got her blood pumping a little hotter and her brain ticking over a little more sharply than the boys. A woman had to work twice as hard to get half the respect the guys got just for showing up. She had spent many an evening with Maria discussing the wrongs they had encountered over a bottle of wine.

"You mean an apple did this?" Pohjanhirvi leaned over the hammock and carefully parted the fabric. Katariina had handed him a spare pair of rubber gloves after he had patted his pockets for a while without finding any. The parachute nylon had stuck together to form a cocoon around the body, but other than the unsuspecting kids that found it, only the patrolmen and Katariina had looked in.

"Wild guess. The guy probably had some kind of attack and got that hole in his head some other way, but it's a possibility."

"An apple wouldn't crack his skull, would it?"

"It could have knocked him out. Or set off some kind of seizure." Katariina looked up at the tree branches, then at the ground. "Doesn't seem to be any shortage of apples."

"Mhmh."

"Not that we have to figure it out here and now. Give the pathologist a chance to strut his stuff. He might even be excited to have the chance to open up something a little dried out."

Pohjanhirvi raised his eyebrows.

Katariina cleared her throat. "He's always complaining the drain doesn't work properly."

Pohjanhirvi's attention turned back to the body. "Quite the condition it's in. Are those saplings?"

"Didn't take long to decide whether to call an ambulance or a hearse. The guy is literally pushing up daisies."

"Better to not contaminate the scene any more," Pohjanhirvi said and backed away from the hammock. He wrinkled his nose. "Weird smell, vinegary and sweet. What have we got on the people who found it?"

"Local kids out exploring an abandoned house. Their adventure turned out a little more exciting than they intended." Katariina pointed with her pencil at the patrol car on the side of the forest road. "The senior constable knows one of them."



He's calling now to make sure the parents are in before taking the kids home. They're the same age as Juuli." Katariina wanted to bite her tongue. Pohjanhirvi didn't need reminding of his tragic family situation. If only Katariina could go back in time, pick a different time for their girls' night out or at least an earlier showing of the movie... or sit behind the wheel rather than shotgun. But time was cruel and only ran one way. Forward. For Maria, it had stopped altogether on the road that night in August. Were the deer's glass bright eyes in the headlights the last thing that Maria had seen?

"Too young to see something like this," Pohjanhirvi said, waking Katariina from her thoughts.

Katariina shook her hand, trying to banish the cold that had seeped deep into her. "Shit happens to people of all ages. At least they can't complain about ageism." And some people survive hitting a deer with scratches and bruises while others don't survive at all.

Pohjanhirvi smiled briefly. "You're right about that, Kata. Well, what did the pathologist say, how long will it take him to get out here? I think I'll take a couple of photos while we wait. It looks like we'll need some advanced forensic science to identify this mummy."

## JUULI

The car swayed as her father slammed the door. Juuli followed her father with her gaze until he met his partner waiting at the corner of the abandoned house. Then Juuli got her phone out of her fur-lined pocket. A round of Candy Crush would get her mind off things for a minute: off of her anxiety, off of the doctor's words still echoing in her head. *A hysterectomy isn't the first thing I'd recommend for a girl so young, but if these pills don't get things under control, it might be the only option.* Under control. Juuli's body was out of control. A hazard. Stupid doctors. Juuli hated them all. Only Sipari had understood her and that bastard had abandoned her, too.

Juuli looked at the plastic pharmacy bag at her feet. It was the largest size they had. At the register, her father had hesitated for a fraction of a second before putting his card into the reader. Her father looked so worn out. Under the hard light in the hospital corridors, he looked as delicate as a picture printed on silk paper.

Juuli's lower stomach cramped. Her fingers fumbled on the screen and the phone beeped game over.

The summer light seemed inexhaustible, even though they were already well into the long evening hours. Juuli tossed her phone onto the seat and leaned her head back on the headrest. She was tired of being tired. She wanted to be angry, like on the

morning after Deer Night. She wanted to scream and shout, but being angry took so much energy. Anger took its toll in blood. Juuli knew that from experience. No amount of iron tablets could replace what anger consumed.

Once again, Juuli wished she could switch bodies. Move into a new one instead of being trapped in one that even the doctors didn't understand. Sipari had also been baffled, at least right at the beginning when he had still been around, and Sipari wasn't completely stupid. These new faceless doctors didn't even have a proper name for what was wrong with Juuli. Menorrhagia. Menorrrr-RAGE. It wasn't that Juuli's periods were particularly irregular or all that heavy, they just never stopped. A nightmare that Juuli had woken to after Deer Night that just kept on going.

And then there were the voices. Juuli trembled.

Her first period had started the night her mother died. Deer Night. Somehow Juuli's body had known to start bleeding even though her father didn't tell her about the accident until morning. Maybe Juuli and her mother had had a special connection. Maybe her mother had given Juuli her blood like Christ had given his body for mankind. Her mother's blood.

As if on cue, Juuli felt a warmth spreading between her legs. Wonderful. She was in a car in the middle of the woods and now she had to change her pantyliner.

Juuli took a closer look out the window. The tree-tops were swaying in the wind. She was surrounded by high grass and overgrown garden plants. She could hear the non-stop twittering of birds even with all the windows rolled up. There was no one around. Her father had parked carefully. The crime scene was on the other side of the rotting house, and no one would see if Juuli were to sneak behind a nearby bush.

Juuli turned a suspicious eye to the spruce trees lining the yard. She didn't feel like getting out, but had no choice.

The door felt heavy. Grass stalks dragged against the metal. The lush smell of spruce and the rotting house struck her face, but soon receded to the point that she could smell the delicate scent of nectar beneath it. The air shimmered at the edge of the forest. Her legs weighed a ton as Juuli turned in her seat so that her sneakers hung out the door. *Her mother's blood.* Juuli pushed herself out of the car and steadied herself against the door frame just in case. Sometimes she got so dizzy she fainted. That would be just what this day was missing: her father having to drive her back to the hospital.

The nearest bush was growing against the wall of the grey house. These days, Juuli didn't go anywhere without spare pantyliners in the pocket of her

coat or hoodie. Blood washed out of clothes with cold water, but the shame from her mind, never. Her father had done his best to convince her that there was nothing to be ashamed of in menstruation, but Juuli could see how difficult it was for him to talk about it. It just wasn't normal. And when they had found out about the abnormality of Juuli's periods, his words had turned into euphemisms or gone away completely. Anemia. Condition. Ailment. Her father did try to understand, but sometimes his silence felt so bottomless that Juuli wanted to yell until her lungs burst.

The ground was soft and it rustled beneath her sneakers. Branches poked at her as she stepped into the cover of the bush and dropped her jeans to her knees. The smell of blood was cloying, almost syrupy. Juuli felt disgusted. She balled up the used liner, stuck it in the fork of a branch and put a fresh one in place. Her ears buzzed. Her stomach felt rock hard. The white of the used panty liner shone amongst the green like an exclamation mark. Juuli grabbed it and kicked a hole into the ground with the toe of her shoe. It wouldn't be the first time she buried her shame in the ground. Thin, pale roots snapped. Their smell tickled Juuli's nose as she hid the bloody pad in the dirt and pulled up some grass to cover it. She leaned on the wall and panted from the exertion. As Juuli straightened up, a shadow like a thin, black cloth passed before her.

Spots danced in her eyes, floating down across her vision like colored snow. Juuli gasped for breath. The grey planks of the house felt warm against her palm. They pulsed.

Juuli could hear voices from the other side of the house. At first she thought they were human voices, her father's or his partner's, Kata's. Then she realized she was hearing *that voice*. The deepest of whispers, carried on the breath of the wind. The speech of the forest. Juuli had first heard a voice like that a couple of weeks ago, maybe earlier, when the leaves had come out on the trees. The memory flooded over her. The hairs on her arms stood to attention.

