

# FINNISH WEIRD?

CHILDREN OF THE WEIRD



PASI JÄÄSKELÄINEN • ANNE LEINONEN  
TIINA RAEVAARA • MARIA TURTSCHANINOFF

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## FROM THE EDITOR

When I started work as editor-in-chief of *Tähtivaeltaja* magazine in the 1980s, modern Finnish speculative fiction was still in its infancy. There were only a handful of active writers, the number of published short stories was by no means dizzying and Finnish spec-fic novels were the stuff of dreams alone.

Now, thirty years later, things are completely different. New, interesting authors are springing up like mushrooms after the rain, spec-fic short stories are published by the hundreds and the shelves of bookstores are filling up at an increasing rate. In 2014 alone, about fifteen Finnish spec-fic short story collections or anthologies and thirty novels were published.

Finland's fine speculative fiction has also been getting attention abroad. **Johanna Sinisalo's** novel *Not Before Sundown* won the James Tiptree Jr. award back in 2004 and has been translated into over ten languages. Sinisalo's later novels have also been published in English to good reviews.

**Hannu Rajaniemi** is also a Finnish success story, with his *Quantum Thief* trilogy (2010–2014) being enthusiastically received in the wider world.

The year 2014 also saw the international breakthrough of **Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen** and **Emmi Itäranta**. The British version of Jääskeläinen's magical novel *The Rabbit Back Literature Society* has received a wide readership thanks to Waterstones in the UK having made it one of the autumn books of its book club. The translation rights to the book have now been sold in eleven countries.

Itäranta's YA novel *Memory of Water* for its part got off to a flying start with US publisher HarperCollins giving it a first print run of 50,000 copies. The book was also recognised with a nomination for the Philip K. Dick award. The rights to *Memory of Water* have been sold to sixteen countries.

This magazine presents a couple more Finnish spec-fic writers. First in the spotlight, we have **Anne Leinonen**, whose bibliography includes works aimed both at adults and youngsters. Her stories have everything from woodland vistas to strange communities and well-written characters.

**Maria Turtchaninoff** is also well-deserving of attention. Her feminist fantasy novel *Maresi* recently won the distinguished Finlandia Junior award. Turtchaninoff also recently signed a three-book deal with British Pushkin Press.

Rounding out the offerings of Leinonen and Turtchaninoff we also have short stories by **Tiina Raevaara** and Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen.

Don't forget to have a look at the previous issue of *Finnish Weird*, which is still available online for free at <http://www.finnishweird.net>. The issue provides a tour of the wild, misty roots of Finnish weird fiction along with short stories and author profiles featuring Emmi Itäranta, Tiina Raevaara and **Jenny Kangasvuo**.

Welcome to the strange and wonderful world of Finnish Weird. You won't regret you came!



TONI JERRMAN

Julia Gantchenko



TIINA RAEVAARA

## DRAGONFLY

**T**he source of the stream is in the forest, invisible. It collects the rain running off exposed bedrock, seasons the water with the sourness of the swamp and lets it cool in the cold spring. The water has burrowed itself into the rocky earth amongst the roots of the spruce trees. It doesn't rise up into daylight until it reaches the edge of the field, next to an old bird cherry tree. The stream winds its way along the boundary between forest and field for many miles before finally joining a small river.

I stand in the stream with my boots full of water and peer into thirty thousand eyes. They stare back, seeing more than I do. The blue-black compound eyes nearly cover the whole head of their bearer.

The creature is a spearhead bluet, a northern damselfly. A male, as I can see from the pattern on its back. The damselfly is sitting on a willow branch and turning its head from side to side, reflecting my image in its eyes from every possible direction. I reach my hand out towards it, but the animal flies off as if it predicted my intentions. The buzz of its wings drones in my ears, the only sound in the sunny, still day.

I no longer remember who told me the story, but it has burrowed into my head as if it has always been there. 'Dragonflies can sew your eyes shut while you sleep', the story claims, at least that's what people once believed.

To die in one's sleep or to wake up blind? The story doesn't give any more details. No one ever told me which fate people were afraid of.

I don't believe in either. When I was a child, my parents were afraid that I would die in my sleep. It was a possibility, the doctor had told them, instilling them with a fear that eventually drained them of everything else. Long ago, people thought dragonflies were the heralds of witches

and wolves. A dragonfly would steal a hair from a person and hide it in a tree stump. When the tree stump rotted, the person would die. Maybe my parents had counted my hairs and found one missing.

I wasn't afraid, even of waking up blind. On the contrary, I hoped to wake up and see more, as sometimes happened. I would open my eyes and for a moment the world would be doubled. Eventually I lost the sight.

I mark the spearhead bluet in my notepad. The water in my boots no longer feels cold.

My parents have trouble tolerating my decisions. 'Is that what your life is going to be like from here on out', father asked without even looking at me, 'chasing after bugs for bad pay?' I didn't tell him that no-one was going to pay me to write my thesis. I had gotten a small grant for expenses, though. My parents always make safe choices and don't understand that that's not really choosing.

'Just be careful', mother said, not so much to me as to the kitchen lamp. I'm not sure whether she even knew what father and I were talking about or whether she was just telling me to be careful in principle. She does that often, tells me to be careful. Not about anything in particular, just in general.

Spearhead bluet, brown hawker, brilliant emerald, all just ordinary species. My day spent along the stream doesn't produce anything particularly interesting.

In the evening I sit on the jetty and leaf through the identification guide. The weather is still mild, has been for the past two weeks since I arrived. The setting sun dyes the lake water, which is still and heavy. Someone is walking on the far shore, a distant, pale shape against the dark spruce.



The shrill sound of a dragonfly landing on the jetty breaks the calm for a moment. A brown hawk-er sets down to warm itself in the last beam of sunshine touching the jetty. Its dark brown flanks shimmer.

The sound of my phone cuts through my world far worse than the dragonfly. The ringtone speeds across the water, echoing off the side of the boathouse. I can't find the phone at the bottom of my backpack right away, so I turn the pack upside down and let the contents drop to the jetty. My phone vibrates against the planks in time with the ringtone. I dream of throwing it into the water.

I do just that. It surprises me how easily the phone flies through the air, how gracefully it pierces the surface of the water. The noise stops right away, the quiet returns.

I start to slowly load my things back into my backpack. The white plastic of my medicine bottle is obnoxious and garish in the soft-edged world of the lakeshore, a desecration. With my finger, I push the bottle to the exact centre of a smooth-worn plank.

The brown hawk-er shrills into the air and lands on the bottle. It places its brown legs around the edges of the bottle top. Its wings slow their vibration and eventually come to a stop. Turquoise patches shine so brightly in the eyes and on the abdomen of the dragonfly that I want to reach out a finger and touch them.

But this dragonfly, too, senses my desire and takes flight. Its legs are still holding on to the medicine bottle, which lifts into the air. At the edge of the jetty, the top comes loose and the pills fall into the water. Eventually, the dragonfly lets go of the top. It is all that is left floating on the water.

It's better this way.

I wake up too early. I can't smell the scent of coffee that normally floods my room from the canteen downstairs. The sun is still low over the horizon, it can't be more than five in the morning.

I close my eyes again and wonder how it would feel to wake up to find I could no longer open my eyes. To find out that waking up is no longer possible. That couldn't happen.

As a child, when I was very sick, I sometimes woke up in the morning with a new kind of sight. Reality had doubled, the world showing me two alternatives instead of one. I was overjoyed. Life didn't have to be like this. Days that started with



those kinds of mornings did not end well, though. They always ended with medicine and doctors, hospitals and tears that interrupted whatever mother was saying. Days like that brought with them an inexplicable tiredness in my muscles, an unremembered moment, a tongue bitten until numb and a grave headache. My new, unexplained sight became a bad omen to my parents, a sign that their son might soon be lost in the electrical disturbances churning through his brain. As I grew up, the medicine eventually took away the alternative realities, the extra electricity, the sight. My mother's tears became silent, but remained, following me even here.

Why would dragonflies want to sew the eyes of sleeping people shut? Because they don't want others to see what they do. If all else fails, they may even put out our eyes. I'm no longer at risk.

A four-spotted chaser gets caught in my net, and it takes me several minutes to get it out. It's hot out, and horseflies circle around me. A large hawk-er has been following me for a while now. Every now and again it snatches a horsefly from above my head, withdraws to the underbrush along the stream to eat, and then comes back. Clever creature. Despite the heat, there is a strong wind. Thin strips of cloud are torn up in the sky into ever new shreds. My temples ache from the wind and heat.

There is someone standing on the edge of the pond. Their back is to me, which bothers me, and I am almost relieved when a branch snaps under my boot. I don't know the middle-aged man who turns his face towards me. I give him—his golden-

tanned face, his dark baseball cap—a nod. The man nods back, but doesn't seem particularly happy to see me.

When I feel I'm done and start back down the path, the man is still there and I have to pass him. As I do, he speaks up, 'What did you find today?' he asks as if he knows everything about what I'm doing, as if I owe him an explanation.

I leaf through my notepad. 'A large red damselfly, an emerald damselfly, a beautiful demoiselle, a downy emerald—', I read out my observations to him obediently. He listens, glances at a passing mayfly, but then turns his gaze back on me and my notepad.

'A downy emerald? What's that like?' he interrupts me.

I look at him with surprise. 'It's quite common, probably one of the more common species in this kind of—'

'But what does it look like?'

'It's a typical medium-sized member of the family Corduliidae, it's flight is uneven, it's missing the yellow spots on the sides of its face and abdomen, the male has a bipartite cersus, the female has a clear notch in the cover of the sexual opening', I list the distinguishing marks as if I were answering an exam question.

'But what colour is it?'

'Metallic, quite greenish.' The way he presses me for answers is unpleasant. I look around and hope that he will go on his way. His interest does seem to flag, he steps a bit further away and presses his eyes shut for a moment. I stuff my notepad into the thigh pocket of my trousers and pick up my net. Maybe he'll leave me alone if I look busy.

He lets me go when I nod goodbye and turn back the way I came. He calls after me, though:

'I'm looking for a dragonfly with every possible colour!'

The next morning the sky is heavy with cloud, but it's not raining yet. The threat of rain makes me anxious. I only have one more week at the biological field station, but there is a large area in which I still haven't surveyed any of the forest ponds and streams. It's useless to look for dragonflies in the rain. I decide to head out to the area right after breakfast. At least I'll be able to familiarise myself with the area, which will speed up the actual survey.

Before I have time to get something to eat, the office secretary asks me into her office. 'Your

mother', she says and gives me a look that lasts too long. I nearly have to wrench the receiver out of her hand, as if she's not sure if it's wise to give it to me. I can hear my mother's breathing on the line before I even get the receiver to my ear.

'What is it?' I ask. I look at the middle-aged secretary. Her sweater is far too warm for summer. She tightens her lips, which are already pursed from concern, but withdraws to the hallway and leaves me alone.

'Is everything alright?' My mother's voice is small and quiet. I grunt in response. 'I got worried when you didn't answer your cell phone', my mother explains. Her explanation contains a reproach, a reminder of the massive fear that my parents inhabit, that they live for.

'I just thought that, since you're all alone out there, I thought I'd check that...' Her voice breaks for a moment. It often does, as if she is bursting into silent tears in the middle of everyday sentences. As if she is touched by triviality.

'Yes?' I prompt, though I'm not really interested in her thoughts.

'I thought that, since you're all alone out there, you might not remember to take your medicine.'

Funny that she would call today of all days to ask that. Why not on any of the twenty-two days when I was taking my medicine on time. 'Yes, yes', I say, 'of course I remember.' I'm frustrated and get up so carelessly that I knock over the chair and the secretary bursts into the room from the hallway. I mumble an apology and point to the chair. The woman does not look at all forgiving, only frightened, but turns back into the hallway and closes the door behind her.

Mother is totally silent. I try to find the sound of her breathing on the line, but can't find even that.

'Everything is fine', I say, making a small concession.

I get up and put down the phone. I don't need to be watched all the time. I don't need anyone to babysit my life. Not father and not mother. I hold my breath for a moment.

'I'm fine', I say once more. I pick up the phone and get only the wailing of the line as an answer.

I park the car at the edge of a logged clearing as far from the road as I dare. The rain hasn't started yet, but the clouds are such a thick, impenetrable grey that they'll collapse to the ground if it doesn't start soon. I walk a short way down a forest trail. A car must have driven down this way

after the last rain and dug deep ruts into the trail. I pull the hood of my jacket tightly around my head. The wind has picked up, and it makes my eyes water and my headache worse. I look at my map in its plastic cover and start labouring my way across the clearing.

The first pond is in the middle of a dense wood. Among the spruce I can hardly notice the wind, but as soon as I step to the edge of the pond, the cold wind stiffens me again. Dragonflies vanish in this kind of weather as if they cease to exist.

The pond is a perfectly round, dark marshland pond surrounded by a green-red ring of sphagnum moss. Thunder booms somewhere on the horizon.

I could move on already, but step onto the rolling moss. The pond tempts me to look. One of my feet sinks into the moss and gets caught on something, perhaps the root of a long dead tree. My boot fills with water and a sharp branch presses into my shin.

There's a rustle behind me. The man, the one who was interested in dragonflies, is standing under a spruce looking at me.

'Help me!' I yell, and reach out my hand towards him.

He looks at me without moving. He is wearing nothing but a thin t-shirt, worn jeans, boots, and the same baseball cap as before. There is something very familiar yet surprising about his dark face. Eventually he reaches his hand out towards me. Not far enough right away, though. 'You have to help me, then, as well!' he says first.

'Of course!' I snap, but his firm grasp is already wrapped around my wrist, and he pulls me free from the moss so violently that my arm feels like it's coming off. I sink to my knees on a tussock. The damp soaks through my trousers up to my thighs.

My ankle is red, but feels almost normal. I thank the man. He has picked my notepad off the ground and is reading it without restraint. 'I didn't find anything today', I say. 'Dragonflies don't come out in this kind of weather. Not even the multicoloured ones.' He doesn't notice my mocking tone.

A bolt of lightning splits the sky, passes through the clouds as if in slow motion, and I can feel its crackle on my temples. The air is thick, full of moisture and electricity passing from drop to drop. The man also puts a hand to his forehead. Then there is another flash and a jolt along with it. In the flash of light the man looks pale and thin.

A dead spruce standing on the edge of the woods has caught fire. I have just enough time to think how beautiful it looks against the dark sky before it starts falling towards us. I throw myself to the ground and think I call out something, but I can't hear a thing, not even my own voice. It's as if the lightning has consumed all the air and not even sound can travel.

The tree has fallen on the man. I struggle to my feet and rush to help him.

'Damn it!' he yells. 'Do something, you idiot!' I grab the sooty trunk and lift as hard as I can. The tree isn't thick, but its branches have sunk deep into the mossy ground.

At first I think the man is just stuck under the tree, but otherwise fine. The branches have scratched him all over his body, however, and there is a cut in the middle of his forehead from the bridge of his nose to his hairline. It seems to split his expression in two. 'Are you hurt?' I ask, but the





man just grunts in response. I don't ask again. He grabs my arm, my skin pinched painfully between his fingers. I bite my lip, continue wrenching at the tree trunk and finally get him free.

He has hurt his leg. The sharp point of a broken branch has pressed a round wound and a large bruise into his thigh. Blood has dyed the leg of his jeans red. I barely manage to convince him to let me take him to the health centre.

The forest is dim, almost dark, as we walk through it. It's still not raining, the thunder is growling somewhere farther away. I have trouble seeing. Distances seem distorted in the gloom, I trip over branches and tussocks, try to see the trail I took into the forest. I have my arms around the man under his armpits. He walks unsteadily and sometimes leans into me so suddenly we both almost fall.

Luckily I find my way to the road at nearly the same spot I entered the forest. It's lighter on the road than in the forest, I can see the man better. The branches have torn his shirt to shreds, the fabric hangs off his back like wings. A paleness shines through his tan, his lips are thin and bluish.

