

THE FINNISH FANDOM

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IT

Pasi Karppanen

What is this crazy Finnish fandom that seems to be bursting with energy, keeps organizing free cons, and now and then is even coaxed to organize the Worldcon? This article aims for an overview of the Finnish fandom. It is originally based on Ben Roimola's "Short Look at Finnish Fandom" from 1995. A previous version of the article, updated by Pasi Karppanen and Shimo Suntala, was published in Cosmos Pen's previous English special in 2003.

The origins of Finnish fandom

The first signs of a phenomenon called fandom can be seen in Finland during 1950's. However, it took over two decades before fandom as we know it started to emerge. The reasons for this are various. In 1950's Finland was barely getting back on its feet, economical resources were limited and urbanisation was only beginning. This meant there were no real chances of an organized fandom to get born.

The first Finnish science fiction convention was organized by the Students' Union at Turku University in 1969, but fandom as we know it wasn't born until the Turku Science Fiction Society was founded in 1976. It started to publish its fanzine, **Spin** in 1977, which marks the birth of a first Finnish sf/f zine.

Presently there are almost twenty sf/f clubs spread around the country and a dozen more-or-less regularly published zines, plus numerous

unofficial sf/f, anime and role playing clubs and zines.

Finnish fandom has all the characteristics of fandom everywhere else. There are societies, zines, awards, cons, gatherings and all the other things that together make up the thing that's called fandom. On the other hand, there are also couple of features in Finnish fandom that make it somewhat different from other countries.

What makes it what it is

One thing that has always been characteristic for Finnish Fandom has been its ability to work together. The thing is, there has never been a "Finnish Science Fiction Association" nor will there most likely ever be. The Finnish fandom is a collection of many different sf/f societies spread all over the country, all with their own characteristics and history. Together they form a tight little community that has pulled together from the very begin-

ning and made Finnish fandom what it is today.

Another thing that should be mentioned when speaking of Finnish fandom is that there has never been that big a difference between science fiction and fantasy. Everybody of course understands the differences between genres, but basically the fans and writers of science fiction and fantasy, as far as Finnish fandom is concerned at least, have never been separate groups but a part of one big, more or less happy family.

This is in a great extent due to the circumstances in which Finnish fandom was born. In late 70's and early 80's both genres were just as marginal and the fans of sf/f naturally teamed up. Therefore one should remember that although the societies mentioned in this article are called science fiction societies, most of them are science fiction and fantasy societies. The same thing applies to fanzines as well.

Probably because of this, the current generation of writers – again, when it comes to fandom at least – are a rather heterogeneous group. The same people write science fiction and fantasy and in some cases drawing the line between genres is very difficult, if not impossible. In fact, many writers consider the whole subject of drawing lines between genres restricting and completely unnecessary.

The third thing one should mention when speaking of Finnish fandom are the Finnish *sf/f* magazines. The fact is there isn't one single commercial *sf/f* magazine published in Finland. There have been many attempts to publish one, but sooner or later, for one reason or other, they have been cancelled.

In their place, however, there's a wide range of flourishing, professional looking fan-, semi- and prozines. Many of them are very slick, printed on glossy paper and looking just as good as any professional *sf/f* magazine with a content to match. The zines such as **Portti**, **Tähtivaeltaja**, **Spin**, **Finnzine** and **Kosmoskynä** are even for sale at big bookstores.

Finncons

The first logical step to start presenting the Finnish fandom would probably be the **Finncon**, the most important Finnish national con. Finncons are big events, have been so from the very beginning.

In most respects the Finncons are like any other big con in Europe or USA, with lots of programme going on simultaneously, panels, lectures and other program items, guest of honour's giving speeches and autograph sessions. On Saturday night there's the official con party with a masquerade contest.

The one thing that sets the Finncons apart from foreign cons, however, is that they are *free*. Yes, that's right. There's no entrance fee whatsoever to them. Since Finncon '89, one of the main principles of the Finncon has been that everyone interested should be able to attend. This way any passer-by can just pop in to see what's going on and with any luck find the con interesting – and so a new *sf/f* fan is born.

"The Finncon brand", so to speak, was created in the first Finncons held in Helsinki in late 80's and early 90's. The Finncons are supposed to be big events, without entrance fee and concentrate on literature. So far most, if not all, guests of honour have been writers instead of television figures.