*We know you, child.* Juuli's skin tingled. *Come closer.*

The whispers came in waves. They crossed and merged, one voice spoken from many directions at once, bouncing like echoes. The air above the wild garden was distorted like looking through water running along glass. Juuli squeezed her eyes shut. Nausea turned her stomach and hot saliva surged beneath her tongue. The smell of iron filled her nostrils. The smell of Juuli's skin. *We know, it hurts. We can heal you.* Juuli shook her head, hoping the voices would go away. *We know your smell, child. Come!*

Juuli moved, sliding her hand along the boards of the house. Before she realized it, she was at the corner. Amongst fluttering police ribbons, huge

apple trees stood unmoving, except for their dead, dry branches, which nodded towards Juuli. Their intermingled foliage swayed like itching animal fur. The police officers looked insignificant standing beneath them, her father in particular, hunched over his phone.

*Small child, blood's own!* Juuli took a deep breath and tried to fight the nausea and dizziness that were making her knees go weak. A rough curtain spread across her vision again. Fear hammered in her ears. Should she call her father for help? Was she having some kind of seizure?

The flaky branches stretched, twisted, and bent towards Juuli. The ground beneath the trees glittered like fool's gold. The glitter rose like fluff caught on the wind and spiraled around a strange cocoon hanging between two tree trunks. It was a hammock, Juuli realized. With something long and heavy lying in it. A body.

*Can you see how we take care of him? Care for him?* The pale glow around the apple trees became brighter, and Juuli pinched her eyes shut. *Little one, blood's own, come come! The earth's own, the earth's own. Our own.*

The ground beneath her sneakers began to move and bulge. Juuli called out in fright when she made out silver veins beneath the plants and soil, twisting roots connecting the trees to one another. They were the forest. The earth's nervous system. A communication network. They could sense her, just as she could sense them. Blood flowed in Juuli's veins, but something else flowed in the earth's veins. Nowhere to run or hide. *Everything the forest's own.* Juuli was shaken by vertigo and she slumped against the stone foundations of the house.

"Juuli?" Her father's voice. Footsteps coming closer. "Didn't we agree you'd stay in the car?"

Juuli raised her eyes from the roiling ground. She realized her father didn't see anything wrong with the ground or the trees that had shown their true form to Juuli.

The whispers in her ears dissolved into the wind as Juuli focused on finding words. "I had to change pantyliners."

One of her father's shoulders drooped. A resigned, tired gesture. "Let's go then. Lankinen can finish up here."

Juuli looked towards the apple trees and brushed the hair from her face. "Was it an accident?"

"Why would you ask something like that?" her father ushered her towards the car. Juuli pulled away from the wall, uncertain of her feet. "We don't talk about this kind of stuff at home."

"We aren't at home," Juuli pointed out. "It just feels bad, not knowing."

Her father sighed. The car shone in the grass like a giant beetle. "We'll know more after the autopsy,



but for now it just looks like very bad luck. Now get yourself in the car.”

As they drove out of the yard, Juuli cast one last glance at the apple trees. Kata Lankinen, nose in her notepad, stood near the police ribbon next to one of the trunks. The drone of the engine covered the whisper of the foliage, but she could still see the glow amongst the twisted trees. Blue smoke swirled along the rough bark. Juuli realized it had always been and would always be part of the world. The soul of the forest, made up of the souls of everyone who had ever died. The real heaven was here, close by. In the forest.

This was where her mother had gone.

The car swayed down the road. Just as Juuli was turning away, she could see glimmering movement around the trees. The blue forest smoke began wrapping itself around Kata. The gnarly branches bent as if pulled by the magnet of the earth and loomed over their unsuspecting victim like claws. Fool’s gold sparked amongst the blueish haze. If Juuli could hear the voices now, what would they say?

*We’re in no hurry. We’re not going anywhere. We always claim our own in the end.*

The car rocked. Juuli blinked.

The glimmer had vanished. Kata was still standing in the same spot. The branches arched high again, and the smoke was nowhere to be seen. But Juuli had been warned.

The forest would claim its own. Forever, as always.

## SIPARI

On days like today, the force of summer and autumn rubbing against each other creates a longing friction. The sun holds on to the last heat of summer, but autumn has already colored the birch trees. The cloudless sky is shining as if winter is blowing frost just beyond it. The branches of the old apple trees in the yard hang heavy over the fox trail as I step closer to the trees. It looks like an outrageous apple harvest, but amongst the small yellow winter apples are plenty with scabbed skin. Every now and again one thuds onto the ground in the high grass. I squash small mummified apples beneath my boots like sticky mushrooms.

In the cover of the shade, I take off my coat and put down my basket of mushrooms. Sweat dampens my back and runs down my temple. I don’t remember seeing this house before, but this is only my second autumn gathering the forest’s bounty in these parts. I don’t usually walk down cabin paths, preferring to follow deer trails through dense spruce groves. It looks like I’m not the only one with memory problems: it’s as if the whole world has forgotten this shack. Its walls are unpainted and its roof has

collapsed by the chimney and the whole house has nearly disappeared behind the lilac bushes and lanky alder in the overgrown garden.

My basket is overflowing with mushrooms. My lower back hurts and the spot where I accidentally cut my forefinger stings. I don’t know how my grip on the mushroom knife slipped like that. Suddenly the blood just trickled and beaded on the moss. I suck on the wound. It’s stopped bleeding now.

In addition to the shade, I’m drawn to the apple trees because of the green hammock hung between them. It looks as if someone has just gotten out of it, but I know I’m alone. A carefree breeze blows through the yard, and wasps scuttle in the grooves of split apples. I can hear the distant call of a jay, but other than that the birds have gone silent. I tug on the anchoring lines to see if they’ll hold. The flat bark of the apple tree rustles against the line. They hold.

I shake the debris out of the nylon and carefully climb into the hammock. I grunt with pleasure as my back decompresses. My body weight pulls the hammock so far down that my backside is nearly brushing the ground. The ends of the tall stalks of grass bob curiously at the level of my head. I sigh and cross my hands over my chest. This was a great find. How lucky that I happened upon it. I need to get one of these for my own yard next summer. Maybe that would help me forget my work. So terrible what happened to Maria Pohjanhirvi...

Suddenly I feel cold. I open my eyes towards the sky. The pattern of interlacing branches looks like a trellis. The net of a cage trap. For a stationary organism, the tree is moving a surprising amount. A gust of wind shakes the leaves. The branches begin dancing against the blue of the sky. The clattering limbs of a marionette. A skeletal dance.

If only I could relax. Take a nap and forget everything for a moment.

Apples thud to the ground around me. Thud thud. Thud. Like the rhythm of a frightened heart or approaching footsteps. I fill my lungs with the sweet air and close my eyes again.

The hammock sways gently. Back and forth, back and forth. The light shines through my eyelids, blood red –

*a flaring pain in my forehead!*

– black as ink.

J. S. MERESMAA

Translated by J. Robert Tupasela

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## VIIVI HYVÖNEN

### THE POWER OF WORDS

**T**he desolate, isolated City. Hanuman the monkey and a trench-coated trio. Mysterious Esau and sweet Luna.

Welcome to Dystopolis, a city trapped between a dump inhabited by monkeys and the open sea, a city with laws of its own, unwritten but entangled in literature. Hanuman the private detective falls in love, is deceived, and has to face both shadows from his past and a group of strangers in trench coats in his quest to find not only the perpetrators of a crime, but also his own identity. Just one case changes everything.

*The Monkey and the New Moon* (2008) is the third novel by author **Viivi Hyvönen**. It is a melancholy tale of love and longing, a roguish mystery wreathed in smoke, and a fantastic plunge into the surreal reality of stories. The book is also a refined science fiction novel about humans and monkeys who do not hold their fates in their own hands.

*The Monkey and the New Moon* is a refreshing exception in Finnish literature. It stands out from the everyday run of books thanks to its ambitious structure, intertextuality, and richness. The book could be compared to novels such as *City of the Iron Fish* (1994) by **Simon Ings** or *City of Saints and Madmen* (2001) by **Jeff VanderMeer**. All of them are stories of strange cities and their inhabitants who try to live their lives in exceptional circumstances.

However, Hyvönen has a completely unique way of treating this story. The result is a novel that challenges the reader to a literary game by means of its structure: the viewpoints of different characters, notes on dreams, and action scenes follow each other in a controlled avalanche. The book is like a baroque work of metal lace with enough

details to interest readers of all types of literature.