The soil breaks away under tires of my car, but I manage to get back on the road.

'Did you say a tree fell on him?' the thirty-something woman dressed in white looks at me, dumbfounded. I nod. My clothes smell like smoke and swamp, there is an ache behind my eyes. 'You were in the woods and lightning hit a tree?' The woman seems determined to repeat everything I say.

'What's his name?' the receptionist sets her fingers on the keyboard.

'I don't know. I don't actually know him.'

She shrugs. 'Is he conscious?'

'He was a minute ago.'

'Well, let's bring him in.' She gets up from behind her desk, waves over a slightly older man dressed in a light green outfit. The man fetches a wheelchair from by the wall.

The handles of the four-wheel-drive I borrowed from the station always give me trouble. The nurses try to peer in through the windows, but they're tinted and fogged up. Come on, open! I think and yank on the handle a few times until the door submits.

The nurses stare into the car with wide eyes.

'It looks like he was able to walk after all', the woman says. The man calmly pushes the wheelchair back inside.

What if everything had been different? That's what people tend to think. They think it without understanding that 'if' isn't a hypothetical, it really exists, and new alternative worlds sprout from our world every second, though few can see them.

When I first told my father about what it's like to open my eyes and see two views instead of one, he said I was cross-eyed. 'Double vision', he said and laughed—he still laughed then, but soon they both stopped laughing when they realised that my sight was an omen. An 'aura' as my doctors taught us, but I never liked that word. 'Some people with epilepsy hear music before an episode', the doctor said, 'others see floating lights, and some just start to feel strange.' After the doctor, my parents never laughed at me again.

Father and his double-vision comment were wrong in any case. I didn't see double. I saw two different versions of the same thing. It was as if my head was a gateway to an alternate reality. Maybe I saw everything as it was and as it could have been, could have been in my reality but actually was in some other reality. Then and now, now and in the future. Or now and now—but a different now, one that had branched off from where I had really been.

My sight went away, though. The images blended into one, and I wasn't allowed to talk about it anymore. My parents thought I was cured: no omens, no seizures. I felt that everything had gotten worse. How far could my sight have taken me? I could have been a dragonfly, I could have seen everything.

But maybe now, despite everything, I'll open my eyes one day and see more than just the here and now.

The rain starts almost as soon as I pass the centre of town. The first drops fall on the windshield with lazy splashes, but soon rise to a constant drumming, fast and sharp. The drumming doesn't stay on the outside of the car. It seems to move into my head, a vibration between my bones and my brain. There is still thunder on the horizon in the direction I came from. Intermittent flashes bleach the clouds white.

When I reach the forest road, the rain has been so heavy it's turned the soil into sucking mud. My car gets stuck before I reach my destination. One of the front wheels spins to no effect, the car won't move forward or back. I leave it where it is, I won't

be getting back in it. The rain feels cold through my raincoat.

The clouds are thinner above the pond. The blue sky almost makes it through a cotton wool gap to reflect on the surface of the pond. I leave the shelter of the spruce trees and approach the pond. The rain is as hard here as everywhere else.

The man is lying at the edge of the pond. His upper body blends in with the moss, his arms are soaking in the water. He turns his head as I draw closer. Rainwater flows along his skin.

'How are you?' I ask, squatting beside him. His face has become unfamiliar. His skin is tighter and darker. There seems to be nothing but hard bone beneath it. The wound on his forehead is straight gash.

He grumbles, looks back at the water. He sits up slowly, folds his legs beneath himself, and leans on his arms like a frog or a toad. The cold has given him goose bumps.

'I can't find them', he says, his voice creaky and coming from the pit of his stomach. His eyes are cloudy. 'I know they're getting closer all the time, but I can't see them.' I look around. The edge of the forest is empty and quiet. The rain patters on the surface of the pond.

I see a dragonfly, an ordinary, large hawkier sitting completely still on a blade of grass, waiting, right next to me.

The man's head snaps up, his voice full of excitement. 'Maybe I've been looking in the wrong place!'

I look at him, not understanding at all.

'Maybe they're still larva!' he yells. 'It can take dragonflies years to grow from larva into adults.'

I nod, he's right about that even if he's otherwise completely out of his mind. I look back to the hawkier frozen on the blade of grass. It's heavy, bronze body doesn't move an inch even though water runs along its wings.

'Maybe they're here in the pond', the man says suddenly and pushes his bear arms into the water again. His pale skin looks like a formless blotch through the dark water.

When he pulls his arms out again, his eyes have become nothing but dark spots. 'I'm going to go in.'

I look at his dirty appearance and his jointed hands. There is a rumble of thunder, and I can feel the electricity tickling the back of my head.

'You're not going! I am!' I yell. I grab his shoulder and pull, trying to stop him from getting away. 'I want to see! I want to see more!'

'Idiot!' the man rasps and struggles out of my grip. The wound on his forehead looks wider than before, his tissues peeking out through the tear.

He gets a hold of my hand, puts it in his mouth and bites, so hard that his sharp, narrow teeth sink down to the bone.

He jumps in, or maybe falls, I can't tell. Either way, he enters the dark pond. I can still see his face before it, too, sinks beneath the water.

'Fool! Can't you see I'm you', he says.

The dragonfly sitting on the blade of grass waits until the rain stops. The movement of the clouds is reflected on its wings. I stare at the pond. There is nothing in the moment but the dark water, its smooth surface hammered by the rain.

When the surface of the pond is broken, the moment breaks, too. The man rises from the bottom, back first with his limp limbs dragging behind. There's no sign of the large dragonfly. I find a stick at the edge of the forest and use it to pull the body closer to shore. The man moves slowly, lightly held up by the water, but heavy.

When I manage to pull him ashore, I think for a moment whether I should try to resuscitate him, but he's very cold, unmoving, nothing more than a shell or cocoon.

Maybe I should carry him to the car. That also seems pointless. The car isn't going anywhere, and bodies don't need shelter from the rain. I try to lift him onto my back anyway. I fasten my belt around the both of us so that we're back to back, but he weighs too much. I can't carry him through the forest, this stupid, foolish man who made nothing but mistakes. I sit back down, we both do, he looking back and me thinking about what's to come.

I take off the belt and stand up. The man collapses to the ground. The rain washes over his face, flowing into his nostrils, his mouth, the wound on his forehead. My head is pounding as if the cold rain is washing over my face, not his. Lighting illuminates the sky as I look at the man's face. In the bright light, I can see something unfamiliar in the wound. The thunder doesn't come until I bend over. The lightning struck somewhere far away.

The man's skin has tightened and pulled the wound open. There is something shiny beneath his skin. I put my finger on the man's forehead and stretch the skin. The wound tears wider revealing

something black and metallic. I pull the skin further aside.

The man's head is covered by two large eyes, compound eyes. Thirty thousand ommatidia, a learned man would say. I used to be one of them. I continue to peel his head, revealing jaws with sharp teeth and short antennae. The detached skin hangs pale against the ground.

I don't have to make the same mistakes as the man. Not now, not in the future. I watch as the rain polishes his black chitin shell.

Blood flows to the ground, collecting in puddles around my feet. In the gloom it looks almost black, flashing red when the lightning strikes. Eventually the rain waters the blood down until it's invisible, carries it away in streams.

Inch by inch I peel myself, pore by pore I pull back my useless human skin with all of its disgusting hairs and irregularities, scabs and scratches, pimples and wrinkles. From beneath it, a beautiful and shining carapace emerges, black as the surface of the pond and brighter than the sky ever was. The lightning reflects off me, I am at once brass and purple, turquoise and fire. My head no longer aches, my brain is in order.

Sometime after moulting, I am finally able to open my wings. They are the colour of the sky and bright. I stretch out my legs—all six of them—and plant them firmly against the moss. I shake my antennae and open my new jaws. The rain will stop soon, and I will be able to take flight.

Last of all, I peel my new eyes, the ones that can see into tens of thousands of realities, into the past and the future, into dreams and unrealised hopes. I can see how everything could be, how there is nothing to fear, how I could have been. I can see myself and my future, the man who drowned in the pond, the boy who wanted to go elsewhere. I can see how I go home to my parents, how I never saw the man or the pond.

With my new eyes, I can see everything.

#### TIINA RAEVAARA

Translated by **J. Robert Tupasela**  
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#### TIINA RAEVAARA

**Tiina Raevaara** (born 1979) is an acclaimed author who has written short stories, novels and a non-fiction book. Her short story collection *En tunne sinua vierelläni* [*I Don't Feel You Beside Me*] (2010) won the acclaimed Runeberg literature prize in 2011. Her short story 'Ospreys' (2006) won the Martti Joenpelto short story competition. Several of her short stories have been translated and her short story 'My Creator, My Creation'—a delicately touching modernisation of Frankenstein—was published in *The Best European Fiction 2013* anthology. Raevaara's newest novel, *Yö ei saa tulla* [*Deny the Night*] (2015), is Gothic story.

Raevaara completed her PhD in genetics at the age of 26. She has written scientific articles for several esteemed newspapers and magazines. She is active in societal discussions and gladly debates her science-based world view against belief-based views.







## ANNE LEINONEN

### CONNECTING THREADS

**A**nne Leinonen (b.1973) is an award-winning author, tutor and journalist. Her short stories have been published in magazines and anthologies, and she is a multiple recipient of the Atorox prize, which is awarded annually to the best Finnish speculative fiction story.

Leinonen's science fiction novels, such as *Vivamaalari* [*The Line Painter*] and *The Village*, as well as the *Children of the Frost* trilogy co-written with Eija Lappalainen, have garnered glowing reviews.

Anne Leinonen is adept at both science fiction and fantasy. Her writing emphasises themes of otherness and strangeness, as well as the problematic relationship between the individual and society. Nature plays an important role in her writing, both carrying her stories and functioning as the stage and a metaphor for the action.

Leinonen's prose is taut. She is not satisfied with superficial description, instead leading her readers to the middle of the story's events and her characters' lives. Her use of language is also very skilled and distinctive, and she is known for her ability to write together with other authors.

Leinonen has already trained a couple of generations of Finnish writers through her literary salons, writing camps and writing guides. In addition, she has acted as a long-standing chairwoman of the Finnish Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Association.

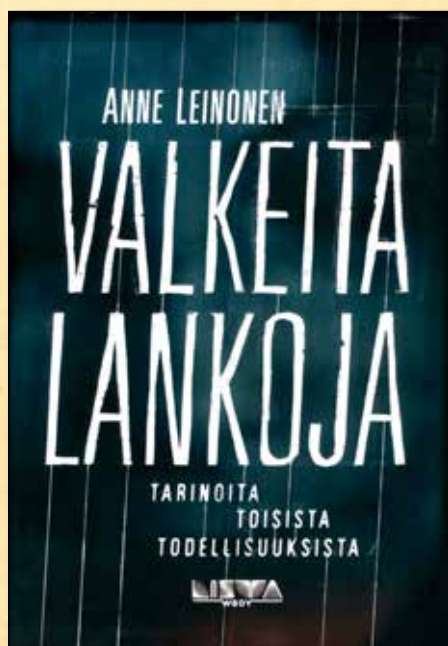
#### BOOKS, SKY AND STARS

Anne Leinonen was born in the early 1970s in Juva, a small town of several thousand people. Like many future authors, she has been passionate about telling stories since she was a little girl. The nature all around her also left its impressions on her mind. The starry sky, free of light pollution, and the forests and mires nurtured her hungry imagination.

'Often in the winter I would go skiing after coming home. I had trodden a track in the field and skied along it slowly. Slowly, because around three or four in the afternoon, the sky start-

ed to turn first dark blue, then black, and then the first stars started to come out. I had learned their names from the star chart and invented adventures for them. The names alone were enticing: Bellatrix, Betelgeuse, Berenice's Hair', says Anne Leinonen. In her Guest of Honour speech for the Tamfan convention, Leinonen said that her childhood home had hardly any books, let alone a whole bookshelf. Her love of books was kindled in the tiny school library, which had a limited selection of reading matter. The story-hungry little girl read it all, from old fairy tales by Topelius to adventure stories and classic books for girls. She proceeded at a fair clip, going through several books a night.

Leinonen has no specific role model in the field of literature, but the myths and legends of antiquity have had a profound effect on her writing and her desire to create stories. In addition to writing,





Anne Leinonen  
**FACTS**

**Born:** 1973, Juva

**Studies:** MA, Geography from the University of Helsinki

**Hobbies:** Volunteer work among writers, hiking in the woods

**Favourite childhood classics:**

E.R. Burroughs: Mars books.  
Ursula Le Guin: Earthsea series.

**Favourite scenery:** Frostbitten winter landscape and the Milky Way in all its glory stretching across the sky. Preferably with no urban light pollution.

**Favourite music:** Metal music on a very wide scale: from Black Sabbath to Anathema and Moonspell. Especially fond of melodious music with female vocalists: 3<sup>rd</sup> and the Mortal, The Gathering, Eluveitie. Special quirk: metal music sung in the Savo dialect of Finnish, such as Verjnuarmu.

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**‘GEOGRAPHY WAS INTERESTING  
BECAUSE IT STUDIED HUMANS AND  
NATURE AT THE SAME TIME’**

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young Anne was interested in role playing and developing her own worlds – sometimes on her own, often together with her childhood friend and co-writer **Eija Laitinen** (presently **Lappalainen**).

‘I thought a lot about stories even when walking in the woods. The mire was a very inspirational place for me. The Huppio nature reserve was located close to our home, and I often went there to pick berries with my family. The open landscape of the mire with its spindly pine trees was rather desolate in its own way. Only the sharp scream of a passing osprey sometimes broke the soundscape. Otherwise there was only the wind and emptiness—and all the space of my thoughts.’

After high school, Anne went to Helsinki to study geography.

‘There was something really fascinating about the environments that people operate in. I was attracted by causality and rationality. Geography was interesting because it studied humans and nature at the same time’, Anne says, explaining her choice of major.

After she graduated, however, she felt pulled towards writing and editing instead of work in her field of study – and this is what she still does. In the field of publishing, Leinonen specialises in electronic study materials, in other words, the supplementary material and learning environments related to books. Her most suspicious plots, however, are hatched in the heart of Southern Savo, deep in the forest, in a place that even GPS systems have trouble finding.

**TWO AUTHORS, EIGHT BOOKS**

Leinonen’s literary career got a jump start on May Day 1999. It was then that she and Eija enthusiastically decided to write a first novel together. The author duo figured that writing a novel together would be a natural continuation of their games together during childhood and youth.

Of course, both of them had already been writing for a while. The previous year, Anne had also received an honorary mention in the short story competition organised by Portti magazine.

Their springtime zeal quickly produced results in the form of a finished manuscript, which right away won a competition for children’s and YA manuscripts. It was only a few months later that Eija and Anne could call themselves first novelists, as their book *In*



*Love with the Seagulls* (2000), dealing with suicide, was published. This saw the beginning of a fruitful alliance. To date, they have written eight novels together, and more are yet to come.