There's of course a simple explanation for that. For the price of a world class author the most you could get from the world of audiovisual sci-fi is "the third storm trooper from right". Still, the main reason is the fandom's desire to concentrate on literature.

This has proved to be a very well-working formula and so far all Finncons have been successes. Over the years Finncons have gotten bigger, bigger and bigger, becoming a major cultural event in Finland. For a number of years now the number of attendees have been in thousands.

In 1995 Finncon was for the first time held outside Helsinki, in the town of Jyväskylä. From there on the task of arranging Finncon has rotated from town to town. In 1999 for example Finncon was the first time in Turku.

One of the secrets behind Finncon's success is the one mentioned earlier, Finnish fandom's ability to work together. Finland is, after all, a small country and it is small wonder Finncons are such big events. That is why Finncons have always been Finnish fandom's joint effort. The main responsibility has of course always been on the town that arranges the con, but they wouldn't be possible without everyone doing their share.

Naturally, Finncons wouldn't be possible without money, and over the years the Finnish con organizers have gotten very good at gathering funds from government grants and looking for sponsors and other co-operation partners. For example Finncon X, the tenth Finncon, held in Turku in 2003, was also Baltcon and Eurocon. In 2004 Finncon was held in Jyväskylä together with Animecon, making it a huge as well. In 2006 it's Helsinki's turn again.

Other happenings

Finncons are for masses. They are big-scale events, the fandom's showcase to the world of mundanes. Apart

from them, however, there are much smaller and informal gatherings for the fandom. Parties of all sorts, video evenings, summer picnics and so forth. In most of the towns with an *sf/f* club there are also monthly, in some cases even *weekly* meetings of fandom.

These meetings, or "mafias" as they are also called, usually take place in a bar or a cafe. Whereas most parties, video evenings and so on are mostly for people who already are more or less "inside" the fandom, mafias are free and open to everyone. This is usually the best place to get to know the local fandom if you have just moved to town.

Book fairs and smaller cons

Another important venue for fandom to make *sf/f* known are the national book fairs. Currently there are two of them. The first of them was the **Turku Book Fair** held each fall. From the very beginning Turku Science Fiction Society has had a booth at the fair and has also arranged *sf/f* related programme during the fair. This has proven to be a great way to make science fiction and fantasy known outside fandom.

A few years back Turku Book Fair got a rival of sorts, the **Helsinki Book Fair**, which quickly became the bigger of the two. Most of the big publishing houses are now not at Turku but at the Helsinki Book Fair. The people at Helsinki fandom have also co-operated from the very beginning with the fair organization. For a number of years now Helsinki fandom has had their own booth at the fair and the "Science Fiction Sunday" as a part of the official programme.

In Helsinki, there's also the **Tähtivaeltajapäivät** (Star Rover Day). Details of the first Star Rover Days are shrouded in mystery, but in current scale it has been arranged at least twice, in 2002 and 2005. In the Finnish scale, Star Rover Day could probably be called a "mini-con", the number of attendees being only a couple of hundreds instead of thousands and the whole event lasting only one day.

On the other hand, compared to the cons held in many neighbouring

countries there's no reason why Star Rover Day couldn't be called a full-bred con. It has already fulfilled all the criteria of one.

On both occasions there have been big world-class guests of honour (in 2002 *Alistair Reynolds* and *Ray Loriga*, in 2005 *M. John Harrison*), panels all through the day and a con party afterwards. For many Finnish fans grown up with the Finncons, Star Rover Days have been even a revelation of sorts, the first *small* con they've attended!

Another small con is the **TamFan**, which has been arranged semi-annually for nearly a decade now. Like the name suggests, it is held in Tampere and is concentrated in fantasy. Like Star Rover Day, it's only a day long, but in other respects a full-bred mini-con.

A relative newcomer in the family of Finnish *sf/f* happenings is the **Atonova**, which has now been held thrice in Turku. The name is combined of two separate *sf/f* awards, *Atorox*

and *Nova*, which both have roots in Turku (more on both later). In 2002 the Turku fandom wanted to arrange a separate award ceremony for them and thus, Atonova was born.

Atonova is not, nor it does have any plans of becoming an actual con. For the lack of better expression one could call it a "literary *sf/f* afternoon". Although there's been press present each time, the atmosphere in Atonova has always been rather intimate. Considering the sheer size of Finncons, Atonova is a refreshingly small-scale Finnish *sf/f* happening.