Viivi Hyvönen was born in 1981. She started her writing career at the tender age of 14 with the fantasy novel *Etsijä* [*The Seeker*] (1995), followed by *Mahlaa suonissaan* [*Sap in His Veins*] (1999). Both books were welcome at a time when Finnish fantasy was rarely published. After this, she took a natural break from her writing career to concentrate on her studies. Hyvönen has a Licentiate in Medicine from the University of Helsinki and currently works as a doctor specializing in psychiatry.

Hyvönen spent years writing *The Monkey and the New Moon*. The time spent can be seen in the maturity of the narration and themes. The novel does not concern itself with genre boundaries. At the time of its publication in 2008, it brought a welcome breath of international flavor and speculative elements to the Finnish literary field.

#### A YOUNG AUTHOR

This skillfully written novel is the result of a long road and an early career in writing.

Hyvönen grew up in Kuopio as the youngest in a family of four children. She is very close to her family, and family members actively support her writing career, for example, by reading her manuscripts. Her interest in literature stems from her childhood: books were always read in her home, and since the children had quite particular tastes in literature, their mother read them ancient myths.

When Hyvönen was in third grade, she got the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy as a Christmas present. Inspired, she realized that writers could spin their own myths. She invented characters and wrote

stories around them without especially planning them. The manuscript of her first novel, *Etsijä*, was the first that she planned and realized from beginning to end.

“I was in seventh grade and did not have many friends. I was more interested in books than in writers. Only when the manuscript was finished did I begin to wonder what to do with it.”

The publisher accepted her manuscript surprisingly quickly. There were some corrections to be made, but not a significant amount.

“I first worked with editors as a teenager. I viewed them as being on the other side, just like parents, teachers, or any other adults. On the other hand, it has been very educational to be influenced by editors as a young person.”

How has starting off young affected Hyvönen’s writing career and identity? Her novel *Mahlaa suonisaan* was praised for the rich atmosphere of the forest setting and the Finnish nomenclature. Looking back, Hyvönen characterizes the book as a rather stereotypical fantasy novel.

“I never chose the genre intentionally, especially in my early teens when I was starting to write my first published novel, so any explanations I might give now are just speculation.”

Fantasy has, however, been a natural choice for Hyvönen.

“It could be said that realism is a passing fad.

There are a lot of common themes in good fantasy and the myths of various cultures describing deities and heroes. Perhaps fantasy could be considered as a much more universal genre than realism? “What if?” is the question that I look for in any book.”

The publication of her first novel was significant in raising her self-esteem. Hyvönen thinks that she built her adult identity around being a writer, even though it all started from the writing itself, with no big career dreams. That could also be why she has taken breaks from writing.

“The good thing about starting early is that I had a very low threshold for writing. There was no fear of embarrassment. My books were also

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“IT COULD BE SAID  
THAT REALISM IS  
A PASSING FAD.”

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well received by readers, and everyone treated me kindly. My parents also tried to protect me—for example, they kept me from seeing a particular negative review. I only found out about it years later.”

In addition to reading, Hyvönen also had other hobbies related to fantasy and writing. She became a fan of role-playing games already in her early teens when her older brothers enlisted her in their gaming crowd. During her student days, she was active in Alter Ego, the role-playing club of the University of Helsinki.

“I never wanted to be a gamemaster, though. I was too lazy and wanted to save my ideas for my writing.”

## WELCOME TO DYSTOPOPOLIS

Looking from the outside, it may seem that there was a big gap between Hyvönen’s second and third novels. But she did not rest on her laurels for nine years.

The events and characters of the new book were constantly on her mind. During the intervening years she moved away from home, completed her studies, selected a career, and built a relationship. The story followed her through all these important phases of her life.

She sketched the major plot lines of the novel, as well as the central characters, already at the time she was finishing high school. The story had been incubating and developing for years.

As the setting for *The Monkey and the New Moon*, Hyvönen has created a unique world utilizing various elements of science fiction and fantasy. The book is set in Dystopolis, a city called the eighth wonder of the world and surrounded by an





uncrossable sea and a dump ruled by rabid monkeys. The city's inhabitants are strangely fond of their home, and few ever leave it, even though many dream of a better life.

The world of the novel is realistic in the way of hard-boiled detective novels, but reality is broken in places by surprising details that catch the reader's attention. Life in the city conforms to its own laws subject to fairy tales and legends. Already at the start of the book, mention is made of cloning and control chips, indicating that human autonomy has been reduced significantly.

The reader can formulate a theory of the events and is constantly told more than the main characters know, but the story still has a tendency to surprise and take unexpected twists. The characters of the novel are pawns in a grand tale that links trench-coated crooks, an editor with a ghastly metal assistant, and the mysterious Author pulling the strings behind everything, a figure that people dare mention only in whispers.

The central character of the book is the ape-man Hanuman, who works as a private detective. He is an orphan who has had to find his own place in the world. No matter how much he wants to, he doesn't feel at home among humans, and feels like he doesn't belong anywhere. He doesn't know why so many people are interested in him and why he is hired to protect a singer named Luna from Esau, a dangerous scientist. The plot thickens when the very same Esau contacts Hanuman of his own accord and Luna suspects that her dreams are being manipulated.

Hyvönen says that she has known the book's characters for a long time, as the whole story started fleshing itself out around them. Hanuman is a deity from Hindu mythology. He is the funny sidekick of religious stories, the character who blunders about and inadvertently saves the day while the actual hero gets the beauties.

"The essential thing about my Hanuman is the way he sees himself in the world of humans," Hyvönen says.

Hanuman is a strong symbol of otherness and difference, a character looking for his roots and the fundamental meaning of his existence. Even though one



of his eyes is entirely white, he still sees more clearly than most people in many respects.

Hanuman's counterpart is the singer Luna, a femme fatale who becomes the object of Hanuman's love. Luna resembles Granny, who raised Hanuman, and there are other unusual aspects in her background, such as four foster fathers. Hyvönen explains that Luna's character started to develop through Hanuman, but her background remained unclear for a long time.

"Luna did not really open up to me at first. She remained thin and superficial, which annoyed me, since she is practi-

cally the only important female character in the book. Finally I figured out the essential element of suspense, and after that, Luna became easier to write, too."

Luna's secret should not be revealed here, but left for the reader to find.

Basically, *The Monkey and the New Moon* is a growth story during which Hanuman goes through his relationship with his foster home and his biological parents, as well as the secret behind his origin. The family relationship that is ultimately revealed is a classic—many might even call it a cliché, but in this book, it is definitely carefully planned.

Anyone can identify with Hanuman through their own experiences in youth, even though the logic behind his actions might not be immediately understandable. Hanuman is exotic in the same way as a superhero—he is sufficiently different and strange that reading about him is interesting.

The reader cannot help but become fond of this heroic monkey who is simultaneously emotionally sensitive and physically strong in spite of his small size. He is a professional in survival and shady business.

## AN INTERTEXTUAL JUNGLE

*The Monkey and the New Moon* is full of literary allusions from the *Bible* to various classics. Different tales and myths are woven seamlessly into the whole. Indeed, the narrators are aware of the metafictional level of the story and comment on it throughout the events.

"The abundance of allusion is a part of my own internal landscape. Since early childhood, my parents



read me stories such as Greek mythology, which is actually quite a soap opera.”

Hyvönen lists a cornucopia of influences behind her own writing: traditional fairy tales, superhero comics, Tintin and Corto Maltese. As for classics, she mentions *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, and *The Wizard of Oz* as significant influencers.

“In these three classics, the girl protagonists are independent, active players with their own personalities, which was rare in the literature of those times. However, my intention was to write in such a way that the reader does not have to know the originals in order to recognize the allusion.”

Hyvönen mentions two more books as very significant to her. **Bram Stoker’s** *Dracula* is one of them. She saw **Francis Ford Coppola’s** *Dracula* movie in her early teens, and its visual style and richness made a great impression on her.

“When I read the book a few years later, I was disappointed,” Hyvönen reveals.

“Even though the book is a classic epistolary novel, it’s not exciting in the same way as the movie. That’s why I wanted to try to write an epistolary novel that would be exciting, too. One reason why this is challenging is because in a novel based on letters, the idea is that the protagonist writing the letters cannot die in the middle of the story.”