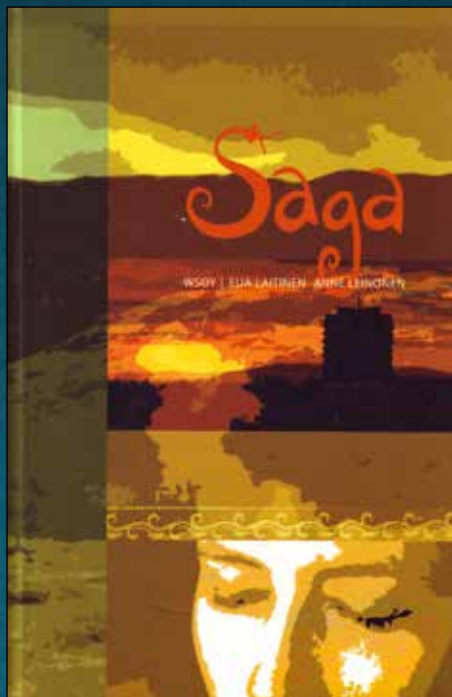
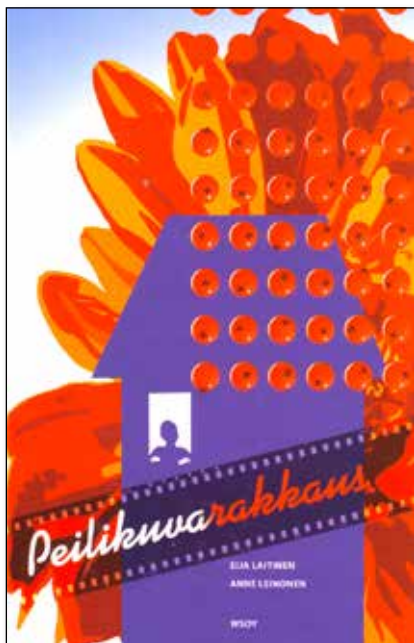
Anne's and Eija's collaborative work consists mainly of children's and YA novels. Even though their books have been branded as literature for young people, don't let it bother you.

'We aim to write our books so that adults could read them too', Leinonen explains.

It is, indeed, true that the Leinonen-Lappalainen coalition has never shied away from difficult subjects. In addition, their books contain no trace of underestimating their audience or needlessly censoring the content—features typical of many YA books. One book even has a rather bold description of online sex.

Even though Anne's and Eija's novels are mainly realistic, they often contain some elements of the fantastic. Only their debut novel and the following growth story, *The Band with Four Songs* (2001), are completely devoid of weirdness. In their other books, speculative elements either can be read between the lines or linger in the atmosphere.

The writer duo introduced their interest in the weird in their third novel, *Saga* (2003). This YA book set in Iceland mocks the format of reality television and utilises its tropes in the narrative. In this story, four young Finnish people, including the protagonist Kasper, have made it to the final round of an adventure programme organised in Iceland. In addition to the competition and a budding first love, Kasper's world is rocked by a small grey girl who bears an uncanny resemblance to a gnome from Icelandic mythology.



Anne Leinonen

#### SHORT STORIES PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH

##### '*Oliver's Book*' ('*Oliverin kirja*')

- In the collection *The Otherling and Other Stories*, Kuoriaiskirjat 2015

##### '*The Mastersmith*' ('*Mestarisepä*')

- In the collection *The Otherling and Other Stories*, Kuoriaiskirjat 2015

##### '*The Otherling*' ('*Toisinkainen*')

- In the magazine *Usva International* 2007 ([www.usvazine.net/usvainternational2007.pdf](http://www.usvazine.net/usvainternational2007.pdf))
- In the collection *The Otherling and Other Stories*, Kuoriaiskirjat 2015

##### '*The Skinner*' ('*Nahat*')

- In the collection *The Otherling and Other Stories*, Kuoriaiskirjat 2015

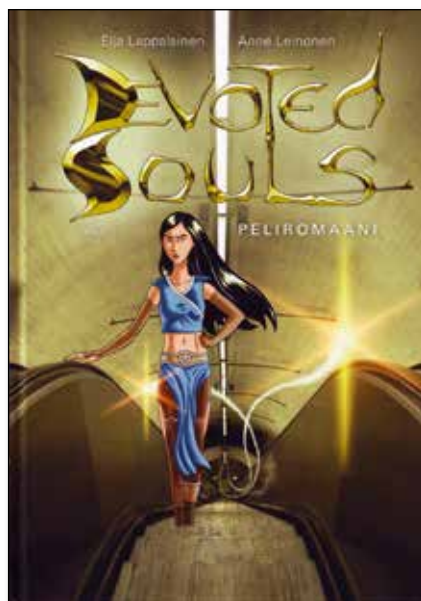
##### '*White Threads*' ('*Valkeita lankoja*')

- In the anthology *It Came from the North*, Cheeky Frawg Books 2013
- In the collection *The Otherling and Other Stories*, Kuoriaiskirjat 2015

Following *Saga*, the novel *Mirror Image Love* (2005) takes place in the small town of Kotka in two time periods, the present day and the 1960s. The protagonist is 15-year-old Emilia, who moves with her parents into the old house of a pharmacist. She finds out that 40 years earlier, a teen-aged girl named Meri lived in the same house and worked in the pharmacy as a maid. The stories of the two girls are intertwined in a fascinating way in the book. The story's greatest merit, however, is its skilful description of how similar young people's problems can be regardless of era.

These examples are enough to demonstrate that this writer twosome does not want to produce cookie-cutter books. The ladies have tried something new in every novel: different viewpoints, themes and styles. *Mirror Image Love* also contains scenes reminiscent of the imagery of horror and detective stories.

The duo's most interesting experiment is their fifth novel, *Devoted Souls* (2007). The book deals with the



world of games, specifically massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs).

The protagonist is Nelli, in her early twenties and excited about the new *Devoted Souls* online role playing game. Quite soon, Nelli's everyday life and the events of the game start to blend in fascinating ways. The book does a fine job of portraying the reality of online role playing games. The description is further supported by stylish comic strips by Eija's husband **Markku Lappalainen**, breathing life into the world of gaming. The book is influenced by the classic game *Planescape: Torment*, as well as the role playing world invented by Anne and Eija when they were young.

The duo's greatest achievement is the dystopian trilogy *Children of the Frost*, consisting of the YA novels *Children of the Frost* (2011), *Sand Soldiers* (2012), and *Machine Gods* (2013). This impressive trilogy contains elements of both science fiction and fantasy.

After a series of massive catastrophes, the remains of humanity have formed a new kind of society with

## CHILDREN OF THE FROST (ROUTASISARUKSET) PART I OF THE CHILDREN OF THE FROST TRILOGY

*Children of the Frost* by Eija Lappalainen and Anne Leinonen is an ambitious science fiction novel for young adults. As the backdrop for their story, the author duo has created a future Europe in which life is in many ways very different to today's world.

The continent has been torn apart by devastating environmental catastrophes and bioterrorist attacks, and it has been divided into areas that differ radically from each other. Human reproduction everywhere is in the hands of a special caste of birthing women. They make sure that genetic purity is maintained.

The Valley is ruled by an ecological way of life. Family communities are formed of several adults and the children are given to them to rear. The Forest is an urban community where clans control the deteriorating neighbourhoods and maintain small-scale industrial production. Heaven, as befits its name, is a site of abundance and happiness where energy is free and people study ancient technologies promising eternal life. Dangerous wastelands function as penal colonies.

The technology used consists mainly of devices developed in the early 21st century and excavated out of the ruins of the collapsed world.

This is the fascinating environment in which two young adults with special talents grow up. Marras is a self-centred but well-meaning boy who can manipulate other people's feelings and moods. His aim is to make reality into a better place to live. Flush with power, he succumbs to unforgivably nasty tricks.

Utu is a girl captivated by Marras and rebelling against the values and customs of the Valley, which she feels are oppressive. Her innocence leads her to difficulties that have ramifications spanning the entire continent. In the thick of the plot, the young people naturally discover new things about themselves and mature to take responsibility for their actions.

However, this is just a surface scratch at the themes and storylines of this rich novel. The different standards of living in the Forest and Heaven spark bitterness that is leading to open warfare.

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**'I WRITE BETTER WITH  
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IN COMPLETE SILENCE.'**

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completely different rules to those we know. Child-birth is strictly controlled, sophisticated technology is the privilege of the few, and even travelling is no longer a basic civil right.

In this world lives Utu, a young woman who grew up in an isolated village community. She sets out to search for her brother Marras, who was banished years ago. Even though the book starts out reading more like ecological science fiction than fantasy, its world contains forces comparable to magic and myths of the new age.

The simple-seeming premise of the novel – the quest, beloved of mammoth fantasies – quickly develops into a very intricate adventure. There are also strong shades of grey in the story. Separating the good from the bad is, in the end, quite difficult, because just as in real life, the nature of what is done depends on who is looking. In the first novel, the story is told from the viewpoints of Utu and Marras, and later on more viewpoint characters are added.

Altogether the *Children of the Frost* trilogy is a great combination of serious speculative fiction and fast-paced entertainment. Thanks to the deeper levels, the books are well suited for adult readers, too.

### **HOLDING ALL THE THREADS**

In addition to novels written with Lappalainen, Leinonen is a productive and award-winning short story writer. Her short story career consists of the collection *White Threads: Stories From Other Realities* (2004), the collection *Kuulen laulun kaukaisen* [*I Can Hear a Distant Song*] (2014), co-written with **Petri Laine**, and a thick bunch of short stories published in various magazines. They are very different from the joint works with Lappalainen, mainly because in short stories, Leinonen has been completely free to write what she wants with no demands from the publisher.

Leinonen's short stories are experimental and full of ideas. They are tightly written and shot through with a certain Finnishness. Leinonen has, indeed, always read plenty of Finnish prose and is constantly increasing her consumption of Finnish literature.

In addition to Finnish nature, Anne gets her inspiration from a myriad of sources: computer games, old myths and conversations with other writers. Music also plays a part.

'I write better with background music, rarely in complete silence. I always need to have a soundscape to bounce my thoughts against', Leinonen says.

A self-changing prophecy foretells that seven—or eight—people will completely remake the world. The lack of biological parenthood causes compulsive traumas and a yearning for real kinship. Mythical tales of Rego the Traveller contain not only morals but amazing seeds of truth.

On the whole, people and their feelings, hopes and realities are set on fertile collision courses in one way or another. Different social ideologies are also tested out.

The world of the novel is fascinating and carefully created. Innovative, even surprising elements abound. The book maintains a constant level of suspense and the story cannot be put down. The writing is fluid, the cooperation of the two authors seamless.

This book is a well of inspiration that is not likely to soon run dry.

– Abridged version of Toni Jerrman's  
book review in *Tähtivaeltaja* 3/2011





Leinonen is a three-time winner of the Atorox award for best Finnish science fiction story, given out by the Turku Science Fiction Society. In addition to these first place finishes, her stories are regularly seen within the top ten. No wonder, as Anne is particularly skilled at building settings and viewpoints. This can be seen, for example, in the Atorox-winning short story 'Toisinkainen' ['The Otherling'], in which a human spaceship is stranded on the planet of the otherlings. These strange creatures try to fulfil all the wishes and desires of the visitors, whom they call firstlings.

The story is told from the viewpoint of one of the aliens, who refers to itself throughout as 'this-one'. This choice of format was inspired by the speech of small children.

'I ended up creating a new way of speaking for the story. I tried out ways in which a different creature would think of, experience and observe humans in its own manner. This was not an easy process. It was hard to stick to my selection of voice, because first-person narration and personal pronouns kept pushing through.'

'The Otherling' provides a splendid sample of Leinonen's skill in creating original yet still believable viewpoints that are outside the ordinary. The story succeeds in observing humans through the eyes of an outsider and, thus, in questioning the very fundamentals of our thinking. This is Anne Leinonen at her best.

Another way of playing with viewpoints is found in the short story 'White Threads', which also won the

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## IT IS CLEAR THAT THE AUTHOR FEELS AT HOME IN THE EMBRACE OF SMALL TOWNS.

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Atorox award when first published. The story's power lies in the fragmented mind of the protagonist and her slowly opening memories.

I dare to claim that Leinonen's skill at switching viewpoints is due to her cooperation with other writers. The effect of her stories rarely hinges on complicated plots. Instead, she is an extremely skilled user of language with a strong personal voice and a rich variety of styles. An excellent sample of her linguistic talent is the short story 'The Skinner', another Atorox winner. It deals with a woman whose skin is tattooed with the history of a nation.

Leinonen could also jokingly be called a country writer—but please banish all thought of ploughmen in the field and the whine of tractor motors. What I mean is mainly that many of her stories are set in small towns and villages. A good example of this is 'Koiperhosenet' ['The Moths'], in which an isolated village is strangely attractive to people. It is clear that the author feels at home in the embrace of small towns.



### SAND SOLDIERS (HIEKKASOTILAAT) PART II OF THE CHILDREN OF THE FROST TRILOGY

'There is room for many truths in the world, as many as there are people to experience them.'

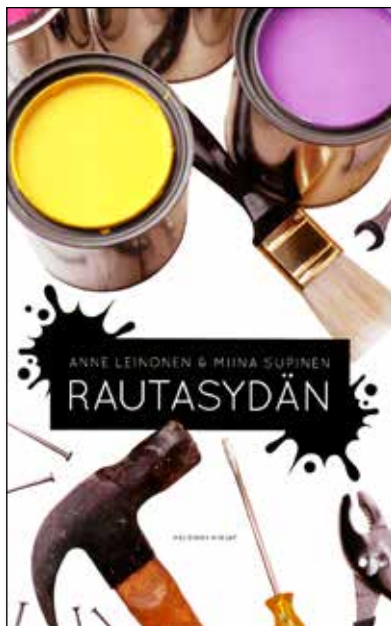
*Sand Soldiers* is the second part of the dystopian science fiction trilogy by Eija Lappalainen and Anne Leinonen. The series, which started off with the novel *Children of the Frost*, is marketed as young adult literature, but these novels can equally well be enjoyed by adult readers.

The story of the novel starts from the viewpoint of Sarim, whom we met in the first part of the trilogy. Sarim has nanomachines in his blood, endowing him with inhuman stamina and pain endurance. Sarim is guided by a strong sense of responsibility and an unshaking faith in the mysterious prophetic cube. He sees himself as a Robin Hood of his day, a helper of the poor and underprivileged.

Elsewhere, Utu, speaker to machines, travels around the world in a dragon-like ship with artificial intelligence. This ancient device is powered by

Nature in its many forms is also visibly represented in Anne's writing. Thickets, spruce copses and the shores of lakes and rivers are shown in story after story regardless of whether the world described belongs to the realm of science fiction or fantasy. Often the natural elements function as narrative devices in addition to having their own symbolic meanings. In the fantasy story 'Velhonaisten salli elää' ('Thou Shalt Suffer a Witch to Live'), the mire is the dominant narrative element. The mire landscape is both a home and a prison to cast-out witch women, the source of their powers and protection against the outside world.

Another recurring theme in Leinonen's stories is otherness. The feeling of being outside of things, emphasising strangeness, reflections on human nature, the relationship between men and women and questions related to immigration have often been raised in her short stories. In spite of these weighty themes, her fluidly written stories are always first and foremost about narrative.



## CHANGING DIRECTION

After the *Routasisarukset* trilogy, Leinonen published several adult novels. *Rautasydän* [*Heart of Iron*] (2011), is a light-hearted, entertaining book co-written with **Miina Supinen**. On the other hand, *Viivamaalari* [*The Line Painter*] (2013) is a magical novel about two women and a line painted through the city.

**Kaisa Ranta** provides a recent review of the book in *Tähti-vaeltaja* magazine:

'The plot of *Viivamaalari* starts with the disappearance of a maple tree. In the middle of drinking her morning coffee, the protagonist, a woman who remains unnamed throughout the book, realises that a maple

that used to grow in the courtyard of her building has disappeared. Only a moment earlier she was watching an unknown woman dressed in overalls, who was for some reason painting a line on the ground. Were these things connected?

When the employment resource agency tells the protagonist to work as a conceptual artist, she de-

a fusion heart and makes the adventurous girl feel invincible. She is searching for her biological father, travelling in the footsteps of her adoptive father all the way to what used to be Asia. Her return home is full of sadness, tragedy and soul-eating hate.

Huria is a healer raised by the Gaian tribe hidden deep in the desert. The Gaians devote their lives to ensuring the survival of Mother Earth. At their base, they revive plants and animals that have gone extinct and take care of technological inventions of bygone periods. They do all this secretly, hidden away from the rest of humanity, which is languishing in the ruins of a destroyed planet.