For the fantasy oriented, there is also the **Fantasy Feast**, arranged also by Turku Science Fiction Society. Basically, it's a weekend spent in Sauvo, where the City of Turku has a youth camp centre by the sea. People come there dressed in medievalish or otherwise fantasy oriented outfits to participate in different kinds of games and activities, to sit by a fire to sing, to dance, to eat and generally to have a good time.

Co-ordination is the key

One interesting tradition one should also remember to mention when speaking about Finnish fandom, are the annual co-operation meetings. In these meetings representatives from all the societies recount the past year and tell about their plans for the coming year. The main reason for this is the sheer number of Finnish *sf/f* societies. The meetings are arranged to help plan future projects, to spread information and to prevent booking future events on same weekends.

For a number of years now the meetings have taken place in a cabin in Tampere, with sauna and pub night afterwards. In other words they are much more than mere meetings, but a chance for the people active in fandom to meet each other, without the hassle of a con to take care of.

One rather unique form of co-operation within the fandom are also the Science fiction researcher meetings.



© Pasi Karppanen

M. John Harrison reading "Light" during Star Rover Day after party.

By now already several Finnish universities have students doing their thesis research on science fiction and fantasy. The researcher meetings are oriented to these students, and they aim on the one hand to share knowledge and experience among researchers, on the other hand to prevent overlapping research. The meetings are often organised in connection or immediately before Finncon or some other big event.

Finnish sf/f awards

Every fandom has its own awards, its versions of the Hugos, Nebulas and so on. Finnish fandom is no exception.

The most important Finnish sf/f award is undoubtedly the **Atorox award** that has been presented annually by the Turku Science Fiction Society since 1983. The name of the award is a tribute to the author *Aarne Haapakoski* and his classic robot *Atorox* who appeared in numerous novels in the 1940's and 1950's.

Atorox is awarded to the best Finnish science fiction or fantasy short story published the previous year. The winner is decided by a vote of jury that is comprised of jurors from all the Finnish sf/f clubs. It is usually presented at Finncon or some other major sf related happening.

The **Tähtivaeltaja award** (Star Rover award) is presented annually to the best sf book (novel or short-story collection) published in Finland the previous year. The book doesn't have to be an original Finnish work, it could also be a translation, which it usually is. In 2001 it was for the first time awarded to a Finnish book, the short story collection **Missä junat kääntyvät** (Where the Trains Turn) by *Pasi Jääskeläinen*.

The aim of the award is to encourage publishers to publish better sf/f. Especially during the last few years, the awarded books have tended to be sf/f on a somewhat marginal side. Or, as it has also been pointed out, more literally ambitious sf/f.

In 2003 for example, it was presented to *Ray Loriga's* novel **Tokio Doesn't Love Us Anymore** (Tokio ya no nos quiere) and the year before that to *Jonathan Lethem's* novel **Gun, with occasional music**. The winner



Atorox, named after the robot character created by Aarne Haapakoski, is the most coveted Finnish sf/f award.

is decided by a jury and the award is presented by the Helsinki Science Fiction Society. The first Tähtivaeltaja award was given in 1986.

The **Kosmoskynä award** (Cosmos Pen award) is presented by The Finnish Science Fiction Writers Association. The award is the recognition of excellence in the field of sf/f in Finland. Last time it was presented in 2001 to the Finlandia award winner *Johanna Sinisalo* for all the PR work she has done over the years for Finnish sf/f.

The **Kuvastaja award** (Mirror-mere award) presented annually by the Finnish Tolkien Association is so far the latest addition to the Finnish sf/f award family. It was presented for the first time in 2001. The award has elements from both the Star Rover

and Cosmos Pen awards, but with a focus in fantasy. It is being presented annually to a Finnish fantasy novel and its purpose is to encourage publishers to publish better fantasy.

The **Portti award** (Gateway award) isn't an award as such, but more like a poll. It's probably the closest Finnish equivalent to Locus award (whereas the Atorox is sort of a 'Finnish Hugo'). It is given annually in a score of different categories: best domestic short story, best domestic book, best translated book and so on. The winners are decided by a vote and all readers of the Portti magazine are eligible to vote. Unfortunately, its importance is nowadays next to nothing due to the small number of voters.