The other significant book that Hyvönen mentions is **Peter Høeg’s** novel *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*. She characterizes the book as a non-chronological thriller that is also gripping. This is what she aimed at in her own writing, too.

“The reader has to forget that these are letters or diary entries. I had to make the text readable.”

Movies have also played a part in directing Hyvönen’s writing process. In the initial stages of ideation, she saw three memorable movies in which metafiction had a significant role: *The Matrix*, *The Truman Show*, and *Dark City*.

“I thought that metafiction has now been used in computer programs, movies, and television shows, but since the book as a user interface is by no means outdated, the same thing can be done in a novel, too.”

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“GOOD STORIES  
ARE ALWAYS  
CHARACTER-DRIVEN.”

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*The Monkey and the New Moon* may be structurally challenging for the reader, but also for the writer it is the result of a long game of make-believe. Hyvönen says that she had even more ideas, but had to prune a lot out of the final book. She gives an example of how her creative process works.

“The social structure depicted in the book started out from the idea of an isolated society with the purpose of producing fictional stories. And good stories are always character-driven. As for the characters themselves, they are social creatures driven by relationships. But if I separated people from biological parenthood and an ethnic frame of reference, what would they be attached to then? I had the idea that it might be something as trivial as music. This is how the jazz and tango gangs in the book were born.”

## SNEAKERS AND ROMANCE

*The Monkey and the New Moon* not only took a long time to write, but it also demanded a slightly different approach than a story that proceeds chronologically. As she was writing, Hyvönen knew that she would not have time to finish the novel quickly, so she wrote the first few chapters in order and then filled in the whole story at random intervals, adding scenes that seemed to suit her state of mind at the moment of writing.

When the first version of the book was ready, Hyvönen read through the manuscript divided into categories. For example, she read all of Luna’s dreams in one go so that she could achieve a consistent style for the viewpoint and narrative voice.

The book includes a lot of tidbits from the writer’s subconscious, such as Hanuman’s sneakers, which function as a motif in many scenes. An attentive reader will also note carefully planned details, like the names of the bars in the story. The bar named Sticks is a play on the name of the river Styx, whereas another bar is named Stone’s. Together, they allude to the saying “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”.

The starting point is that in Dystopolis, things are exactly the other way around. Words are used to wield the greatest power. Many allusions are deliberately obscure and partly very personal, but to Hyvönen’s delight, readers have discovered them.

Even though intuition plays a role in the writing process, the book as a whole still has to be intentionally thought out.

“One thing I think is common to both writing and working as a doctor is that all decisions have to be justified. While writing, naturally, I can simply decide



that in this world, things work this way, but I still have to pay careful attention to the whole.”

The book has plenty of different elements from a circus to organ grinders and numerous foster fathers. It also includes a few pages of comic strips. Hyvönen feels that this choice was natural in terms of the story: as the main character is thoroughly commodified, it is natural for there to be stories about him in comic form.

Hyvönen wanted to use monkeys in her book because humans find them strange, but at the same time uncannily familiar. The description of the circus is influenced by the Canadian Cirque du Soleil, which combines traditional circus with theatre and performance.

“The inspiration for the dump is the urban legend according to which the New York dump is the only manmade structure that can be seen from outer space.”

The worldview of the book is gloomy. The surveillance society of Dystopolis is clearly a nightmare scenario, and the book could also be interpreted as a critique of the popularity of reality television. The story

presents a question that is already familiar from *The Matrix*: Does it make a person happier to find out the truth?

“People are interested in sad and terrible stories. Perhaps the Author behind everything realizes that she is a megalomaniac and is aware that the world she has created is not exactly idyllic. Characters are treated poorly without a second thought, and they also die. Of course, the reader can question whether things really are as described.”

The book also includes a dash of romance and a longing for the exotic that is typical of fantasy and science fiction. The characters walk through labyrinthine streets, climb on the roofs of buildings and trams, crawl through tunnels in the dump, visit music bars ruled by criminal gangs, and get involved in underworld duels.

Hyvönen says that the urban romanticism in the book comes from her childhood visits to Helsinki. The looming stone buildings and trams made an impression on the little girl. However, she does not consider her book as escapism, even though it cannot be compared directly to the present.

“I think that *The Monkey and the New Moon* is very far from everyday reality, at least my own reality, and bears a closer resemblance to other literature, the kind that I personally like.”

## UNBOUND BY GENRE

*The Monkey and the New Moon* can be classified in many categories: it is simultaneously science fiction, fantasy, and an epistolary novel, and also fits the definition of New Weird. While writing, the author did not think of genre and did not let genre boundaries affect the final result. Only in the case of the detective story elements did she need to justify her choice to herself.

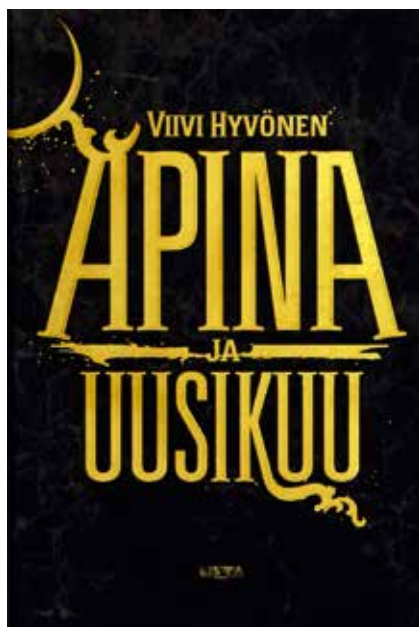
“The book describes a closed community created for the purpose of producing fiction. This project is grandiose enough that it is natural to use it as the basis for entire series of books. Detective stories fit this pattern very well,” Hyvönen explains.

“However, I have personally read shamefully few detective stories. **Arthur Conan Doyle’s** *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was the first adult book that I read at the age of seven, when my parents would not let me watch the TV series based on it. For some reason, they allowed me to read the book. It was so exciting that I was scared to death and followed my mother from room to room while reading it.”

This gap in her reading history does not appear to be a major shortcoming, as Hyvönen’s novel successfully conveys a film noir atmosphere.

“Many fantasy and science fiction novels also have a detective story built into the book.”

In conversations with the publisher, the book had to be given some kind of label. The editor described it as science fiction, which was fine by Hyvönen. This definition should not be taken as a simple reading



guide, because the book can be approached from many different viewpoints. *The Monkey and the New Moon* is full of levels and details that do not open up at first reading.

“In my opinion, a good book should give the reader something new after every reading,” Hyvönen says.

“I read good books several times for two reasons. Firstly to learn, because at first reading I’m devouring the plot and characters, and only the second time allows me to concentrate on the language and structure. Secondly, I want to be sure that the time I invest

in reading pays off. I’m too lazy to read in order to educate myself, even though I try sometimes. A book has to provide food for thought to make me enjoy reading it.”

Books that Hyvönen mentions coming back to time after time include **Ursula K. Le Guin’s** *Earthsea* books, *The Dispossessed*, and *The Left Hand of Darkness*, **Neil Gaiman’s** *American Gods*, **William Gibson’s** cyber-space trilogy, **Robert Holdstock’s** *Mythago* series, **Salman Rushdie’s** works, and **Gabriel García Márquez’s** *Hundred Years of Solitude*.

“What I find fascinating about Le Guin is the sparseness and precision of her style, which can nevertheless be very harrowing; it is the polar opposite of my own prattling and meandering style. Also, she is very productive, but her books never feel like they are just churned out,” Hyvönen says in praise of Le Guin.

“If there’s something I can still be bothered to educate myself about, it’s mythologies. Reading the *Kalevala* is never wasted, a new Finnish prose translation of the *Edda* was published recently, and I have read the *Tain* and the *Mabinogion* in English.”

## RECEPTION AND FOLLOW-UP

*The Monkey and the New Moon* was enthusiastically received by both critics and other readers. Of course, there are reviewers who missed the structure and many levels of the book. Surprisingly, Hyvönen has had to explain why there are violent scenes in the story, even though the violence is not described directly.

The book also contains plenty of intellectual humor.