The main characters of the book want to make the world a better place to live, but their methods of achieving their goals vary—and are not always above suspicion. Humans are fallible creatures who can be led astray by strong emotions. However, they can learn from their experiences and mistakes

if they are ready to grow and forgive, to see the bigger picture.

Hard lessons lie ahead as the people of Heaven, basking in technological abundance, and the people of the Forest, labouring in primitive conditions, head for war. The act of killing hits hard in the characters' psyche and changes them irrevocably.

The plot of the novel unfolds fluently, many mysteries are revealed and the characters develop. There is love, jealousy, death, and difficult choices. However, the book suffers from the usual problems common to the second part of a trilogy: not many new things are introduced and no storylines are finished.

'Power gnaws at you from the inside. You want more and more of it, and when you get enough, only an empty shell is left. A wreck held up by power.'

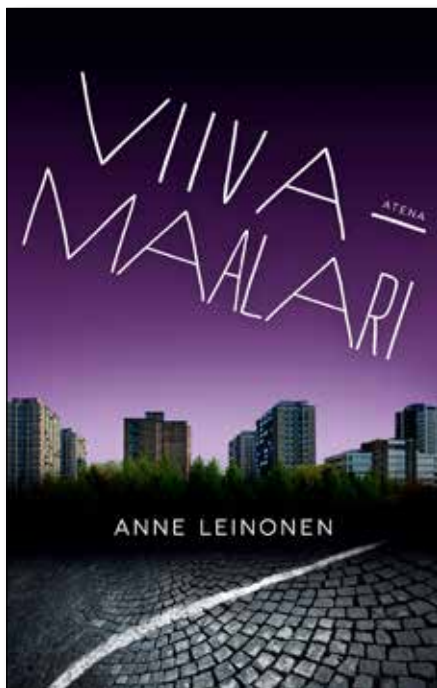
– Abridged version of Toni Jerroon's book review in *Tähtivaeltaja* 3/2012

cides to find the line painter. That woman, if anyone, should be able to guide her in her new profession. She manages to get hold of the woman in overalls, Ursula, and starts to follow her eccentric life.

The world of the novel is absurd, oppressive, and—as is traditional in dystopian science fiction—only a few steps removed from our own. The administration irregularly organises lotteries in which the cornerstones of people's lives, such as professions, jobs, homes and family relationships, are reshuffled. The only constant thing is uncertainty.

Another dash of strangeness to the world is added by Angels, who remain mysterious to everyone. Many people swear to have seen them, and some believe that they caused the dangerous crevasse in the middle of the city. Some hope that the coming of the Angels will herald salvation, whereas others fear destruction.

Leinonen's writing is tight and much happens between the lines. Very little is revealed about the protagonist, as well as Ursula, and sometimes it feels



like there really isn't much to tell about them. The characters' personalities remain secondary and mainly open to the reader's conclusions. The events are punctuated by at least seemingly unrelated stretches of narrative from the viewpoints of various characters.

*Viivamaalari* is a rewarding reading experience, but not in a traditional way. The book started to grow in my mind only after I shut its covers. Its layers acquired new shades with the passage of time. Its questions started to bother me. I was haunted by the absurdity of not only the book, but also the real world.

For me, the novel, thus, had a slow and unpredictable effect—a bit like the effect that painting the line and

meeting Ursula has on the protagonist.'

After *Viivamaalari*, Leinonen published the novel *The Village* (2014). It was reviewed by **Ella Peltonen** in *Tähtivaeltaja* magazine as follows:

'The narrative starts off in a village where people are farming, harvesting, and doing other everyday tasks. There are machines, but they are not used.

## MACHINE GODS (KONEJUMALAT) PART III OF THE CHILDREN OF THE FROST TRILOGY

*Konejumalat* is the final novel in Eija Lappalainen's and Anne Leinonen's impressive science fiction trilogy. This time, the story is told through the eyes of Onawe and Utu, already familiar from the previous two books.

Onawe is struggling on the leash of her strong-willed mother and even stoops as low as murder in her service. The young woman is constantly worried by her choices and their ethical justifications, but breaking away from her blood heritage and her mother's teachings is easier said than done.

Utu is thirsty for revenge, angry at the loss of her ancient artificial intelligence machine, and torn by her love for two very different young men. She is rebellious by nature and therefore an easy character for both boy and girl readers to identify with.

In the midst of war and chaos, both Onawe and Utu are driven forward by the hope for a better tomorrow.

In the background of the feverish action, the ambitious matriarch Zulda is weaving her own obscure webs. To her, people—even her own daughters—are only game pieces on her road to autocracy. Zulda is responsible for genetic experiments on humans that have rekindled the forces endowed by nanomachines. However, power is her only true love.

The main actors and events in this drama are also guided by a self-fulfilling prophetic cube that is shaped by the DNA of its bearer.

The character descriptions in the novel work well. Each character has a history with motives to explain their behaviour. With the exception of Zulda, who remains a straightforward caricature of a villain, the main characters have to make difficult choices and develop through their experiences. This internal struggle is fascinating to follow.



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## VIIVAMAALARI IS A REWARDING READING EXPERIENCE, BUT NOT IN A TRADITIONAL WAY.

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There are books, but only a chosen few may be read. Rather than rely on medicine, people prefer to resort to their natural fate.

And somewhere beyond the cluster of villages is the border, and at the border a wall, but beyond the wall there is nothing—or at least nothing that is spoken of. Sometimes a single wheelless flying car passes by.

The protagonist, Aalo, has turned sixteen and is becoming a man. People in the village are familiar with games, but playing is completely unknown. At least it was until Aalo finds a book about playing in the attic. Plenty of other things happen at the same time. A total stranger steps out of the bushes and befriends Aalo. Also, the fearsome laughing sickness makes an appearance.

Finally the outside world beyond the border starts to interest both Aalo and other young villagers. There are journeys into the unknown, secrets whispered in corners and, above all, suspicions of whether the world beyond the wall would have something better to offer than the narrow-minded and restrictive village community.

Another strength of the book is the world created as the backdrop for the story. It is a titillating blend of the familiar and the strange featuring ancient technology surviving from the heyday of humanity, genetically moulded lifeforms and unusual models of society. Extra points for steampunk-style airships and tentacled sea monsters!

The book is a fine end to a trilogy that could even be called a new cornerstone of modern Finnish science fiction. If this series does not conquer the young adult markets of the world, I don't see what could.

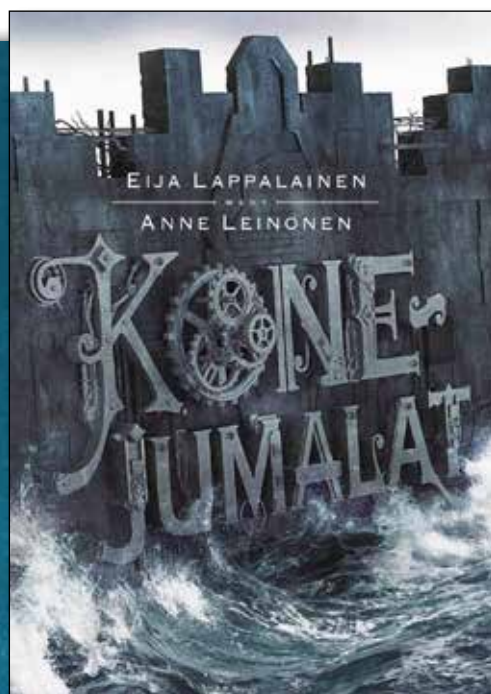
In spite of the young age of the protagonists, the book is suited for readers of all ages. The believably constructed story quickly finds its way out of the dismal, archaic community where everything, especially having fun and enjoying oneself, seems to be strictly forbidden. Leinonen's skill at storytelling grips the reader firmly.

The message of the novel seems to be that it is always worth peeking over the walls and looking for new options. On the other hand, the grass is not always greener on the other side.'

At the moment, Leinonen is busy with several projects at once. Her short story collection *Pienen rasian jumala ja muita novelleja* [*The Matchbox God and Other Stories*], featuring dystopian scenery and atmosphere, will be out in the summer of 2015. In the autumn, she will publish the novel *Vaskinainen* [*The Brass Woman*], which is inspired by Finnish mythology. Also forthcoming is a mini-collection translated into English, *The Otherling and Other Stories*, containing five award-winning stories by Leinonen.

In addition, Leinonen and Eija Lappalainen have recently co-written a science fiction radio play for YLE, the Finnish public broadcasting company. The play deals with the relationship between human and machine and also takes a stand on the ethics of prolonging life.

There are also high hopes that an animated series based on the *Routasisarukset* trilogy could finally be produced. Leinonen and Lappalainen are currently working on introductory material for the project. Their aim is to expand the project into a transmedia



– Abridged version of Toni Jerman's  
book review in Tähtivaeltaja 3/2013

## ON WRITING

'Readers and researchers are better able to comment on the themes addressed in my writing. When I write, I don't analyse the products of my brain with any constance, I just forge ahead, following my intuition as to what a good story requires. Many of my stories are kept on the back burner for years, because some parts of them just don't work, and only time can make them click together. I have compared the ideas simmering in my head to a forest full of small saplings to cherish, full-grown trees ready to fell, and rotten, decomposing trunks. Things happen at different times and sometimes at the same time, but I don't have the patience to fiddle with just one thing. I always need to be working on many stories of different lengths and styles in order to feel alive.

But when the story is finally ready, after long periods of simmering and honing, I can take a step back, look at the creature I have made and judge its viability.

My stories often feature an individual facing a community and its attitudes and expectations. The short story 'Velhonaisen salli elää' ['Thou Shalt Suffer a Witch to Live'] tells of witches banished to the mire because they took part in a war and were cast out by their community for their actions. The witches want to flee, but what is the price of escape? 'Koska he olivat liian pyhiä' ['Because They Were Too Sacred'] is the story of a world from which nearly all women literally disappeared one day. What is a world created by men like, and how can a woman survive in it, destined to live as a well-guarded reproduction machine?

The communities I describe are often small and enclosed. My closest reviewers gently make fun of me for being a village writer. 'Koiperhosen' ['The Moths'] features an ordinary Finnish village where strange things happen and which draws people like moths. There is something for everyone in the village: a story for the journalist, ground-breaking new theories for the scientist.

In these village settings, I recognise my own childhood, but the other reality of fictional worlds is not "what really happened to me"—as is easily thought in mainstream literature. I have not had stories written on my skin and then shed it; I have not changed my gender from woman to man. I have not committed suicide by teleportation or slipped to the netherworld during an orienteering competition in order to scheme myself into winning, though I am familiar with orienteering. A writer cannot completely escape her experiences, but she can always try.'

– Extract from Anne Leinonen's Guest of Honour speech at the Tamfan fantasy convention (2011)

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## USVA HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT STEPPING STONE FOR MANY NEW WRITERS.

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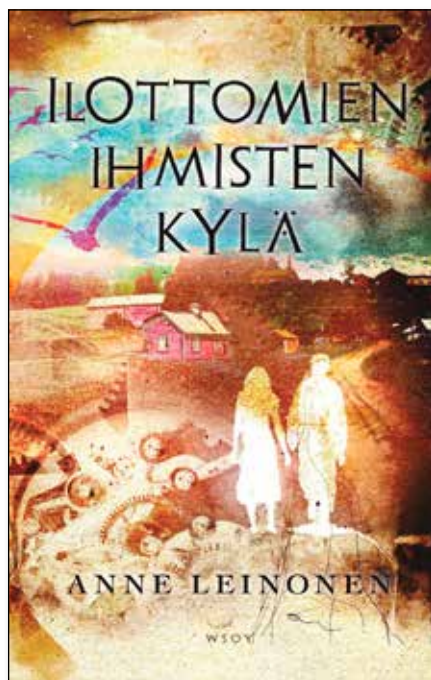
product family. If all goes well, the world of the novels will come alive again in the animated series, as well as new books and perhaps also a game.

## A WRITER'S BEST FRIEND

Being an author is only one of Anne Leinonen's many roles. Another central form of influencing people has been her profession as an editor. During the last fifteen years, there is little that Anne hasn't done to promote Finnish speculative fiction.

It all began at the turn of the millennium. As a first-time participant at Finncon, 'somewhere between pizza, beer and pep talk', Leinonen accepted the position of editor-in-chief of *Kosmoskynä* (*Cosmos Pen*), the magazine published by the Finnish Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Association.

During Leinonen's editorship, *Kosmoskynä* approached a traditional literary magazine and opened up also to readers outside fandom. New features





were a review column dedicated to short stories published in Finnish speculative fiction magazines and several articles related to writing. Nowadays *Kosmoskynä* is one of the most influential sources of Finnish genre writing and one reason for the widespread production of high-quality speculative fiction in Finland.

Editor Leinonen has continued along these lines. In 2005 she acted on an idea that she had fostered for a while: she started to edit *Usva* (*Mist*), a short story magazine published free of charge on the Internet.

'*Usva* aims to publish high-quality speculative fiction and offer writers a chance to make themselves known. From the start, the objective has been to narrow the chasm between mainstream literature and speculative fiction, which is more imaginary than real', Anne says.

*Usva* has undoubtedly been an important stepping stone for many new writers. Over the years, the pages of the magazine and its competitions have teemed with stories from numerous writers who have gone on to reap fame elsewhere, such as **Heikki Nevala**, **Saara Henriksson**, **Tiina Raevaara** and **Katja Kaukonen**.

Leinonen does not try to hide her satisfaction. She admits that these writers would probably have found their way to publicity even without *Usva*, but believes that the magazine functioned as a good testing platform for them.

But what made her want to influence the future of Finnish speculative fiction?

'The idea probably crystallised along with time. I'm typically too impatient to take the time to enjoy

things done by others; instead, I need to try out all kinds of things myself. Being editor-in-chief of a magazine was a pleasant job where I learned a lot of new things.'

### A CHAMPION OF MULTITASKING

Thinking of everything Leinonen has been involved in over the years, one has the sneaking suspicion that our esteemed author-journalist-editor-critic is outrageously utilising some forbidden temporal paradox. Indeed, she admits that she is constantly multitasking.

'When I was studying at the university, I realised that not everything needs to be done to a standard of perfection. I don't mean that you should settle for second-rate work, only that you need to figure out a reasonable level of investment. That way, you can conserve your energy. Though when I'm constantly in the middle of several projects, my writing processes often tend to stretch out.'

Stretching or not, Leinonen has already accomplished a great deal, enough to dazzle the weaker among us. As for what still lies in store, no one knows.

#### ALEKSI KUUTIO

Translated by **Sarianna Silvonen**  
 Edited, updated and abridged version of an article  
 published in *Tähtivaeltaja* magazine 4/2011.





ANNE LEINONEN

## THE MATCHBOX GOD

Felix cracked open the front door of his apartment building, checked that the coast was clear and scampered to the sandbox behind the building. He wasn't supposed to go outside. Mother would be angry. But mother didn't know everything, and there were things she didn't need to know. What Felix was doing was not for his mother's eyes. Felix held a matchbox in his hands. He gently pushed it open to check. It was still inside, the one who talked to him.

'Are we in the right place now?' Felix asked.

A colour shined out of the matchbox. Yes, they were in the right place: in the sandbox at the edge of the yard buried under pinecones and litter from the trees, next to the rusted climbing frame.

Too big to play in the sandbox, that was what mother had said to Felix. But Felix didn't care. He felt it deep down in his stomach that playing in the sandbox was something he was meant to do. Sand cakes and tunnels dug with big spades were his work. He put the matchbox in his pocket and began making piles of sand with his hands. The sand was wet after the night's rain and took shape quickly. The yells of the other children fell to the background.

'That sure looks like fun.'

Felix raised his eyes from the sandbox. For a moment, the boy thought that the being in the matchbox had sent his father back, but this man was lanky, much taller than the father Felix remembered. The man was leaning back a bit, his head at an odd angle, and there was a look in his eyes that the boy sensed was like the look mother got when she was worried.