Another award with a multitude of different categories is the **Lumi-**

mies award (Snowman award) presented by the Oulu Science Fiction Society **Polaris**. This is the most Finnish of all the mentioned awards with different categories each year. There have been categories like "Humanoid of the Year", "Chauvinist SF Act of the Year" and "Disappearance of the Year" and so on.

The last one could be presented to the Snowman award itself though (and has been at least once) since the prize hasn't been presented for a number of years now. Some years ago there were rumours circling that Oulu University sf/f club (more on that later) planned adopting the Snowman award, as Oulu Science Fiction Society has disappeared from the map of Finnish fandom. OYSFK hasn't presented the award yet, though.

Another similar fannish award, not-to-be-taken-so-seriously, is the **Jet Ace Logan award**, presented by a group of people in Helsinki fandom, also called the infamous Mundane collective. It has been presented twice now, both times during Star Rover Day's after party. It is given, and I quote, "to the most idiotic attempt to conquer the Earth" and "to the most stupendous way to foil that plan".

In 2002 it was given to the movie **Reign of Fire** (an army of dragons with only one male) and to *Will Smith* (for his achievements in such films as **The Independence Day** and **Men In Black** movies). In 2005 the winners were the aliens in new **War of the Worlds** movie and *Mel Gibson* in *M. Night Shyamalan's Signs* (stopping the world conquest with a glass of water).

Another award presented by more or less the same people in Helsinki fandom is the **Tuestin award** (Bracer award). It's given for Special Behind-the-Scenes work for Finnish Fandom. The award's idea is to remind you about the existence of people you don't see basking in the spotlight, but whose work fandom couldn't do without.

Finnish sf/f zines and clubs

In many cases drawing the line between zine and club in Finland is nowadays very difficult, if not impos-

sible. Like everywhere else, Finnish fanzines started out very modestly, with only a few xeroxed pages.

Over the years, the field of Finnish zines has undergone quite a metamorphosis. Some of the fanzines have become bigger and bigger, some have maintained their fannish appearance, some have disappeared altogether. Those departed have been left out from the following.

This means omitting clubs and zines like **Tähtiallianssi** (The Star Alliance) and its zine **Vapaa Galaksi** (Free Galaxy), both shutting down their engines at the moment. Tähtiallianssi was a *Star Wars* club and one of the many projects of *Shimo Suntila* from the Turku fandom. The club was born in the general *Star Wars* boom around the time of the movie **Phantom menace**. At present, we are waiting for the final issue of Free Galaxy.

Arcturus, also one of Suntila's projects, and its **Arczine** are taking a time out as well. The idea of Arczine was not to be a regular zine, but a series of special publications. A few of those did appear, among them **Scifistin malja** (The Goblet of the Scifist), a collection of films. The second Arczine was the end point of a Suntila's mad dash of seven zines for the Finncon X and was aptly named **The Seventh Zine**. It contained *Michael Swanwick's* short story **Dirty Little War**. Swanwick was one of the con's guests of honour, and the idea of the zine was to donate it to Swanwick, for him to give out to people he chose.

For the time being at least, Arcturus' engines have been shut down, after its founder and driving force behind everything, Shimo Suntila decided to take a vacation from fandom and recharge his batteries.

The biggest Finnish fanzines published currently look more like actual sf/f magazines than fanzines. In some cases the society itself has more or less disappeared and all that's been left is the magazine it publishes. This is the case especially with Tampere Science Fiction Society's Portti (Gateway). The same can be said with some reservation about the Helsinki Science Fiction Society and its *Star Rover* magazine.

The following list contains the Finnish zines and clubs that publish them. Unless otherwise stated,

the zines publish short stories (both domestic and translated), news, reviews, articles, illustrations, comics etc., and are published with four issues a year.

Most Finnish clubs have their own pages on the Internet as well. Unfortunately they are mainly in Finnish, but usually there's a summary page for non-Finnish speakers as well. One good place to start surfing is *Jussi Vainikainen's* excellent "Scientifiction links" that can be found at the url <http://kotisivu.mtv3.fi/jussiv/sf/suomisf.html>.