“People close to me sometimes find it hard to read my writing, because the word games and dialogue are

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“A BOOK HAS TO  
PROVIDE FOOD  
FOR THOUGHT.”

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so clearly typical of me and my childhood family,” Hyvönen says.

“For example, I really like **Terry Pratchett**’s humor, because he can make his characters funny without making them difficult to identify with. On the other hand, I think you have to be able to laugh at yourself in order to enjoy Pratchett. Playing around with genre clichés is also laughing at yourself. In addition, it is rewarding for the reader to notice these tricks.”

Due to her busy work as a doctor, Hyvönen has led a quiet life on the literary front in the last few years. Nevertheless things have still been happening.

“**Jeff VanderMeer** got so excited about *The Monkey and the New Moon* that I finally translated it completely into English. The translation spent a lot of time with an American agent, who liked the book a lot, but expressed doubt as to its salability because I have no other qualifications. After this, the project was put on the back burner due to family reasons and work pressure. But as soon as I finish my medical specialization, I can negotiate a part-time employment deal that will leave me time to write.”

“In the meantime, I have also written a magical-realistic family chronicle. Looking back, I can see that it grew much too expansive and difficult to grasp. I have already figured out how to rewrite it, and will do so as soon as I have time. In addition, I’m also working on a metamorphosis novel set in an imaginary Eastern European country after the fall of communism. And a sequel to *The Monkey and the New Moon* is not out of the question either, if the translation is sold.”

Hyvönen has no plans to move on to realistic literature.

“I want books to raise questions and ideas.”

**ANNE LEINONEN**

Translated by **Sarianna Silvonen**  
Updated version of an article published  
in *Tähtivaeltaja* magazine 2/2008

# Cosmos Pen

The special edition of Kosmoskynä for  
**Worldcon 2017**

New short stories, articles and columns  
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FINNISH SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY WRITERS ASSOCIATION







VIIVI HYVÖNEN

## THE MONKEY AND THE NEW MOON

**Hanuman's Diary,  
Monday, November 18<sup>th</sup>:  
First Commission**

I wish I could begin by writing that I was admiring my cleared-off desktop that morning, but I can't. Not that it wasn't clear. Ironically, it had been accumulating dust for more than two weeks, the time I had spent without a case to my name. Still, it was the earliness of the hour that most tested my sense of humour. I had just returned after being on the move across the rooftops since evening, and I was troubled less by lack of work than lack of a good night's sleep. I hadn't yet gotten to the part where I fall over onto my office couch, though, when the buzzer froze me under a still turned-off shower.

In busier times I might have listened for a couple of seconds and then turned on the tap, deciding my battered ear was ringing out of sheer weariness. However, I had already considered humbling myself by looking for a job as a bouncer. So I made do with a few select obscenities instead of selective hearing as I wriggled back into my clothes. My teeth were short of a brush, so on the way down I rolled a hasty cigarette. Besides smoke covering the stale smell, clients by all rights should find it impressive when, early in the morning, a private eye opens his door in a wrinkled, dirty and scanty outfit and, for starters, asks them for a light.

There were three of them, as ill-matched with the backdrop as with each other. An attempt to reconcile the stylistic clash of the characters with synchronised outfits had had poor results, since a trench coat only suited the tallest of the three, who for his part was built like a number of stacked crates. In my youth I had hauled a box or two at the Freight Yard, but this pile I wouldn't have tried to so much as nudge without its express consent. His angular face was hidden under a brimmed hat, sunglasses and a

moustache, and his gloved hands were rather movingly gripping the handles of a wheelchair, so that he had to stand bent over. Not that he didn't loom over me anyway. I placed him in "file G, section gorilla" with all the others bigger and meaner than me, and lowered my gaze.

For undoubtedly the most interesting member of this disparate delegation sat in the wheelchair. She was positively buried in her coat and chair and drowned by her hat and dark glasses, which lent her a deceptive vulnerability. I had no doubt which of the three was in charge.

Nor on who would do the talking. The trench coat suited the last and least member of the party most poorly. He had no hat to cover his thinning, sandy hair, and only horn-rimmed spectacles instead of sunglasses. He introduced himself as Nemo so casually as to avoid introducing his companions, offered me light so companionably, ushered the others in so busily, and smiled at the woman so often and so fawningly, that I realised I already loathed him before he had even stepped inside.

After dropping ash with precision accuracy onto the toes of his shoes I excused myself on account of the messiness of my office and hurried ahead, leaving the wheelchair to him. As I glanced back at the first landing I saw the gorilla lift the woman without effort or expression. It showed that he'd been to the gym now and then, but the muscles in his cheeks apparently had not been included in his exercise regimen. I wonder whether he would learn how to smile if he lifted weights with the corners of his mouth for a change.

Crate-face would have cleared the two stories in no time with his light load if the wheelchair hadn't refused to co-operate with the fawner – which, in my opinion, wasn't a surprising move even from an inanimate object. I had plenty of time to place myself comfortably in my office chair and occupy the

vacant space on my desk with my bare feet before Nemo stumbled in through the door and opened the folded chair, so that the gorilla could set the woman down again. I made no move to offer them seats but let them stand before me and smoked my hastily rolled cigarette with as much grace as I could muster. The woman and her bodyguard refused to be provoked, though, which didn't surprise me, as she already sat in her wheelchair. Nemo, on the other hand, seemed uneasy only about the fact that the bodyguard remained standing behind him, which would have disturbed me as well. Even from my side of the desk I was glad of its width.

At last I motioned the other two to sit down and blew out a lungful of smoke through my slanted, narrow nostrils, but failed to make any perceptible impression on my audience. Annoyed, I placed the cigarette on the rim of the ashtray, leaned back with my hands behind my head, and inquired: "Outsiders, aren't you?"

This was meant as sarcasm. Why, they certainly acted like tourists, ringing the doorbell of a detective agency so early on a Monday morning and wearing something as clichéd as trench coats, which with their long hems are too inconvenient to be worn even by members of my noble profession.

"How did you know?" asked the fawner, astonished.

Astonishment was what I felt, too, and I almost choked on my cigarette and swallowed my tongue, trying to hide it. Outsiders? Outsiders! I would have laughed aloud, like any Citizen would have in my place, if there hadn't been something ominous about my guests right from the start, even by the standards of my own circle of acquaintances. Ask anyone in the City, and you'll learn *no one* has ever met an outsider except for the militia and the railwaymen, and they don't count. Ask, and you'll discover that someone knows someone who has met someone, who must have been an outsider. That's as close as you'll get. Certainly you may hear of someone who escaped beyond the Dump. *Attempted to*, that is, for none of the escapees have ever returned to tell their tales.

"Instinct," I growled out of my throat and proceeded to roll another cigarette, my last one having gone out and I being in need of both another smoke and something to do with my hands before they started to shake. "Refreshments?" I inquired without lifting my gaze. "I'm afraid I'm a bit low on cigars, but there are bottles of whisky in the cabinet, filed by label."

To my surprise the bodyguard turned around, strode to the filing cabinet, which he opened at B, and poured out a glass of the malt *Birds of Rhiannon* (and, to my annoyance, gave no sign whatsoever of noticing my heavy Beretta). I had thought earthly pleasures were nothing to him, and been right, for instead of drinking the double shot he passed it to the woman with his habitual poker face. Luckily I hadn't had time to light up, for I might have dropped the cigarette onto my lap.

After sipping from her glass the woman confirmed my suspicion that she was the leader of the group by glancing at Nemo, who obediently dug two folders out of his briefcase and tossed them in front of me.

I pretended not to notice. I don't even know why I wanted to get on their nerves, considering I needed the job so badly.

"Well, captain," I said. (I've read both my Verne and my Homer.) "What's the case?"

"Tell, me," Nemo began and leaned forward, "do you kill for a living?"

"Do I look like it?" I asked, conscious of the associations of my appearance in a City terrorized by monkeys. My question was also ambiguous, and I did nothing to diminish that effect by admitting: "Sometimes, while earning my living." To be honest, I resort less often to violence than to threats of it, but the course of the conversation had started to intrigue me.

"You don't like it."