'Can I play with you?'

The boy nodded, and the man crouched next to him. There was something else odd about the man. His face was furrowed and slack, as if something was pulling it down.

The man began making a new pile next to the one Felix had made.

'What's the matter?' the man asked.

Felix's heart nearly burst. He didn't know how to not show his distress. Sadness seeped out of his skin and stained his whole being. If left unchecked,

it would choke him and run down his throat like a bad taste. For the first time, a grown-up had stopped and wanted to hear, had actually asked him, what he was thinking and what the matter was. Normally grown-ups would just pass Felix by as if he weren't even there. Sometimes he would yell and jump up and down just to get someone to look at him, not through him.

Felix knew what the matter was, but it was too big to say out loud. He sniffled through his runny nose until he managed to snort a dollop back in and swallow it.

'I'm just playing.'

'We could go to my place', the man said. 'You could read comic books and watch a fun movie. And talk some more. Talking makes you feel better, you know.'

Felix did know. The creature in the matchbox said the same thing, that talking made things better, at least if you talked in the right way. The slack-faced man knew how to talk in a way that made the boy feel in his guts the power of words to make things better. He wanted to go with this man.

The man held out his hand and the boy slipped his own into it.

'Everything will be alright', the man said.

'It isn't a long way, is it?' the boy asked.

'No, it isn't.'

The man had a friendly smile. The same kind of smile Felix imagined his father had.

Detective Acroy trod his cigarette into the street and marched into a stairwell that stank of excrement. A bald man nearly ran into him at the door. The man didn't say hello, just glanced, or glared more like, at Acroy and rushed past. Had it been any other day or moment, the detective would have stopped the man—such a suspicious character wasn't likely to be a resident—but Acroy let it slide this time. The buzzer had barely rung when the door clicked open and a woman peeked out. The woman had a pleasant oval face.

'Mrs Dahlia? You called about a missing boy?' Acroy said.

'Finally', the woman muttered and slid the chain off the door.

Acroy gave the room a quick once-over. Pillows, clothes and bric-a-brac lay here and there, and the walls were lined with cardboard boxes. Mrs Dahlia looked to be a hoarder: everything had to be kept, nothing thrown away. Acroy's eyes began to ache. The weather had been so stifling he wouldn't be surprised if it gave him a migraine.

'He went out into the yard to play', the woman said. 'I looked out the window every now and again to make sure everything was alright. Then a man started hanging around.'

'What happened then?'

The woman blew her nose into a cloth handkerchief. 'The kettle started whistling, and I went to take it off the stove. When I came back, my boy was gone. I ran outside, but...'

'The man?'

'I've seen him before!' the woman said. 'He's stalking my boy. He's a strange, greying man. Tall and somehow... aged.'

Acroy dug out his notepad, took down the man's description. Mrs Dahlia was distressed and stumbled over her words. The description was vague. It wouldn't be enough to find the man.

'And your son's name is?'

'Felix. I'm frightened the man will do something terrible to him.'

'He won't. We'll see to that.'

Acroy got the chills. A missing child and a strange stalker made for a frightening combination. He kept that assessment to himself, though, to keep from upsetting Mrs Dahlia even more. The more relaxed she felt, the more details she would remember, details that could make or break the whole case.

The woman paced back and forth in her living room and wrung her hands. Every now and again she would fiddle with the crystals on the table and mumble a prayer.

'How old is your son?'

'Ten. But... his mind... it's not as bright as... I got him a couple of years ago.'

'And the permits?'

'All in order.'

'I'd still like to see them.'

The woman got up and dug a bundle of papers out of a chest of drawers. Acroy looked through them thoroughly. There was nothing special about the adoption, a normal assignment of a grown specimen to an adult and implantation of appropriate memories.

'Is there anything else we should know?'

The woman shook her head.

Acroy rubbed his aching temples and looked out the window to the yard. He saw his car parked

in front of the house and behind it tall apartment buildings and an idyllic meadow of wild flowers. Acroy shook his head, and the meadow disappeared from view, replaced by an abandoned lot filled with junk and a distant knot of motorway ramps. Acroy didn't care for landscaping. Life should be faced as it is. Anything else was dishonest.

Acroy had a look in the boy's bedroom. There was just a simple bed, a closet and a small table covered in heaps of the typical kind of junk that little boys love, everything from pebbles to nuts and bolts. All of the small bits of junk had been arranged in various shapes. There was so much of it that Acroy only glanced over it all. There was nothing odd about the screwdrivers and arts and crafts tools, but the contraptions built out of small metal objects were strange. Acroy picked one up and had a vague recollection that he had never been good at building anything as a child. There were posters of insects on the walls and one article torn from an old newspaper about the reservation being closed off from humans.

'He keeps busy', the woman said, 'collecting old junk and building gadgets out of it. They're not worth anything, of course.'

There was a modest media centre in the living room. The satellite connection was probably cracked, like in many middle-class homes. There were no other relatives in the framed family photographs. The kitchen was messy. The table was covered with dishes that had been left sitting for a few days and some mandarin peels had fallen to the floor.

There was one door left, between the front door and the toilet, that Acroy hadn't opened. A closet, probably. Acroy took a step towards the door. The woman called out and tried to block Acroy with her body, but the detective pushed her firmly aside.

The floor was covered in bundles of clothing, baskets filled with socks and jars. On a shelf next to some towels were small clear glass jars. Acroy held one up to the light. It contained a glittering yellow liquid.

'And what might this be?' he asked and shook the jar at the woman.

Felix didn't tell the man about the matchbox. He had learned as a little boy that there was no point in telling grown-ups about things they couldn't understand. At first, he had told his mother about the matchbox he had made and the creature inside it, but her answer had been blunt, 'Now listen here, gods live on the high plains and are big. They're bigger than our building and could crush entire city blocks if they happened to pass this way. Gods do not live in boxes.'

Felix hadn't said any more. His mother didn't believe his stories, but she didn't have to. It was enough



that he knew how things were. Mother could keep her gods of the plains, they were suited to her understanding, big enough to be seen with the naked eye. Felix specialised in smaller gods, the ones that were hard to notice.

The man asked the boy to sit down and started clattering about in the kitchen. The boy picked up the comic books on the table and wondered whether everything was alright. Mother wouldn't like this at all. Other grown-ups were to be feared, that's what she had taught him. He wasn't supposed to talk to other grown-ups.

The small creature in the matchbox chirped. It said that Felix needn't be afraid. The man wasn't going to hurt him. The man was broken, just like the boy. He could never be whole, but he could make the boy feel better.

'Can he bring father back?'

The man could help with that, too, the creature promised. It would be possible. Felix just had to be patient and everything would become clear.

The man came back from the kitchen with plates of cookies and sat down on the couch next to the boy.

'So, where were we? Would you like to tell me something about yourself?'

The boy shook his head.

The man put his hand on the boy's arm.

'We can just sit here then.'

Felix nodded. The man's touch made his arm feel hot. The man was frightening but safe at the same time. He had a piercing gaze, the kind that bored straight into your soul, the way that mother described some of the people they saw on the street. The man began to stroke Felix's head slowly. For some reason, it felt very nice.

Mrs Dahlia had kept quiet the whole way to the station and had stayed that way even when she was locked in a cell. Acroy offered her the opportunity to get an attorney or an assistant, but she refused. The search for the boy had been expanded from the block to the whole neighbourhood. It was, of course, possible that the man had taken the boy out of the city, but Acroy didn't want to bring in the national police yet. He didn't need arrogant colleagues trampling over his case.

Acroy took the evidence to the evidence locker, but before he handed the jar over to the guard, he opened it and dipped his little finger in the liquid. He sniffed his finger and licked a drop of the liquid.

'Just as I thought', he muttered only half aloud.

He went back to his office and focused on searching for reports of freaks and criminals in the surrounding areas. No one had seen anything out of the ordinary. Acroy hadn't come across a crime with

a child as the victim in a long time, and he had been on the force for over a decade.

When Acroy reckoned Mrs Dahlia had waited long enough, he had her brought to an interrogation room. The woman stared at the surface of the table.

'It would be best if you told the truth. Possession of relics is a serious offence.'

The woman just stared and held back tears.

'The silent treatment will do you no good. Just the opposite, it could put the whole case at risk.'

Acroy didn't want to bully the prisoner, but he kept his sympathy well hidden. He focused on looking through some papers and from time to time glanced at the woman, who was chewing on her lower lip.

'We have a duty to inform social services of offenders. Felix could be taken from you.'

The woman's lower lip wobbled. She seemed to be about to burst into tears, but something was holding her back.

Acroy's headache was getting worse, and his hand sought out his breast pocket. He popped a pill and closed his eyes until the medicine began to work. Having a lie-down in a bed would have been the most sensible thing he could have done, but he wanted to solve the case. He couldn't abandon the boy. The woman stayed silent, and the detective lost his patience. 'We might be able to make some kind of deal, but you have to tell the absolute truth. Right from the beginning. Somehow I get the feeling there's something here you haven't told me.'

Mrs Dahlia's mouth snapped open and she took a deep breath, 'Felix isn't an ordinary boy', she stammered the words out. 'When I got him, I noticed that he is... not all there. He's emotionally cold. He just concentrates on his own business as if the rest of the world doesn't exist.'

Acroy scribbled his observations in shorthand. Once the woman got going, there was no stopping her.

'I tried to fix him', she went on. 'I got him treatment, to make him more normal. I gave him emotions. I copied my own memories, various events and fragments. The emotion surgeon and I also collected information from family photos and implanted them in him, memories and all.'

A happy childhood. Acroy thought about his own childhood, practically an age ago now. He couldn't remember details about it. When had so much time passed that he could no longer remember his earliest years?

'But the reparative therapy didn't work. He keeps asking about his father. I've never had a husband. Why would I have created one for his story?'

'Could he have dug your memories of your father out of the transplants?'



The woman shook her head. 'The story we implanted was carefully planned. Childhood... me as his mother. The kind of life he would have had with me if he had been around the whole time. I have pictures from the birthing facility, even a picture where we're hiking in the north seeing the god reservation.'

'Constructed memories.'

'Yes, ones that would support the story.'

Acroy nodded. 'Had the template the child was made from been used before?'

'Impossible to say.'

Felix sounded like a specimen that would be exchanged for a new one under the return policy, but Mrs Dahlia had kept her boy. Acroy supposed that one got attached to children if one kept them long enough. He didn't have any experience of that himself, not even a pet that he could compare it to. Pets had been prohibited decades ago.

'Those kinds of operations are expensive. How were you able to afford all that?'

Mrs Dahlia tilted her head. They had made their way back to the reason she had been arrested. Finally, she confessed, 'I manufacture copies of relics.'

When Felix touched the creature with his finger, its wings trembled and a light could be seen for a moment on its retina. He lifted a drop of water from the toilet bowl with the end of his finger and deposited it in the box. The creature drank it up. Felix closed

the box and put it in the pocket of his trousers. Then he flushed the toilet, rinsed his hands and wiped them on his trousers, as there was no towel.

The man was waiting for him outside the toilet. He made Felix think of a wolf. He is hungry, the creature in the matchbox whispered to Felix. He thirsts for you and what he can get from you. Felix flinched, but the creature comforted him. The man wasn't a threat to Felix. Even if the man got what he wanted, it wouldn't hurt Felix. The man hunted for different things than most people.

That calmed Felix down.

He knew that something was wrong, but couldn't put his finger on it. The matchbox creature wriggled and stretched its legs and whispered that this man was old, much older looking than mother or other grown-ups. Surely Felix could see that? But why? When Felix could think of an answer, he would be a step closer to being whole.

They went out on the balcony for some fresh air. The yard was deserted, as if there was no one else in the entire world.

'Where are the others?' Felix asked the man.

'The other children?'

The boy nodded.

The man's face twitched. He knelt down.

'There are no others. There is only you, and a few others, but they're not here.'

'I don't understand. I play—'

‘They only exist in our heads.’

The boy stared at him with wide eyes. The man was playing a trick on him. But the creature in the matchbox buzzed and said that the man was telling the truth. The boy should listen, because this was the only grown-up who would be honest with the boy. The truth was a rare gift.

‘Look’, the man said and grabbed the boy’s head and gently turned it to the right. There was no one in the yard. The swing swayed in the wind, empty. The man did something else, as well. Something that made the boy see the yard differently. Now the yard was filled with the voices of children at play and a girl sat in the swing, using her hands and feet to gain more speed.

‘You don’t remember, because you have forgotten’, the man said. ‘Your mother is protecting you from knowing. But you’re a big enough boy now that you should understand things the way they are. You need to wake up.’

Acroy didn’t know what to make of Mrs Dahlia. The woman claimed to be nothing more than a small-time forger, but forged relics would not buy her a real child or modify one from a template. There had to be something about the adoption, but Acroy couldn’t put his finger on what it was.

Whatever the case, there was no denying that the boy had gone missing and was possibly the victim of a crime. Maybe he should focus on the man who had allegedly grabbed the boy. It was clear that he was a sick individual with an interest in children and was in need of prompt brain surgery and re-education.

Acroy remembered the bald man he had seen and fed his description into the database. He looked through the search results, but none of them seemed familiar. Next Acroy fed in the description of the kidnapper Mrs Dahlia had given him. Up to now, Acroy had been only been looking for habitual offenders and perverts, not other exceptional persons. There were still some psychophysical constructs left in the world. They had been tasked with caring for people’s emotions. They had always been interested in children and mentally disturbed people.

His screen was filled with reports of people, some long dead, some uncertain, some known to still be active. Amongst the actives was a blurry picture of an old, bald man who was tall and thin and had a greyish complexion.

‘Gotcha’, Acroy muttered. He stared at the figure on the screen. It was rare to see such old people. Every decent citizen altered their appearance to look young and maintained this dignified illusion until death. But these creatures were used to playing with people’s minds and camouflaging themselves

amongst ordinary citizens. You might sense their abnormality, but if you started asking questions out loud, you would suddenly find yourself unable to formulate your question or you’d just forget what you had been doing. Most people never remembered having met a care persona. You had to have a very strong mind or be particularly well-practiced at resisting mind alteration in order to make it through an encounter.

Acroy knew he didn’t have much margin for error. Exceptional individuals required exceptional measures. He put out a full warrant on the boy and notified the protection authorities of a potential high-level threat.

The man opened the trunk of his car and took out a blanket and a basket. They walked one after the other, the man pushed stalks of hay aside, and Felix did his best to keep up along the gently rising hill. The hay was as tall as a grown man, and Felix was lost amongst it. Felix let stalks run between his fingers. Some of them were sharp and left small cuts on his skin. The sun was already low in the sky, but it was still warm. Flies buzzed past his head.

‘I want to fix you’, the man said.

‘Why?’

‘It’s my purpose.’

‘What’s my purpose then?’

‘To do great things.’

Felix didn’t ask any more questions, he didn’t have to. He opened the matchbox and slipped a stalk of hay inside. The creature grabbed it. There was a rustling sound, and Felix could feel the creature attaching the stalk to its body. It grew a bit bigger. Soon it wouldn’t fit in the box anymore, and Felix would have to find it a bigger nest.

The man stopped and pointed at a tree that was just visible beyond the hay.

‘There we go’, the man said. They stopped under the tree. The man called it an ash. The spot was so high that Felix had a good view of the meadow surrounding them. Far off he could see a forest, a sliver of lake painted gold by the sun and the mountainous figures of gods, wandering like hazy ghosts.

The man spread out the blanket and set out their picnic food on top of it, but Felix was too excited to sit down. He had only ever seen gods in magazine articles and on the news. The size of them alone demanded respect. The lumpy figures strolled along the plains opening up beyond the meadow, so far away that they looked grey and their edges looked fuzzy. The heat from their bodies distorted the air above them. Birds flocked around them in great numbers, diving at insects surrounding the gods.