Portti

Tampere Science Fiction Society
Editor Raimo Nikkonen
<http://www.sci.fi/~portti/>

Tampere Science Fiction Society's **Portti** (Gateway) is undoubtedly the biggest and most successful Finnish sf/f zine. It is a professional-looking, printed on glossy paper, colour on the cover and even on some of the inside pages. About 130 pages, published since 1982.

The Tampere Science Fiction Society also arranges an annual sf/f short story competition, undoubtedly the most important Finnish sf/f writing competition, with big cash-prizes. The winner gets 2000 euros and 2200 euros is split between the runners-up. The competition has been arranged since 1986 and the prizes have become bigger and bigger. Over 200 short stories are submitted to the competition annually.

One can't deny the fact that Portti is the most successful Finnish sf/f zine. On the other hand it tends to be an island of sorts and one could argue whether it is a part of fandom anymore. Portti's competition also dominates rather heavily the short story writing scene. Up to the last years the stories published in Portti, and the winners of Portti's competition especially, also tend to dominate the yearly Atorox poll.

Portti, sorry to say, also has rather terrible web pages.



Tähtivaeltaja

Helsinki Science Fiction Society

Editor Toni Jerrman

<http://www.tahtivaeltaja.com/>

Helsinki Science Fiction Society is one of the main forces behind the Finncons and the presenter of the Tähtivaeltaja award. For many fans, however, the society is more known through its magazine, **Tähtivaeltaja** (Star Rover).

Tähtivaeltaja is professional-looking sf/f magazine, printed on glossy paper, cover in colour, and about 100 pages, published since 1982. From the very beginning it has been the Finnish sf/f magazine with most edge. One main element in Tähtivaeltaja and the Helsinki "mafia" in general has always been a fascination with black leather and studs and one must admit that in the early days Tähtivaeltaja looked almost as much a punk zine than an sf/f one.

Although the zine has mellowed a bit over the years and become a "real magazine" it hasn't lost its edge altogether and for many fans Tähtivaeltaja is still the best sf zine in Finland. Especially in the early days, the branch of sf Tähtivaeltaja took special care of was comics. In fact, many nowadays well known artists started their career in Tähtivaeltaja.

In recent years especially Tähtivaeltaja has also done valuable work by presenting in its articles new and upcoming trends and writers in the field of sf/f for Finnish readers, often

beating in speed even its foreign counterparts.

For an sf/f publication Tähtivaeltaja is also a rather fleshy zine.

Spin

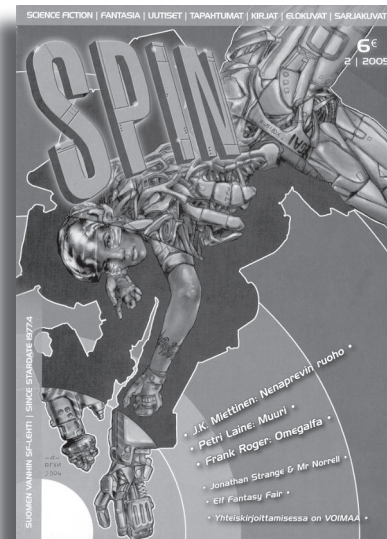
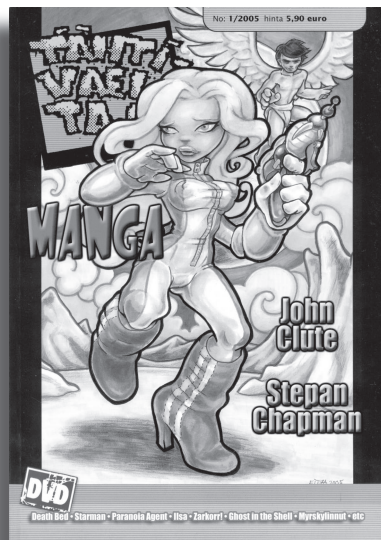
Turku Science Fiction Society
Editor Johanna Ahonen
<http://www.tsfs.fi/spin/>

Founded in 1976, the Turku Science Fiction Society is the oldest of the Finnish sf/f clubs. TSFS's **Spin** is also the oldest of the Finnish sf/f zines. It has been published since 1977 and has had its ups and downs over the years.

During the late 1990's, under the editorship of Shimo Sutila, there was a radical raise in the profile and the quality of the zine. Currently it can be counted among the "big three" of Finnish sf/f zines. Nowadays Spin is a professional looking zine, printed on glossy paper, about 80 pages, with colour covers.