I might have repeated myself (*Do I look like I do?*), since answering with a question is not just useful but pleasurable. Yet I contented myself with lazily blowing smoke into his eyes, for I was getting impatient. Or restless, forewarned by my instincts of what he said next.

"Not anymore."

This time they must have seen me start. I did, indeed, kill when younger, with blows, kicks and bites, too, and even I don't know how many men, although I have lain awake on countless mornings atop the filthy sheets of my stuffy bedroom, for I always lose track at a number far too great for my peace of mind. Why, I should have asked *them*, how many I'd killed, instead, since they knew enough to ask me. I wish that had occurred to me, but I was occupied with questions like: *How* did they know, if they were outsiders, and did they *really* know, and if not, had my professional paranoia finally become pathological?

"Would you kill in self defence?"

The creep had practiced in advance. He knew what to ask, was after something and at the same



time trying to throw me off-balance. Succeeding to, in fact, but I'd be damned if I let him know how many points he was scoring. After all, you get an extra point for knowing.

"Who wouldn't, in self defence?"

"What about in defence of someone else?"

"Whom? And from whom?"

He nodded at the desk.

Reluctantly, I picked up the folders. One was labelled Luna, with the additional information:

*Occupation: Singer*

*Marital status: Single*

*Mother: Unknown*

*Father: Unknown*

*Foster-fathers: Four in all*

*(See inside)*

It was like an eerie little nursery rhyme, and I think I must have read it aloud under my breath. Shrugging it off for the moment, I turned to the other file, labelled Esau with a red stamp of EXTREMELY DANGEROUS. To conceal my amusement I asked: "Last names?"

"They don't use any."

"Me neither," I pointed out, regaining my good humour. "Why bother, with no phone? Besides, deep down everybody wants a stage name." I glanced at the fawner and smiled wryly. "Judging from your style, captain, you would hire me to protect a lady. How charming that chivalry hasn't died. Let's have a look at your villain, then."

Esau's file contained nothing but two series of photographs. In the first the background was out of focus and blurred like the sea or the Dump, but the location could only be guessed at, because each photo was carefully cropped to focus on a face. It was a frightening face, covered in dirt and a thick, tangled beard. Both the hairline and the forehead were low, and the eyebrows, grown together, did nothing to lessen the bestiality of the look. The eyes, though, were most dreadful of all, staring wide as though without lids. Their insanity would have had my hand looking for a gun and my eyes for the closest drainpipe on even the most well-lit boulevard, let alone a dark alley.

The rest of the shots were like negatives of the previous ones. In the background I recognized certain City streets, and the man, too, could have been a different one. He was wearing a smart trench coat (yes, you read right), and he had recently been to a barber. It was as difficult to judge the order of the undated

photographs as it was his age, but possibly the years had hollowed the cheeks and furrowed the forehead deeper in the second series. Yet most altered was his bearing which now reminded me of Dump monkeys in its deceptive ease. Sometimes, when I watch them with a telescope from my roof, they will lie on the mounds in sleepy peace only to turn on each other in the next instant for no reason whatsoever, like raving lunatics.

"You did do justice to your subject, in the end, Captain," I observed dryly. "More recent shots, I presume."

Nemo nodded. "Esau is in town."

"And is Esau –" I breathed the name in the same ominous tone "– also an outsider?"

The corner of his mouth twitched with rewarding irritation. "Re-migrant."

I laughed out loud, but almost burned my lip on my fag end when all three stared at me gravely. As a matter of fact, a graveside was where they belonged in their funeral uniforms. Good riddance, as far as I was concerned!

"So that's why you want him dead!" I knew I was playing with higher stakes than ever before, and the highest of all wasn't my life, but the favourable odds did little to comfort me. I got no answer, and could have let it go, but for an uncontrollable character fault. "Tell me, then, why don't you just hire a killer. Plenty of them to choose from, around here."

"That has been seen to."

"What about me?"

"Can't you read?"

I ignored the insult, stubbed out my cigarette, and dug out the materials for another from my desk drawer with such sudden movements that the gorilla's hand went to his breast pocket. "It's detectives who answer with a question," I said. "Or villains. You're not villains, are you?"

"We," said Nemo, his voice brittle with irritation, "are commissioners. And the commission is to protect Luna from Esau, who is extremely dangerous as it says on the folder. Now I wish you wouldn't answer the following, simple question with another –"

"Why me?" I interrupted him, grinning, and lit my cigarette.

He was downright trembling. "Because you can win her confidence, and if not, follow and protect her without her knowing."

Next, four things happened at the same time and a fifth right after. Do try to follow.

I opened Luna's file (to look at my protégée-to-be) and my mouth (to ask the obvious: *Why not*

anyone else?). I lost my voice, though, as my eyes fell upon the image of a ghost, and before I got it back, the woman answered mildly: "Because you have no chip, either."

I was crouching on top of the cabinet with my left eye wide open, seeing everything in red and hissing with my teeth bared so that spittle spattered out of the corners of my mouth, and I had no recollection whatsoever of my twenty-foot leap across the room. Nemo looked shaken and satisfied at the same time, for the woman had achieved the effect he had been after. The gorilla stood between me and them with his hand in the breast of his coat, as if he had been there for a while, and from behind him I could hear a frivolous, feminine laughter – the kind sooner expected from the heights of a barstool than the depths of a wheelchair. My chair had been overturned, its castors still revolving. My cigarette, however, had landed in the ashtray. A sense of style like mine can never be compromised, even when instinct takes over.

This hadn't happened for twelve years. I had ceased to hiss the instant I came to my senses but my eye, ordinarily dead white, was still in its extreme position, blazing red, and I had to close it for a few seconds to force it back into its resting state. I did nothing about my grimace, though. I did not want my leap to look entirely involuntary, although they literally had me climbing the walls – and knew it. I'd decide later whether I should be more worried about my loss of self-control or its cause.

I had lived under the impression that nobody knew about my lack of a chip except for my deceased Granny. However, I have no idea whom she might have told while still alive, and it shouldn't be forgotten that she found me on her doorstep, which is an unusual method of procreation even by City standards. Besides, I can't well spend my life continually alert to prevent someone from looking behind my ear and observing the absence of a scar, can I? I hadn't even thought it necessary after my school-mate Triton tore apart both my ear and my newly acquired self-control in such a way that it was the end of him.

In our youth, when we were pitted against each other on the *tatami*, Triton used to ask if it had occurred to me that perhaps I was not paranoid after all. That maybe behind my back they all pointed at me and laughed at me and called me an animal and a freak and wished Triton would beat the hell out of me. Now, more than ten years later in my office,

far from Master Peter's boarding school, I found that I suffered from neither professional nor pathological paranoia, but this was no relief. I'd rather be paranoid than persecuted. In both cases you have to watch your back, but only in the latter instance do you risk finding an ice-pick between your shoulder-blades.

At the moment, though, my back was firmly against the wall of my office, and directly below me, in the drawer labelled L, was my sawed-off shotgun, filed under the mob term *lupara*, or greyhound. As fast as the gorilla was, he could not beat my pooch. A barrelful at that range would've stopped an elephant.

He didn't want to take on me and my hound, however (wise animals those apes, I should know – elephants, too, I should think). Instead, he turned the wheelchair around and began to push it away: the queen of the threesome retiring from a victorious battle as if she were a gently smiling statue of a saint that had just startled her followers by speaking aloud. As far as I'm concerned, she had better part her lips again, for I shall put certain questions to her, once I get the chance. The game is on, but she may keep her points for now. Goodbye, until the next round!

Nemo stayed behind to give me the folders and a look of sympathy I suspected him of rehearsing in front of a mirror the night before. However, it would have been too troublesome to clean up the entrails and other mess from the office afterwards, so I resisted the temptation and left *lupara* in its drawer.

"How about it?" he asked and offered the folders.

"We'll see," I said and took them.

"We'll keep in touch."

"You will," I said, to be more specific. "Not I."

"Not you," he admitted. I had not expected to get an address: I got instructions instead. "Try to approach Luna but stay away from Esau."

"Except if he doesn't stay away from Luna."