‘No one knows why they like this place rather than any other’, the man said. ‘People call this a



reservation, but that's not really true. If they wanted to, the gods would just walk out and crush us beneath them. But they just seem happy here.'

'They're great', Felix said and pointed at one. 'That one is moving at a funny pace.'

'It has seven legs', the man said.

'Why seven? Don't legs always come in pairs?'

'No one knows.'

Felix could know, the creature in the matchbox chirped. Felix could have the keys to that and to many other things, just as long as...

'And that one, the one whose body disappears into the clouds', the man said. 'It's so big that its head is bathed in sunlight far into the night.'

Felix could not help but admire the view.

'I want to help you now', the man said.

'How?'

'I want to hold you.'

'Mother holds me.'

'She can't help you. It's not what she's meant for.'

Felix didn't understand, and he suddenly felt like he should listen to his mother's warnings. What was it that she had said about strangers? That they were dangerous to children. Felix starting thinking about what he should do, but the matchbox creature let out a demanding chirp.

'Alright', Felix said.

The man stretched out his hand, and Felix sat in his lap with his face towards the man's face.

It felt different than in his mother's lap. Mother said she loved Felix, and Felix felt that she would do anything for him, but mother was never completely there, as if a part of her was missing that would make her whole. The man was present in a different way. He kept his eyes closed and put his arm around Felix, so lightly that the tips of his fingers barely touched the boy. Slowly, Felix began to sense the man's emotions. There was a dark well inside the man. It wasn't threatening or frightening, it was just a depth that had swallowed an entire world of knowledge. From that depth, the man now drew things and ideas, as old as the world, powerful words and projections of shapes that reached into Felix's mind once they were set free. The pieces began to fall into place in Felix's head, and he started tasting the new thoughts springing up inside him. They made him feel other things as well, feel that he was bigger and stronger and wiser. He could feel all the minute movements of molecules and was conscious of the world in more detail than before. He could feel the invisible limbs that had attached themselves to him with bonds stronger than steel. One day he would be able to use them to move worlds.

The depth inside the man told Felix about the large gods, who were interested only in things beyond the normal ken: interstellar traffic, planetary

orbits and the mathematical beings residing inside large numbers. And then he told Felix about the small gods, the ones that fit inside the micro-world of humans. They kept hidden, and when the time was right, they were born and grew ever stronger, from small, frail beginnings until they were like the giants.

Acroy glanced at Mrs Dahlia, who was sitting hunched in the car seat. Acroy had been given custody of her for the duration of the operation. The detective had tried asking her more about the grey man, but she could only talk about her boy, as if she only had a single record in her that would start playing given the right stimulus.

'Felix has always been very dear to me', she said. 'Strange, but so special.'

The migraine pulsed in Acroy's head. He had run out of pills and was trying to ignore the jagged lines dancing at the edge of his field of vision.

'Why did you take on a child even though you couldn't afford him?'

'It just happened', she said. 'I've always wanted... even as a child I always played with dolls. Or was it in my youth, when I met a nice gentleman and wanted to get pregnant. Though no one can get pregnant. Maybe the dolls after all... I don't know!'

The woman seemed embarrassed, perhaps even a bit disoriented, and Acroy had run out of sensible questions to ask. The hammer that was rhythmically pounding the back of his head made him doubt the sensibility of the whole trip. He had to be crazy driving out here alone instead of waiting for help from Special Unit.

'Felix has abilities', the woman said.

'A terrible responsibility', Acroy said.

'Sometimes he knows so much about things. More than I do.'

'Caring for a child is hard work, a big commitment.'

'I can't live without him!'

'We just have to find the boy before anything happens.'

Mrs Dahlia shut her mouth and focused on staring at the road.

When she had identified the freak's face, Acroy had dug up everything he could about the man. The men from Special Unit had been happy to help. They had experience with care personas, which apparently had a taste for human emotions and situations that provoke emotional responses. That was the reason they could often be found at movie theatres and amusement parks and festivals. Then there were the solitary ones that seemed to avoid all other humans, but stalked the moments of joy and sadness of lone drifters.

However, the more important question was what the freak wanted with the boy. It had to have something to do with the boy's deficiencies or with the fact that he existed at all. Finally, Acroy had thought to ask the mother where the boy would go to comfort himself, what was the boy's favourite place that exited him and made him experience emotions, the stronger the better.

That was why they were now at the gates of the reservation. You had to trust your instincts in cases like this.

Acroy flashed his permit to the men guarding the reservation. They hadn't seen anything out of the ordinary all day, but couldn't say why the gate was open. They seemed absent and sleepy—a clear sign that the man and the boy had passed through the guard post.

They drove for an hour before seeing the first god. I was easy to see, even from a distance. It reached high into the heavens like a tall building, its scaled surface reflecting the sun as it strolled along the plain. There was a rundown ramp on the side of the road. In the early days, ramps like that had been used to tip over gods. A god would be led off balance over a ramp so that it would trip over its own legs, which it could not see under its immense body. Once on the ground, scales the size of shields could be pried from its vulnerable stomach and made into miraculous ointments and powders. The gods didn't care, they didn't care about humans at all. They just flailed on the ground a moment before struggling back on their feet. No one understood their thoughts or why they left humans alone.

The gods did not get angry or attack anyone unless they accidentally wandered off the plains and stepped on some outlying villages. Some of the villages on the edge of the reservation had been abandoned due to the danger of being crushed, but that seemed to be the only danger posed by the creatures. The divine objects made from them were beneficial to humans. So much so that they had had to be banned. When people started winning the lottery and successfully speculating on the stock markets too often, it could quickly derail even the most stable society.

The reservation was closed, and disturbing the gods was frowned upon. It didn't stop the most enterprising people from entering the area, but the authorities took no responsibility if someone got squashed beneath one of the giants.

Acroy wiped sweat from his forehead. The gods always made him afraid of unexplained phenomena, and now Mrs Dahlia was frightening him with what she was saying. It was enough to be facing one freak that could confuse the mind with its mere presence, but not an old hand like Acroy, who had come prepared.

Acroy instinctively put his hand to his breast pocket. It was a good thing he had his protection with him. In all his years of chasing down illegal relics and forgeries to destroy them, he had made sure to look out for himself. Just in case. A piece of a claw from a three-headed god made him very lucky.

There was a rusty old pick-up at the end of the road. It probably belonged to the man. Acroy helped the woman out of the car, but felt so sick he had to bend over and retch for a moment. The icy band of the headache eventually eased enough for Acroy to be able to function again.

'You need to be careful', Acroy said. 'I can't protect you if you don't do just as I say.'

The woman nodded fearfully.

It was easy to follow the man and the boy, they had left a clear trail through the meadow. Acroy loped forward, and the woman panted at his heels.

The man and the boy were under a tree on the other side of the meadow. They were standing and looking intently at the gods walking on the horizon.

Acroy snuck closer, drew his pistol and aimed it at the man.

'Let the boy go', he said in a clear voice as he stood up out of the grass.

The man turned around and raised his hand up at his sides, 'Take it easy'.

The boy was at the man's side staring at them with his mouth open. Mrs Dahlia tried to rush to her son, directly into the line of fire, but Acroy managed to hold her back with his other hand.

'There must be some kind of misunderstanding', the man said.

The man's hand twitched and Acroy felt the movement in his mind. The freak was trying to affect him, to bend Acroy to his will. A voice said that Acroy was feeling very tired, and didn't really feel like doing much else than sleep.

Acroy's eyes drooped, it would be so nice to lay down and sleep off his headache, but when he pressed the amulet beneath his clothes, his migraine stabbed through the back of his head and cleared his mind enough for him to get a grip on himself.

'Stop!' Acroy yelled.

The man's eyes closed, he waved his hands to the side and Acroy's finger pulled on the trigger.

The gun roared.

Acroy jerked backwards.

The freak fell to his knees and then to the ground.

Mrs Dahlia screamed.

Acroy dropped his shaking arms and drew a deep breath. His heart was racing.

The boy squealed and bent over the man. The man's eyes were open, and a red spot had appeared on his forehead.

The boy turned towards Acroy, his face wet with tears. His mouth tried to form words, but no sound came out.

Acroy reached out to the boy to coax him away. 'You can come away now, everything is alright. You're out of danger.'

'Why did you do that?' Felix cried. 'He was good to me. He helped me find...'

'Mommy is here', the woman said and rushed to Felix's side. She bent over to hug her son, who was staring intently at the detective. Acroy straightened his back and holstered his pistol. He felt tired, as if he had climbed a high mountain or run a marathon. Acroy didn't like using his gun. It felt just as bad every time.

Then he remembered what the men from Special Unit had said in passing. There was a bounty for freaks. Acroy walked up to the body, bent over and took out a pocket knife. A finger would be enough. They could do a DNA test on it, and Acroy would get his bounty.

When Acroy stood up, the boy had torn himself free of his mother's grip.

'I don't approve of this', the boy said.

He took a small matchbox out of his pocket and brought it up to his mouth. He whispered something into the box, held it out towards Acroy and opened it.

Acroy smiled at the small boy's desperate game. He squinted when the sun hit the wings of the creature crawling out of the matchbox and there was a flash of blue light. The creature was small. It flew at Acroy's face, and the man instinctively swatted at it with his free hand. He would crush the buzzing little nuisance just as soon as he could get his hand in position. Before Acroy could do anything, the dragonfly was in his nostril, swallowing him from the inside, absorbing him into itself.

'Would you like some more juice?' mother asked Felix. She was sitting on a blanket and had set out all the food neatly within reach around her.

Felix shook his head. 'I'm going for a walk', he said.

'Be careful', mother said, and smiled happily. 'Your father and I will stay here under the tree.'

Mother made a fuss like before and did her best to protect her son. That was her purpose, though she didn't know it herself and would never understand the scope of the fibres holding her life together. Felix didn't exist for his mother, but she for him. Felix was wiser now, and had more patience. Mother could be who she was, make a fuss and take care of him and believe what had been implanted in her head. Mother could keep her original memories, the ones that had supposedly been used to build Felix, just as she

could keep the idea that Felix was a creation. Father—Felix's brand new and first real father—winked at Felix, because he remembered much more of his purpose, though not everything. Felix had given him that. He could still see a scar on his father's forehead, and on a whim, Felix stopped both his mother and his father. He packed up wrinkles and rebuilt things. He owed the person who raised him and his memory bank that much.

When they both started what they had been doing again a moment later, mother's hair had changed colour to red and the scar had disappeared from father's forehead.

'Don't go too far off', his mother reminded him.

'I won't', Felix answered.

When Felix walked in the meadow, he had to push tall blades of grass out of his way. A big red box hung on a strap from his shoulder. He walked for a long time, deeper and deeper into the plains, not caring that hours passed and the day became hotter and hotter. He walked until he reached the first god. It towered over him like an impassable cliff. Its smell was safe, like home, and reminded Felix of far off times and places that he hadn't experienced yet. Felix walked right up to its foot and pressed his cheek onto the lumpy surface of the creature.

Then Felix opened the box, and a creature shimmering in every possible colour unfolded itself from inside. It had developed much more quickly than Felix. Its wingspan was already as wide as he was tall, and it would grow larger every day. Felix looked at the creation with satisfaction. Why should gods be mountains towering above the clouds, clumsy and scaly, when they could also be beautiful and delicate, and they could be given wings so they could take to the sky? The dragonfly was Felix's masterpiece, and he planned to make more like it just as soon as he was able to take down the shields and blocks built around him and learned more about the universe.

Felix waved at the dragonfly as it took joyfully to the sky and went off to do things that only it and Felix knew to be possible.

The small gods wouldn't stay small for much longer.

ANNE LEINONEN

Translated by **J. Robert Tupasela**

First published in *Portti* magazine 1/2009

Reprinted in the collection *Pienen rasian jumala ja muita novelleja* (Atena 2015)



The poster features a whimsical illustration of a forest scene. In the background, there are tall, thin trees and several satellite dishes mounted on poles. A large, light-colored, cloud-like banner stretches across the middle of the image, containing the event's title and details. Below the banner, a green field is populated with numerous stylized mushrooms of various sizes and shapes. The foreground is filled with dark green, leafy bushes. The overall style is hand-drawn and colorful.

# FINNCON

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## MARIA TURTSCHANINOFF

### FROM THE SHADOW OF THE MOOMINS

What's your first thought when you hear the words 'fantasy written by Swedish-speaking Finns?' You will probably first think of Moomins and **Tove Jansson**... Maybe even **Yvonne Hoffman** and **Irmelin Sandman Lilius**. And then you might well draw a blank.

However, something is happening now, because weird tales written in Swedish are gaining ground in Finland as well. **Mia Franck**, **Kaj Korkea-Aho**, **Hannele Mikaela Taivassalo** and **Jenny Wiik** are authors to keep an eye out for—as well as naturally **Maria Turtchaninoff**, the spearhead of fantasy written by Swedish-speaking Finns.

#### FROM A COOKBOOK TO FANTASY

In 2009 I reviewed Maria Turtchaninoff's first novel aimed at the adult audience, *Arra*, in my on-line magazine *Enhörningen*. I finished the review with the words: 'Med författare som Maria Turtchaninoff ser framtiden för finlandsvensk fantastik ljus ut!', which means 'due to authors like Maria Turtchaninoff the future of fantasy written by Swedish-speaking Finns looks bright'.

Five years later, Turtchaninoff's latest novel *Maresi* was awarded the Finlandia Junior award and the author signed a three-book deal with the British Pushkin Press. Looks like sunglasses are necessary.

The success has not come out of a void, and *Arra* is not even Turtchaninoff's (b. 1977) first novel. Let's hear from the author herself.

'I have wanted to be an author ever since I wrote my first fairy tales at the age of five. Being an author

has always been my greatest dream and goal. First, however, I got myself a "real" job and worked as a reporter for a number of years before I got confident enough in my fiction writing to really invest in it. I worked first as a freelance reporter while writing, but now I have been a full-time author for seven years.'

Turtchaninoff's first published work was a cookbook, *Min mat och mammas* (2006), which she wrote together with her mother. How on earth do you slip from doing a cookbook to writing fantasy?

'Actually, I slipped into the cookbook', says Maria. 'I had done radio productions about food for a few years and my mom had done food shows for television. One day she suggested the idea of a cookbook to the Söderström publishing house and it got green-lighted. It was actually a coincidence that the



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'BEING AN AUTHOR  
HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY  
GREATEST DREAM.'

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## MARIA TURTSCHANINOFF Facts

**Born:** Helsinki, 1977

**Studies:** MA in Human Ecology from the University of Gothenburg

**Hobbies:** Reading, cooking

**Favorite childhood classics:**

The NeverEnding Story,  
The Chronicles of Narnia,  
The Chronicles of Prydain

**Favorite scenery:** Forest

**Favorite food:** I love food, it's impossible to choose one item!

## TURTSCHANINOFF ONLINE

mariaturtschaninoff.com  
turtschaninoff.blogspot.fi  
twitter.com/turtschaninoff  
facebook.com/maria.turtschaninoff  
fantastiskpodd.se

cookbook was released before my first published fiction as I had already at that point been working on my first novel for a long time.'

That first novel was a children's book, *De ännu inte valda* [*The Unchosen*] (2007), which is the only one of Turtschaninoff's novels that Tammi Publishers has not yet published in Finnish. The story tells about two half-sisters who live with their aunt who is an author. Together they capture a muse and travel with her to the world of muses.

Turtschaninoff got into fantasy naturally.

'I read a lot of fantasy as a child without realising it was a specific genre. My favourite authors included C.S.Lewis, Michael Ende, Diana Wynne Jones, Lloyd Alexander, Tove Jansson and Irmelin Sandman Lilius. A bit later I discovered J. R. R. Tolkien.'