TSFS is also one of the exceptions where the society manages to put out a professional looking zine and act as an actual working club as well. One of the reasons for that is the more or less complete blood transfusion it underwent in late 90's, as the old guard stepped aside and the new generation of fans took over.

For many years TSFS was probably the most active and energetic sf/f society in Finland. One proof of this



are the Finncons of 1999 and 2003 in Turku. In recent years, however, it seems that the wind has gone away from society's sails. Currently TSFS's crew is in dire need of fresh forces.

Because of its long history TSFS is also in many ways one of the corner stones of Finnish fandom. It presents the Atorox award, arranges the Fantasy Feast and organizes the sf/f coverage at the Turku Book Fair. Worth mention is also the extensive sf/f library of TSFS, with almost two thousand books.

Finnzine

Editor Pekka Supinen
<http://finnzine.com>

Finnzine is one of the few Finnish zines that has no "town based" sf/f society behind it. It was born in 1991 as a Finnish news zine, with a motto "Science Fiction now!" Finnzine's first issues were very amateurish, but it too started soon to look like "a real magazine", much of this is thanks to the layout and the graphic look. Finnzine is about 40 pages, covers in black and white on coloured paper.

Finnzine has remained a news zine, with a strong emphasis on audiovisual sf/f. The zine's trademark are articles about new sf/f movies with lots of pictures.

On the other hand, it publishes a fair share of domestic short fiction and one of its specialities are

long, multi-part sf/f sagas. It is also one of the few Finnish zines that has published sf/f poetry. There are also columns for literary sf /f in Finnzine and the events in Finnish fandom are also well covered in it.

Kosmoskynä

Finnish Science Fiction Writers Association
Editor Pasi Karppanen
<http://kosmoskyna.net>

FSFWA's **Kosmoskynä** (Cosmos Pen) has been published from 1984 and in 80's it was, according to many, the best Finnish sf /f zine. It too has had its ups and downs over the years.

Kosmoskynä's current appearance is a good example about the process which many Finnish sf/f zines have undergone during the last decade. During the editorship of *Anne Leinonen* it evolved from a small writer's zine into a high class literary journal.

Kosmoskynä has had numerous editor-in-chiefs over the years and each run with a new editor has given the zine a very distinctive look. On the other hand, being a writers' zine Kosmoskynä has always concentrated on writing and especially in recent years, in domestic sf/f in general. There are columns and articles on writing, interviews of novelists, information about writing competitions and writer guides. It also reviews *all*



the Finnish short stories published annually in zines.

Like TSFS, also FSFWA is one of those exceptions where the zine and the society that puts it out are equally important. FSFWA has a wide range of activities for writers, such as cost-free feedback service for members, writing courses and so on.

FSFWA also has close ties to TSFS and for example the Nova short story writing competition is one of their co-operation projects. During the recent years FSFWA has had various co-operation projects with other Finnish sf/f societies as well. One could say that currently FSFWA is undoubtedly the most networked society in the Finnish fandom.

Alienisti

Jyväskylä Science Fiction Society "42"
Editor Kati Mäki-Kuutti
<http://www.cc.jyu.fi/yhd/42/alienisti/>

Jyväskylä Science Fiction Society **42** is one of those societies that have more activity around the actual society rather than the zine. It bursted into fandom at the early 90's and has done a lot since that.

42 was for example the main organizer behind the Finncons in 1995 and 2001. It also organized the Finncon '04 in Jyväskylä and will do so

in 2007. One of the secrets behind the Jyväskylä Finncons is that 42 has managed to create working ties with the summer festival Jyväskylän Kesä.

42 also has its zine **Alienisti** (Alienist) that is being published about once a year, with the new issue out usually for the Finncon. The zine is about the same size as Finnzine and Kosmoskynä (A4) and although it can't compete material-wise with some of the bigger zines, it's a good example on suiting the activity to the resources.