"Except if," he confirmed, then glanced over his shoulder and lowered his voice. "As you may have noticed, we can only tell you what you need to know. The better to evaluate what information is necessary, we would like some kind of reports or notes from you. If that's all right?"

"We'll see," I repeated, "if I even take the case."

"Of course," he conceded. "We'll contact you within three days."

"I'd prefer later in the week," I corrected.

He shrugged. "Whatever's most convenient for you." Of course he'd turn up the day after tomorrow at the latest.



At last he turned to go, then stopped and glanced at me. "By the way," he said, suddenly unsure of himself, "why don't you wear a trench coat?"

I was hardly surprised.

"Because it makes me look taller," I declared.

He withdrew, perplexed. Unable to rejoice over winning my odd point I waited until the footsteps had died away. I then opened the folder to take another look at the photograph of my ghost.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FINAL VOLUME OF THE HANUMAN SERIES

Twenty-nine years ago Penny Moon, formerly a Jazz singer, currently a tattoo artist, almost tripped over a swaddled bundle on her doorstep. Inside the swaddles wriggled a baby boy who resembled a monkey to an alarming degree. Hardly even pausing to marvel at her discovery she wondered aloud at a blind white eye paired with a pitch-black one, then peeked behind the right ear and saw the cub had no chip scar. After only a moment's consideration she decided to keep him as her grandson, despite being a childless spinster, since parents and children of different complexion failed to astonish anyone in the City anymore.

At the suggestion of her friend, the schoolmaster Pan, she named the cub Hanuman after the Hindu monkey god. He was yet to become a rascal like his namesake, for the present remaining a pale freak, a tenderfoot lurking all day long behind the curtains in his window bay, since there was no other room for him in the small attic apartment. From there he peeked either out through the painted-glass window at the roofs and the sidewalk far below, where the blind organ grinder often stood with his instrument and spider monkey, or through the curtains into the single living-, bed- and dining-room that also served as a tattoo parlour.

Later on, the boy got the notion of crawling into the grand piano that was his foster-grandmother's pride and dominated the apartment, but that game was soon put to an end, as a number of strings snapped. The solitary Penny never went so far as to have anyone tune the instrument, and one day the whole thing collapsed when she forgot herself in reminiscence of the beauty, slenderness and sensuality of her youth to the degree that she lay down on top of it to sing. The cacophonous crash that resulted was the final piece played on the grand piano, and

the ruined instrument was left lying where it had collapsed, splintered, a monument to the perished music of its owner. From then on Penny resigned herself to humming softly and idly while she cooked or baked.

To the delight of Hanuman's tastebuds she spent long periods of time in the kitchenette. As a matter of fact, in her old age she had become monstrously fat. Stomping around her minuscule apartment with a cigar between her teeth she looked like a sooty steam engine, and sounded it, too, as she scatted and crooned while bustling about her kitchen. Her foster-grandson, on the other hand, became bonier by the year, as Penny liked to point out, although he spent most of his time in the window bay, only occasionally sneaking into the grand piano (or later on, its ruin) to peek as she, unaware that he watched, stroked the keys longingly or gazed at the two black-and-white photographs between the tattoo models.

Hanuman did not recognize the young sailor in the more official of the two photos. (Which was no wonder, since besides his Granny he knew only a few of her regulars and the tweed-suited gentleman from next door who was hopelessly in love with her, brought flowers and was served coffee when allowed inside.) But in the other shot it was Granny herself who sang, young and lovely, on a stage in some jazz bar and leaned smiling towards the viewer as if planning to kiss the cameraman or the microphone that she stroked gently with her long fingers. By those fingers Granny could still be recognized, for decades of cooking and tattooing had kept them slender.

Granny's own skin was too dark to be tattooed, but she tried her skills on Hanuman, even though she had no shortage of customers. The cub had peculiar scars on his body, and around them Penny depicted a troop of stylized monkeys in red and black ink. On the back of the neck, to accompany the most visible scar, one figure was enough, but elsewhere, in the hollows of the knees and the crooks of the elbows, around the navel and at the base of the spine, the sketches danced in circles of twos and threes like animals frenzied by starvation. The cub himself was as skinny as the pictures on his skin and even more silent, as his Granny was prone to joke to hide her worry.

As best she could, Penny tried to bring up her ward to be a man and feed him enough to grow up accordingly. With good reason she wondered when he grew hardly any taller, with plenty of bony angles and wiry muscles like lengths of cable to compensate for his short stature, even though he ate all that was

served – from the fried eggs and bacon at breakfast to the meat loaf at supper, not to mention the cakes and cookies he was treated to by his Granny through the day.

Out of doors the cub couldn't go, because his Granny wouldn't let him, but neither did he ask to. The poor thing had no chip, so it was useless to dream about public school, which was all they could have afforded.

For the time being Hanuman submitted his captivity with patience, or so it seemed. When he didn't want company, Granny left a glass of milk and a heaped plate or a pile of library books on one corner of the windowsill and took the dirty dishes or the already-read books from the other. Sometimes he spent time on the apartment side of his curtains, silent, crouching in the bookcase to watch a knitted sweater grow and a cigar shrink, or hanging from a cupboard to see pies bake. The tattooing he observed at first timidly through his curtains and then demurely from the couch, for he was shy of the rough, loud sailors, even though they fascinated him. Regardless of the chores at hand, the cub got to hear his Granny sing with the swing of old times or, later on, hum and, of course, tell stories. Although Hanuman learnt to read at an early age and read a lot, he could listen to his Granny's stories for hours on end. And Granny told him tales for sure, about the City and her youth and the sailor in the photograph who never came back, though he promised, but drowned instead along with his ship, and about Hanuman's future. For he would be a sailor, too, she mumbled past her cigar while knitting yet another sailor's sweater with plenty of room for growth, since Hanuman would have no business outside for a long time yet, if it was up to her.

No doubt she dreaded the onset of Hanuman's puberty, but he went through the stage early and almost furtively. The boy spoke so seldom and spent so much of his time in a crouch, it was only afterwards that his Granny realized his voice had dropped and he had gone through a growth spurt, albeit a small one. Letting out a sigh of relief, she redoubled her efforts on the feeding front. "We'll see if I can't put some flesh on your bones," she puffed, "with you lying all day long on your windowsill and all!"

During the daylight hours the boy did indeed nap and read under her watchful eyes. But at night, after the snoring behind the curtains had steadied down to the huff and rattle of a steam engine, Hanuman sneaked out of his window, which he had learned to

open at the age of six. He would climb up and down fire escapes and windowsills and ledges and laundry lines and flagpoles and roam the rooftops to dream his waking dreams. These visions he saw also with his deathly white left eye, which was not blind like his Granny thought, but even keener in the dark than his right one.

At first, the little monkey had leapt only a few blocks from one roof onto the next, for even from above the miniature universe of the City had proved to be far filthier and scarier than in Granny's constant tales – as well as far, far more interesting. However, little by little, he grew bold enough to descend from his roofs after first pulling the hood of his jacket over his face. Furtively, he learned the human life of the small hours from pimps, whores and Tango or Jazz gangsters, until, abruptly, he would be noticed – and flee up the nearest drainpipe, back to the safety of the heights.

It took some time for Hanuman to learn that he could blend into the crowds like anyone else despite his disfigurement. Gradually he ventured into bars and billiard rooms through vents or a men's room window left ajar, or even hiding behind legs in the line to get past the doorman. Some places banned him, and with such a heavy-handed cuff on the ear to boot that he kept away. But at other places he became a pet who, seated on the edge of the counter, quickly learned to talk – and talk back – as if born and bred on the Docks himself.

In the end, Hanuman ventured to the movies, too, although the only way in was through the front door with a ticket. With money stolen from his Granny's purse he went to see grainy classics in theatres specialising in westerns, historical spectacles, naval drama or animations, until, one day, he happened to see a true anti-hero on screen in a blacker-than-black detective story. From then on he became the most faithful regular of theatres playing mysteries, because a dream had settled inside his bald head, even if in the beginning he did not recognize it. For who could have learned to dream on a windowsill with less room for growth than his sweaters? Or with a view in which the outside world seemed featureless and other people nothing more than insignificant dots in the distance? Yet gradually, and painfully, it became clear to him that he would never be the sailor his Granny wanted. He would be a private detective.