'These days I've got the habit that when I get excited about an author, I immediately read all of their works. Then I get excited about the next author. Ursula Le Guin is, however, a constant favourite of mine.'

'As I was working on my first novel I did not consciously gravitate towards a specific genre. But everything I have written is fantasy, one way or another. These days I feel strongly that I have found my place, the genre where I belong. I hope I will never find it too restricting, but instead, if needed, I will be able to restructure the fantasy genre to be exactly what I want and need.'

The publishing house accepted fantasy without qualms.

'I have never sold an idea for a novel to a publishing house. I have always approached them with a complete script. There has actually never been any discussion about my choice of genre.'

## MYTHS AND LEGENDS

The children's novel *Du ännu inte valda* was followed by a novel clearly aimed at older readers, *Arra – legender från Lavora* [*Arra – Legends of Lavora*] (2009). Turtschaninoff has returned to its world in nearly all of her later works.

Turtschaninoff's signature style can already be clearly seen in *Arra*. The book mixes credibly that which is known and that which is unknown. Magic is a part of the whole, not the entire reason for the story. In addition, the characters are believable and anything but black and white. The whole thing is knit together with beautiful language which suits the story. The result is first-class literature and good fantasy, which is a far cry from your average 'saving the world' fantasy of which there are thirteen to a dozen anyway.

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## 'IT IS OBVIOUS THAT MY VALUES AFFECT MY TEXTS.'

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*Arra* tells the story of a poor, mute girl who grows into an expert tapestry maker. Thus summarised, the story does not seem very special. But when you add a Nordic-feeling world and a musical form of magic which brings to mind the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, the result is a novel which should speak to all readers of fantasy, regardless of their age or gender. Especially since the whole cake is iced with fascinating, multidimensional characters.

Turtschaninoff's next novel, *Underfors* (2010) takes place mostly in modern-day Helsinki. The fantasy elements swim into the story when it turns out that trolls, gnomes and other creatures from our mythology actually do exist. They have just gone underground to hide from people. Turtschaninoff also draws from Finland-Swedish troll stories and the end result is a most tasty concoction.

Two years later Turtschaninoff returns to the world of *Arra* in her novel *Anaché – myter från Akkade* [*Anaché – Myths from Akkade*] (2012). The novel is not a direct continuation from *Arra*, but instead an independent novel which takes place in a different environment and culture from its predecessor. *Anaché* looks at the life of a young woman in a patriarchal nomad society.

Turtschaninoff's Finlandia winner, *Maresi – krönikor från Röda klostret* (2013, English working title *Maresi – The Red Abbey Chronicles*) is also an independent novel set in the same world. This time the story takes place on an abbey island which only women can enter. Does this seem familiar somehow? That's right, Turtschaninoff got her inspiration for the Red Abbey after seeing a photograph exhibition about the Autonomous Monastic State of Mount Athos in Greece, which is closed to women.

Last year *Maresi* was awarded the Finlandia Junior Award. Turtschaninoff was touring schools in Norway when she heard about her victory.

'I got the news in the middle of the tour. The Norwegians did not consider winning the award any reason to discontinue the tour, so it was not certain that I could travel home to receive the award. In the end I was able to do it.'

In the acceptance speech for the award, Turtschaninoff used the 'f-word.' When I ask her about it—it being feminist literature written for girls—she begins by quoting Le Guin.

'I will quote Le Guin to clarify my position: "I don't speak message. I speak story." By no means do I sit down and decide to write a feminist novel for girls. But it is obvious that my values affect my texts. Especially in fantasy, a feminist take on the story can be simply writing a novel which tells basically just about women in contact with other women.'

### BEING AN AUTHOR

It is difficult to say anything exhaustive about the impact of the Finlandia Junior Award just yet.

'I have no way of guessing how the award will impact my writing. Because I sold two yet-to-be-written novels to Pushkin Press, I now have actual deadlines for my novels for the first time. That has, naturally, increased the pressure somewhat. I try not to think about it actively and just write as usual—I keep my focus on the story I'm working on at the moment. Sometimes it's difficult, but I believe my solution usually works.'

'The award has made my life more difficult in a sense that I get a lot of more requests for appearances



and interviews, which of course take time away from writing.'

Turtschaninoff's three book deal with Pushkin Press does not include her older books. Instead, in addition to *Maresi*, the novels published in English will be a prequel and a sequel to *Maresi*. At this point the trilogy has the working title of *The Red Abbey Chronicles*.

Turtschaninoff is one of those authors who have always been direct about not talking about their future books. The industry is, however, pushing the author hard.

'The publishing world is increasingly moving towards the direction where you need to talk about books in advance. I don't like it, as it affects my writing, but it is something I will have to learn to live with. On the other hand, it is a completely different thing to write a synopsis for one's agent than to discuss unwritten work with others. Discussing means receiving reactions and comments from others, and I do not want those because they impact my writing far too much.'

*Maresi* was the first of Turtschaninoff's novels to be published in Finland in Finnish and Swedish at the same time. This is also her first novel which has

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**'I THINK I HAVE AS  
MANY ADULT READERS  
AS I HAVE YOUNG.'**

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a publisher in Sweden. Contrary to what one might imagine, it is not easy for Finland-Swedish novels to break through in Sweden.

'It is very difficult for Swedish-speaking Finns to break into the Swedish book markets. The interest in Finnish novels written in Swedish is non-existent, and if a book has no publisher in Sweden, it will not be sold in local bookstores.'

'So even though my previous novels had got good reviews in Swedish newspapers, they are only sold in online stores and SF-Bokhandeln bookstores. *Arra*, *Underfors* and *Anaché* have, however, managed to sneak into Sweden through the backdoor, because they were the books of the month in the Barnens Bokklubb children's book club.



### **MARESI - THE RED ABBEY CHRONICLES**

The Red Abbey is a community and sanctuary of women and girls where everybody can develop themselves depending on their aptitude. Young Maresi has already noticed she's interested in books and reading, learning new things. One day a scared young girl, Jai, arrives at the abbey. Slowly it is revealed that Jai is fleeing her father's wrath.

In the midst of wild events, the resourcefulness and courage of Maresi and her companions are put to the test. They have to unite their strength and stretch themselves to the breaking point in order to defend a person's autonomy.

Turtschaninoff once again deals with grand themes, such as self and finding oneself and one's calling. And when everything has been achieved and the bright future looms in the future, one must leave one's own comfort zone in order to work for others.

– Abridgement from the publisher's text



Publishers and bookstores classify Turtschaninoff's novels as YA literature. The author herself does not see much of a difference between a young adult and an adult novel.

'I think I have as many adult readers as I have young. At least the feedback I have received from *Maresi* has come almost equally from young and adult readers.'

'When I'm writing, I don't think that I'll be writing a specifically YA novel. For example, the novel I'm right now working on deals with old women. It will be interesting to see how the publishers will classify it.'

### MANY WAYS TO WRITE

There is no single trick to writing, and Turtschaninoff is not one of those authors whose books always come about the same way.

'My writing process varies a great deal. This is partly due to the fact that each book grows in its own way, but also because my living conditions change constantly.'

'Writing was totally different before I had a child. It was also completely different to write alongside a full-time job. Right now I work roughly like this: After the child has been dropped off to day care, I use the morning to write or work on my writing some other way. Sometimes it means editing texts, sometimes making travel expense compensation claims, answering e-mails and so on. If I write new text, I usually have a daily goal, for example 1000 words.'

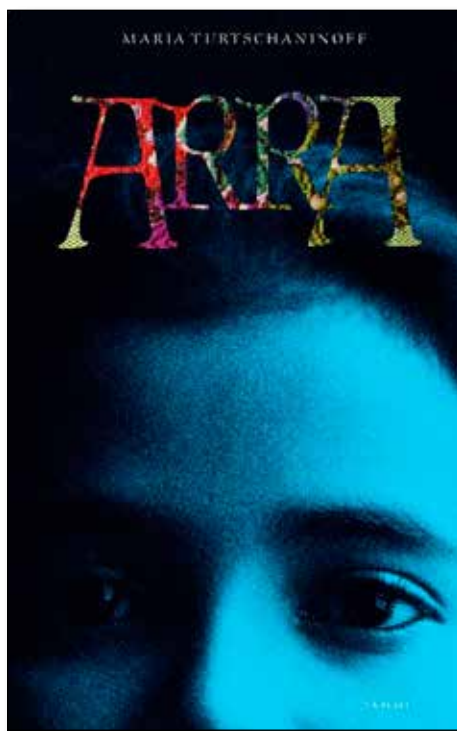
'After lunch I do something else related to writing, such as background research, writing a blog or columns or something like that.'

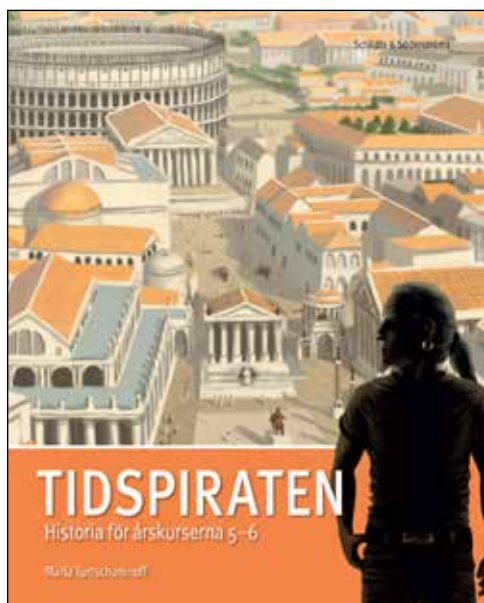
'At the moment I work from home, but every now and then I go someplace else to write.'

In 2013 Schilds & Söderströms published a history textbook *Tidspiraten* written by Maria Turtschaninoff. As the name 'Time pirates' might indicate, it is a piece of fiction where history is taught alongside adventure.

'Writing this book was very different from my usual novels. It was more like journalistic writing. First I did a lot of background research and interviews. After having written each chapter I showed it to the other people involved in the project even though the text was not yet polished—this was a whole new experience for me. Also, the factual content was more important than the style, even though it was a work of fiction. In the midst of all this, I still needed to think about the story and its characters.'

Seven years as a full-time writer is a great achievement in a country where books are not sold by the millions.





‘I’m sure somebody in Finland lives off the profits of their books, but I cannot do it as I write fantasy in Swedish. My market is rather small. You must also consider that royalties are only paid once a year.’

‘There are two simple reasons why I’m able to write full-time: I have been lucky enough to get grants from various sources and my expenses are very modest. Including the grants, my annual income is about the half of what, for example, teachers earn.’

In addition to Finnish, Turtschaninoff’s novels have been translated into Danish and English. *Maresi* is also coming out in German. The author is happy

with the collaboration with the translators and especially gives praise to the Finnish translator.

‘Collaboration with **Marja Kyrö** works excellently. I get to read the translation beforehand and she always has a bunch of questions for me. My stories include a lot of made-up words and names which we need to discuss.’

Turtschaninoff is in contact with her readers especially through her blog.

‘My blog started out as a marketing channel. It did not take many months for it to transform into something quite different. I work alone, but I have author colleagues, so the blog and Facebook work almost as my break room. I get to talk about writing with the people in the same field, and that gives me a lot. Of course the blog is also a channel for me to contact my readers.’

## FANDOM AND PODCASTS

Turtschaninoff did not run into fandom until after her first books had been published.

‘When I started writing I didn’t know anything about fandom. I’m still a fandom-newbie, and in addition to Rasecon and Fantastik I’ve only visited three large cons: two Finncons and a Swecon. I like going to conventions, and I will be going to Archipelacon in the summer, but sometimes I feel like an outsider among the active fans. They know so much and have knowledge of various types of fantasy in a way I do not. Just because I write fantasy doesn’t

## TURTSCHANINOFF AND IRMELIN SANDMAN LILIUS

Maria Turtschaninoff has often mentioned Irmelin Sandman Lilius as one of her greatest inspirations. Some time ago she got a chance to meet her literary idol.

‘I was completely dumbfounded! Usually I’m very talkative, but then I could not get words out of my mouth.’

‘It is hard to define what spoke to me in Sandman Lilius’s work when I was child, but quality never fails to impress. It was, of course, a great experience to realise that fantasy does not have to be Anglo-Saxon and that events can take place here, in

Finland. And that the main characters can be just regular girls, not just hobbits.’

‘As an adult I obviously can see many other things in Sandman Lilius’s works. How she creates the myths of the Swedish-speaking Finns of the coast. And how she works dialects into the story and gives them a similar magical quality to an invented elven language. Or how she creates amazingly interesting female characters. On top of all that, she also demonstrated to me that it is possible to write fantasy in Swedish.’

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**‘THE SHORT STORY IS AN  
EXCITING, BUT ALSO QUITE  
A NEW FORMAT FOR ME.’**

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mean I’m an expert in it! I write fantasy because I love it and because it is the best form of expression for me.’

‘I’m not very familiar with Finnish fantasy because I read Finnish slowly and very little Finnish fantasy has been translated. Right now I’m reading *The Memory of Water* by **Emmi Itäranta** in English. I try to also keep track of Nordic science fiction and fantasy, and I’m a huge fan of **Karin Tidbeck**. Next I’ll try to read some Norwegian science fiction.’

‘I’m also actively in touch with other Swedish-speaking Finnish and Swedish speculative fiction authors. I also have some connections to Norwegian and American authors.’

‘It is hard for me to take part in Finnish anthologies, writing competitions and so on because I do not write in Finnish.’

Even though she is relatively new to fandom, Turtchaninoff has already managed to create something new for the Swedish language speculative fiction fandom: a joint podcast with Finnish and Swedish authors.

‘Fantastik podd was born in the 2013 Swecon, where a bunch of Finnish and Swedish authors started talking about a podcast which would cross national borders. I had already thought about launching a science fiction and fantasy podcast for a while so I was happy to take part in the collaboration.’

‘Quite quickly we divided ourselves into four geographic groups: Finland, Swedish west-coast, Malmö and Stockholm. Collaboration has been fantastically smooth. There’s always somebody who’s willing to do what needs to be done: homepages, illustration, roll-ups, fair appearances, iTunes, jingles and hundreds of other things. All have been implemented beautifully.’

‘It is especially lovely for an author who is a Swedish-speaking Finn to be a part of such border-crossing collaboration—I can’t think of another such Finnish-Swedish podcast.’

‘Personally, this also offers me the opportunity to nerd out about my writing in company who is as excited about it as I am. It’s also great to be a part of a



larger network. The Finnish-Swedish book world just isn’t that big.’

Turtchaninoff is at the moment known for her novels, but short stories are not completely alien to her either, as the story ‘Woven Flight’ in this magazine demonstrates.

‘For me, the novel is a more natural form. I have written some short stories, but only published a few. The short story is an exciting, but also quite a new, format for me. I’m usually quite verbose, and that makes short stories challenging, but I have always liked challenges. I also like how a short story forces you to think in a new way. I feel I can use a different voice in short stories than in novels.’

‘This short story published here was born a few years back, directly in English. I have not written much in English, even though it has been my home language for a number of years now as my husband is American.’

‘I have also incorporated many characteristics of the characters in ‘Woven flight’ into the novel I’m working on at the moment.’

**BEN ROIMOLA**

Translated by **Marianna Leikomaa**  
First published in *Tähtivaeltaja* magazine 2/2015





MARIA TURTSCHANINOFF

## WOVEN FLIGHT

I am the King's dream-weaver. I am tasked with crafting the most beautiful, sensuous dreams for his nights. I come from a long line of weavers. My mother could weave dreams so vivid that the dreamers did not know what was real life and what was the dream. They would wake, fumbling for reality, confused for hours after. She could have the dreamer fall in love with someone they had never met. She could make them feel real sorrow, real pain, real joy.