Hanuman had always been so sparing of words that his Granny could at times forget he had ever even learnt to speak. The witty repartee that he

used to entertain drunken patrons at bars was hardly suitable for serious discussions. How, then, could he have found the words to tell her of his dream, let alone that he would never go to sea? Besides, where did he plan to establish his agency? On the windowsill, since he wouldn't be allowed outside for years – if ever while his Granny lived? She wouldn't be there to stop him forever, but the idea of her death was even more horrifying than that of her disappointment.

Haunted, Hanuman wandered further than ever, all the way to the notorious Harbour, and, with his teeth bared in fear, scampered onto the pier, where there was no climbing to safety nor any escape other than a certain death by drowning. There at last he saw, in the light of the massive white lighthouse, the sea with its rafts of waste and weeds and half-sunken, corroded carcasses of ships. The horizon was desolate and bereft of ships, as were the Docks.

Filled with disbelief, almost as if in a dream, Hanuman left the ghost-harbour behind him, and on the way home asked everyone he met when the next ship would sail, as he wished to sign on as spy-

monkey. Most shunned him, others cursed him in disgust, someone even kicked him, and little by little he realized that he was dreadfully tired. Finally, more weary than disappointed, he twisted in through his Granny's window, the apologetic light of dawn at his back.

Careful not to wake his Granny he went on all fours across the floor and, stiff from exertion, clambered up onto a set of drawers. From there he looked at the two photographs and wondered whether the sailor had ever existed at all and, if so, whether he'd really been his Granny's beloved, and most of all, whether the young beauty in the other picture was no more his Granny than the City in Granny's stories was his City.

VIIVI HYVÖNEN

Translated by **Viivi Hyvönen**

Excerpt from *The Monkey and the New Moon*

**FINNISH WEIRD**

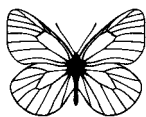
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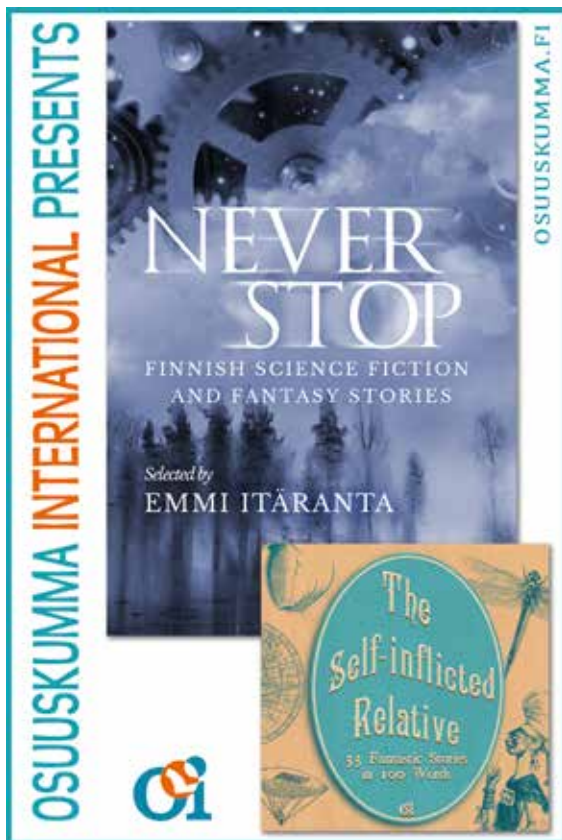


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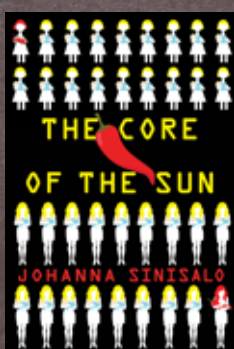
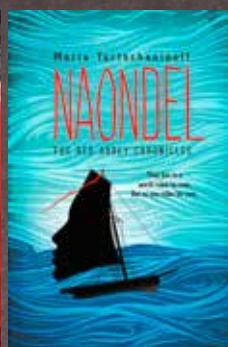
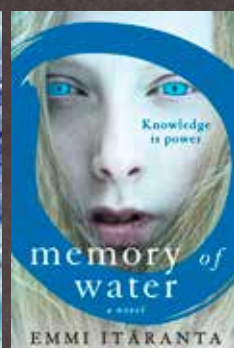
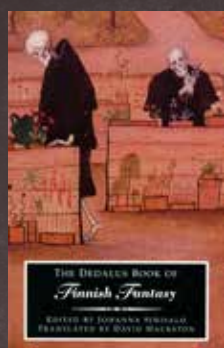
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# FINNISH WEIRD IN ENGLISH

## COVER GALLERY

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## CONTRIBUTORS

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**MINNA JERRMAN** is a journalist and photographer. She spends her free time as the subeditor of Tähtivaeltaja magazine and photographing burlesque—and on the side works as the editor-in-chief of Kamera magazine. [www.minnajerrman.com](http://www.minnajerrman.com)

**TONI JERRMAN** has been editing Tähtivaeltaja magazine for over 30 years. When he's not busy with Tähtivaeltaja-related stuff (that I'd like to see!), he destroys time & space—or was that brain & lungs?—by vaping Bears and drinking Camels. He would be a totally different person without Substance D, The Lizard King and a pocket-sized Ubik. [www.tahtivaeltaja.com](http://www.tahtivaeltaja.com)

**ELIZA JÄPPINEN** is the creative force behind Studio Killers, a challenging animated multimedia project that she built into a social media phenomenon with a 200k fanbase. The music video 'Jenny', which she single-handedly produced, is Studio Killers most successful music video to date with a viral reach of 16 million views in one year. She's also the founder of Visible Realms, an entertainment development company focused on creating content for VR, AR, and mobile games.

**MARIANNA "KISU" LEIKOMAA** has been active in Finnish fandom for quite a few years now. Her background includes writing book reviews and being on the juries of various competitions as well as spending far too much money on going to conventions. She has also been known to dabble in translations and convention running.

**ANNE LEINONEN** is the editor and publisher of Usva-magazine. She writes books for young adults with her colleague Eija Lappalainen and also sf and fantasy short stories and novels on her own. She has won the Atorox prize for best Finnish sf/f short story three times and her collaborative novel Routasisarukset has been nominated for the Finlandia Junior and Tähtivaeltaja Awards.

**M. PIETIKÄINEN** is a graphic designer and fan artist who specializes in book and magazine design and photo manipulation.

**OUTI PUHAKKA** is an amateur photographer from Tampere. Outi mainly photographs live gigs, dogs, and all things weird. More of her photos are available at [www.facebook.com/OutoKuva](http://www.facebook.com/OutoKuva)


**JOUKO RUOKOSENMÄKI** has, during the last 30+ years, drawn short comic stories and illustrations for Tähtivaeltaja, Sarjari, and a few other Finnish publications. He has also designed and painted a handful of covers for records and books. Still, he is probably better known as an editor and translator of comic books, and that's quite OK.

**KI RUUSUVUORI** can no longer tell the difference between herself and her music. Other than that, her chaotically organised mind is filled with photography/J-pop/history/Touhou/science and cooking.

**SARIANNA SILVONEN** is a multitasking translator, technical writer and archaeologist as well as a lifelong book lover and science fiction fan. She shares a roof in the bourgeois suburbs of Espoo with a little comedienne and a man who collects ugly plastic gorillas. She enjoys archaeological fieldwork, playing with words, watching cartoons with her daughter and walking in the woods with her dog.

**VESA SISÄTTÖ** has been active in Finnish fandom since the late '90s. He has been the chair of the Helsinki Science Fiction Society since 2003. When not busy with fannish stuff, he works as a writer, critic and journalist and is also enrolled as a postgraduate student of Comparative Literature at the University of Helsinki.

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The background of the poster features a stylized sunburst pattern in shades of blue and orange. In the foreground, there is a dark blue silhouette of the Helsinki skyline, including the Helsinki Cathedral with its prominent dome, a Ferris wheel, and various other buildings and a tall antenna tower. The sunburst rays emanate from behind the skyline, creating a dramatic effect.

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