My grandmother won her husband with the dreams she wove him, when he was still just a rich customer in her parlour of sleep. What a place that parlour was! Beds of silk and velvet filled the main room, which was partitioned with painted screens in reds and gold. There was plenty of space for the dream-weavers to stand at the head of each sleeper. I was allowed to play in the parlour when it was empty, and again as soon as all the dreamers were asleep as long as I was very quiet. Grandmother showed me how she held her hands, and how she twisted the memories of the sleepers, and how she bound the dreams to their brows. I was a fast learner, she said, faster even than my mother. I had not her skill for detail, but I could find the memories in the sleepers' minds with ease. It was my small, deft fingers I think, they could pry unnoticed. I loved the scent of incense in that parlour, the ceiling of blue tiles and the smell of rose soap as my grandmother leaned over my shoulders, holding my hands and softly exclaiming at the detail of memory I had extracted.

I have no parlour now, no customers. I have one master: the King. I am his slave. I was taken by the slave-hunters he sent out some years ago to the shores of my country. They knew nothing of dream-weavers: I was taken for my silky skin and young breasts. When I was brought to the King's bed he thought me a conjurer at first. What we do is not conjuring, it is merely the shaping of memories that already exist in the minds of the dreamer. We cannot put anything there that was not there already. Even if you feel pain in a woven dream you will wake

with no injuries. You cannot harm a dreamer, so I was taught.

As the King discovered my skill I rose from concubine to dream-weaver, and other girls, younger and more supple than me have taken my place in the King's bed. Ever younger. Today a girl was brought before the King. She was the same age as my little sister was when I was taken from home and hearth. She was stripped naked, as they always are, and she barely had the buds of breasts on her bony chest. A real man would have found her to be what she was, a child, and sent her away. But the King swallowed hard and stroked his thighs with moist palms and called her a beautiful woman. The girl quivered and was silent and reminded me in every way of a mouse. A mouse, and my sister Sinna, with her large dark eyes and dimples. This girl had dimples, too. I could tell. The sunken cheeks hid them now but there were traces of them in the fair skin.

I am formally employed to care for the King's concubines. He does not want anyone to know my skill: he wants to be the only one with a dream-weaver. He is jealous of his treasures and he fears that others would sail the great sea and steal away more of us.

I fear it too. So I keep my silence, and tend the girls. I soothe their fears as best I can, and tell them what to do, and show them what pleasure is with my hands and my lips and my tongue. The King does not like them to be afraid, he lacks that particular streak of cruelty. So I teach them.

But this girl. She was a child. I could not touch her in that way. And she was so very afraid. I helped her bathe, and the two of the youngest concubines, Lerthe from south Valleria and Doria of the bird people, washed her long golden hair and dried it and brushed it until it shone. They chattered and exclaimed over her beauty, but all through it she remained silent. When she was dressed in a robe of pale green silk, the colour the King wished to see her in, I called her over to me by the fire. The room was pleasantly warm, but she was shivering. I took her in

my lap as a mother would, and held her head to my breast and stroked her head. I saw my hands in the light of the fire, on the locks of her fair hair. They were no longer the hands of a young woman. I have been here long. How long? I have lost count of the years.

I wanted to speak to her, to calm the shaking in her limbs, but I had no words. Anything I could have said would have been a lie. Even holding her, making her feel loved and safe, was a lie. There is no safety here. All love is an illusion. The King discards us as he pleases and there is no love lost between the concubines as they fight each other for the favour of the man they hate.

The bedroom guard entered the room unannounced, as he always does, and pointed to the child in my arms. I kissed the top of her head, as a mother sending off her child to play.

It was the sight of her thin back that did me in. As she stepped over the threshold she straightened her shoulders and lifted her chin.

I cried then, for the first time since I was stolen from my family, and the tears would not stop. The girls were startled and then afraid, and they left me alone with my grief.

But when the bedroom guard brought back the girl my tears had dried and I sat and read by lamp-light. I did not look at the girl. I heard her cry, long, heart rendering sobs, but I did not meet her eye. I closed my book and followed the guard out of the women's chambers.

'The King is much displeased', said the guard. 'I think he will not keep her.'

This meant she would be sent to some nobleman or other, as a gift. I did not think of this as I walked the familiar corridor that led to the secret door to the King's private rooms. I focused on the task at hand. I feared it might be my last.

Maybe I wanted it to be.

The King was sitting on the edge of his bed, robed in crimson silk and with a goblet of red wine in his hand. He had a furrow in his brow and did not look up as I entered.

'You should have prepared her better', he said at length.

'Yes, my lord.' There was no use in replying differently. 'Forgive my inadequacies.'

He sighed and set the goblet on a bedside table. 'Tonight I wish to fly. Not too high, mind. I want to see stars and strange lands. I want to feel wild and free.' He looked wistfully around the gilded chamber. 'Like an eagle. With sharp eyes and claws.'



I bowed low to the floor. 'As you wish. Does Your Highness wish for any scents? Tastes?'

'The taste of the wind', said the King. 'The scent of the sea.'

'It will be done.'

The King settled back on his pillows and I blew out all lamps and candles save one right by the bed. Then I placed myself at the head of the bed and waited.

I have waited in that way by the head of the King's bed so many nights. At first I was terrified. I had never practiced dream-weaving on my own. My grandmother's soft hands had always guided me. It had taken me long to reveal my gift to the King, because I feared he would ask me to weave for him, and I did not think I could. But I soon saw it was my only way out of his bed, out of his embrace, his attentions. And I could bear them no longer. So I told him, and he laughed and asked me to prove myself. He asked to dream of his dead mother—a difficult request, or so he thought. But it was an easy one: the thoughts of his mother were on the surface of his mind and presented no challenge to find. I took the most beautiful ones, the ones that shimmered



before my second sight in golds and soft pinks, and braided them together with trembling hands and bound them to his brow, just as my grandmother had taught me.

In the morning, the King appointed me his dream-weaver, and I have not shared his bed since. I was given privileges beyond any of the concubines; dresses to my heart's content, sweets and wine, and, to me the most precious gift, free access to the royal library.

Yet I had not removed myself so far from the King's bed. I stood at its head every night as the concubines had left it, weaving beautiful dreams for the sleeping regent.

This night I stood silent and listened to his breathing. It took some time for it to quiet down. No doubt the disappointment of the new girl weighed on his mind. But not so heavily that he did not find sleep in the end.

As soon as I was sure he was fast asleep I began looking for the right memories. If it was flight he wanted, I would give him flight. I found memories of high places, of wind on his face, and memories of sailing on stormy seas. I twisted and wove them together and brought the dreaming King up in the air, sailing over his kingdom like an eagle, free and proud. I made more effort with the details than ever before, and tried to do as my mother had taught me. I focused on a few details: eyes watering in the wind, cold misty clouds against the skin. I wanted the dream to feel as real to the King as a hunt through the royal forest. He must know no difference. My hands were shaking from the effort. I sent him out over the sea: dark and great under a night sky. I could see the dream taking effect as the King smiled.

Then I brought up a great wind, from one of the storms the King had experienced as a young man, and I put all the fear he had felt then into that wind. I knotted it to the dream with hard, tight knots. The King started tossing his head in bed, and beads of sweat were forming on his brow. I was afraid he would wake. I had to make him think the dream to be reality, so there would be no reason for him to wake, no impulse to pull him up from the depths of sleep. I added as many details as I could: the wind ruffling the feathers, the rushing noise in his ears, the gusts throwing him this way and that, so that he did not know which way was up and which way was down.

Now I looked for every memory of fear I could find in his mind. I wanted it to be his own fear that

brought him down. Not the dream-wind beating at his wings, but all his own failings, all his own horrors, from childhood to manhood. I fed them to the wind: the fear of the dark, the fear of his father, the fear of betrayal, the fear of loving and losing. I took pleasure in weighing down his eagle wings with all this fear, I admit it freely. I thought of all my nights in his bed, and of the young girls that had come after me. I thought of the indifference he showed us all: not outright cruelty, but what we thought or felt simply did not matter. I saw the fear on his face now, I saw him feeling what we all have felt, but a thousandfold.

I almost cried out with joy when I found the most powerful emotion of them all: the fear he had felt when he saw his mother die. I tied this heavy memory to his dream with my most beautiful knot.

I felt his dream-form falter once, then twice. The second time it did not right itself again. I hurtled the fear of his own death at him and he fell like a rock. I tied all the fears together, as hard as I could, and I let them fall with him.

The body in the bed before me jerked. He did not wake.

He drew one, shuddering breath. Then all was still.

I stood motionless at the head of the bed. I did not know what to do. The body did not move or breathe.

I did what I do every night. I exited the secret door, and there was the guard. He escorted me without words back to the concubines' quarter. I undressed and went to bed.

I dreamed of my grandmother's dream parlour, of rose-scented soap and gentle hands, of my little sister's dimples.

They are about to hang me now. I wait in a cell in the northern part of the castle. I care not: I dream of my home every night, for the first time since I came to this country. I know I will keep dreaming.

But my guard might fall asleep. And if he does, I will weave him a dream of freed slaves, of faraway countries with beautiful women and conjurers. Maybe it will work. Maybe he will set me free. After all, I am a skilled dream-weaver. I have killed a King.

MARIA TURTSCHANINOFF

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PASI ILMARI JÄÄSKELÄINEN

## THE COINS OF MORPHEUS

Lilian is sick  
Anton asks whether his little sister is going to die. Mother doesn't seem to hear, she just repeats the question over and over. Father hears and says that everyone could die at any moment, and that it's better not to talk about death to keep bad things from creeping into the house.

At night, Anton can't sleep. He watches Lilian, who is asleep on the other side of the nursery. Her chest moves up and down. You can't see it unless you look very closely and hold your own breath. Her pale face is tense.

Lilian looks like a withered apple.

Anton sneaks across the room and leans over Lilian. There are germs in the hot air she's breathing, Anton smells them and hears them rustle. They bump into his face and tickle his skin and try to get in, but he is too strong for them and they know it.

He wants to catch them all, seal them in a jar or squash them to death. Instead, he settles for blowing them further away. The current of air sends them flying, and maybe some will get lost and not find their way back to his little sister.

It's dark, but Anton sees a bright white mark on his sister's forehead. It came from the iron locomotive Anton flung at Lilian's head. The wound has healed, but the scar will never go away.

Anton has a great-uncle who lives on the other side of the world. All they know about him is that he's a 'restless adventurer' like father once said.

It's been ten months since Anton's last birthday. A couple of days before his birthday, a package arrived from his great-uncle. Everyone was amazed, especially father. Father said he thought

that great-uncle had died years ago. Father couldn't understand how great-uncle knew about Anton, because great-uncle hadn't kept in touch with anyone.

Inside the package was an iron locomotive and a note that said 'Happy birthday, Anton!'

It wasn't some plastic toy, but a hand-made model, 'an incredible and unique object', his father said. Anton slept many nights with the locomotive under his arm. It was black and heavy and so wonderful that Anton couldn't stop looking at it. Lilian nagged to use the locomotive in her own games. Anton didn't want to lend it to her. Lilian whined, insisted and tried to blackmail him.

Finally, Anton lost his temper.

He shouted, 'Here, take it then!' and flung the locomotive towards his little sister. He knew he had done something stupid when everything seemed to be happening as if in a slow-motion movie. The locomotive flew in an arc towards Lilian's braided hair. Anton tried to shriek a warning, but by then the locomotive had already hit Lilian's head, split it open like a melon and splashed blood everywhere.

When his sister began screaming, everything started moving faster than normal.

Lilian was taken to the hospital. Luckily the doctor knew how to sew Lilian's head back up. He put a bandage on it and said to rest.

Anton didn't sleep for three nights. Then he asked his father to take him to the lake, just the two of them. It was early morning. Lilian was still asleep, so was mother. Father was awake. He always got up before everyone else. Father put down his book, finished his coffee and said let's go.



Anton took his backpack.

Father looked at the bag, but didn't say anything.

The lake was close by their house. It was deep, cold and black. There was a row of boats on the shore and a long, narrow jetty.

When Anton was small, he had fallen off the jetty and sunk to the bottom. Father had dove in after him, lifted him back onto the jetty and given him mouth-to-mouth. Anton had stayed far away from the lake since then. He had learned to swim in a swimming pool, but never swam in a lake or went boating with his father.

Until now.

When they got to the middle of the lake, Anton opened his backpack, took out the locomotive and dropped it in the water.

The boat rocked.

Anton flinched.

His father said, 'This is the deepest point in the lake'.

Anton grabbed the side of the boat and looked after the locomotive, but the dark water had already gobbled it up. Anton looked at his father, afraid he wouldn't understand. Eventually his father nodded.

'There are big fish down there in a deep sleep', his father said before getting lost in his own thoughts and beginning to row ashore.

On the way, Anton closed his eyes, thought about the depths yawning below the boat and made them a promise: he would make sure nothing hurt Lilian again.

The next night, Anton dreamt of the locomotive. He was swimming in the lake and looked

through the water all the way to the bottom where the locomotive was chugging along amongst the fish and pondweeds. Smoke billowed from its smokestack. The black smoke spread everywhere, covering the fish and darkening the water and everything else.

Anton's eyes stung when he woke up.

That was a long time ago. The wound on his sister's head has healed, but now Lilian is sick, has been for many days. Anton stands by her. She is having bad dreams and moans. Anton pulls a box out from under the bed and opens it.

The box is full of coins.

The package came three weeks ago. There was no letter or sender's name. Not even a postmark, though father and mother looked for a long time, but who else could the sender be than great-uncle. An early birthday present, his father guessed.

The coins are different than the ones Anton gets for his allowance. These ones have strange markings and are made of a strange kind of metal, nobody knows what it is, not even father. Nobody knows what country they're from, either, or how old the coins are.

Anton handles the coins every night before bed. They make him dream of far-off lands, tunnels, secret passages, enchanted places and hidden treasures. The kinds of dreams you never want to wake up from. After dreams like that, the real world seems bland and boring and cold.

Anton carefully chooses two coins. He places them gently on Lilian's eyelids, pulls the curtains aside and opens the window.

He has done the same thing on six nights now. He wants to comfort his sick sister with beautiful



dreams and let fresh air into the room so at least some of the germs would fly out the window.

Anton goes back to bed, but keeps an eye on things from under the covers. He wriggles his toes.

And it happens again. His little sister's breath starts to smell different, not like germs and fever anymore, but like a storybook garden—the kind of secret and happy place where the air is sleepy and still and relaxed.

The scent flows into the room from Lilian's open mouth.

Anton waits. He isn't the least bit sleepy.

Then the moths come.

They fill the room, coming to drink the nectar of wondrous dreams leaking from his little sister. The moths darken the night. It's like a heavy blanket thrown over them, a dark tent that mother never looks into. The air in the room becomes hot and thick.

The moths tickle Lilian, and his sister laughs in her sleep. Laughter is a good thing. Lilian has laughed far too little lately. She has been sick and sad, and that has made everyone else sad as well.

Now Anton gets worried, though. The scent is too strong. There are more moths than ever before.

And then his sleeping sister moves.

The coins clatter to the floor.

The moths are startled.

A sigh passes Lilian's lips. Her hand swings over the side of the bed. It is skinny and white as snow.

Her fingers graze the floor. Her chest no longer rises.

The moths try to leave, but can't find the window. Anton closes his eyes and covers his ears to keep from hearing the rustling of raining wings.



#### PASI ILMARI JÄÄSKELÄINEN

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Jääskeläinen has, for example, twice won the Kuvastaja award, which is given annually for the best Finnish fantasy book, and four times the Atorox award for the best Finnish science fiction or fantasy short story. His early collection of short stories was given the Tähtivaeltaja award in 2001 (for the best science fiction book of the year released in Finnish).

'A lobster pot of a book... an exquisite balance of suspense, precision-engineered structure and darkly playful humour... fascinating. And fun' – 5-star review of *The Rabbit Back Literature Society*, SFX.

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