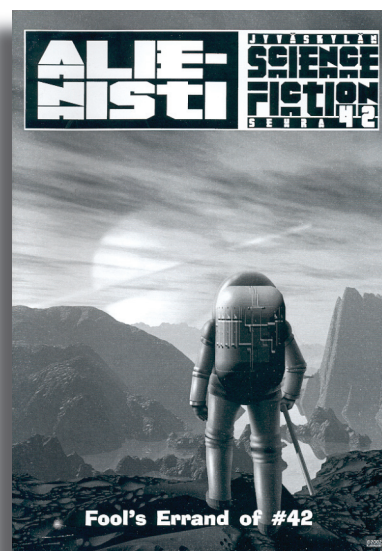
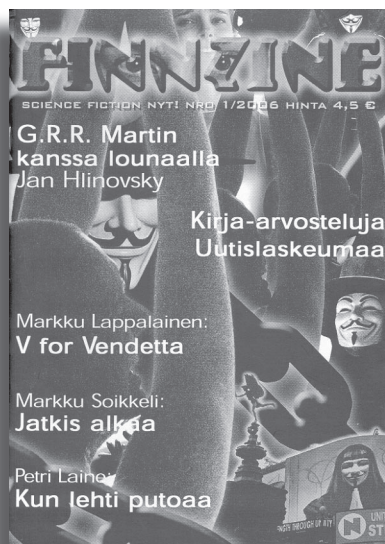
Usva

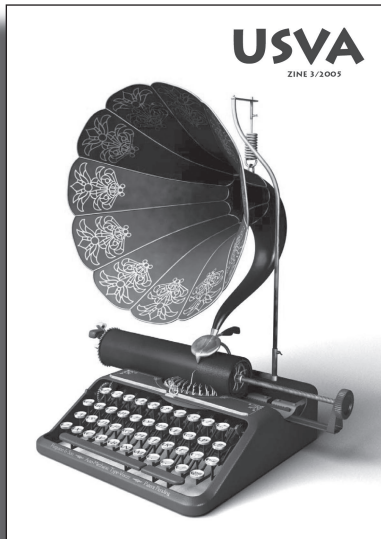
Editor Anne Leinonen
<http://usvazine.net>

Usva (Mist) is currently the youngest of Finnish sf/f zines. It's also the first Finnish sf/f zine that's published in e-zine format, to be downloaded without cost as PDF.

Usva has taken on the bold challenge of trying to bridge the gap between mainstream and sf/f readers. Some of the short stories published in it are sf/f only marginally and can be placed in the hazy area somewhere between sf/f and mainstream prose.

Usva is edited by Anne Leinonen, Kosmoskynä's former editor and a successful author in her own right. Only time will tell what becomes of Usva.





Enhörningen

Editor Ben Roimola
<http://www.enhorningen.net/>

Enhörningen ("The Unicorn") is the fanzine of the Swedish speaking Finnish fandom. It was established in 1987 by *Ben Roimola*, publishing short stories, articles and literary and audio-visual reviews. Enhörningen publishes both original Swedish short stories and Finnish (and foreign) short stories translated to Swedish.

Enhörningen has also excellent web pages and one could say they are the Finnish fandom's best showcase to the Swedish speaking world. It also serves a wider national public with news and reviews.

Legolas / Hobbitilan Sanomat

The Finnish Tolkien Society
 Editors: Oskari Ratinen
 (Legolas) and Anu Polkki
 (Hobbitilan Sanomat)
<http://www.suomentolkienseura.fi>

The Finnish Tolkien Society was founded long before the current fantasy boom or the movie versions of **The Lord of the Rings**, all the way back in 1991. Although Tolkien has a prominent role in the society's activities,

it is not solely for Tolkien-fans but for Finnish fantasy fans in general. Currently The Finnish Tolkien Society is the only society in Finland that is devoted purely to fantasy.

The society puts out not one but two zines: **Legolas** and **Hobbitilan Sanomat** (Hobbiton Times). Of the two, Legolas is the actual zine, Hobbiton Times more like a members bulletin. Both of them look much like the zine **Marvin** (see next). They are A5 in size, Legolas about 40 pages, Hobbiton Times 20 or less, black and white only. Legolas is also the older of the two, published since 1991, nowadays with four issues per year.

Just as the society, Legolas has never concentrated solely on Tolkien but in fantasy in general. During the last year, there has been more domestic and even foreign fiction on the pages of Legolas and a raise in the overall quality of the articles as well. Legolas is, however, still one of the "little zines" and it has very little chance to compete with bigger ones for example in the Atorox poll.

The Tolkien society is a great example of a club that puts more emphasis on other activities than putting out a fancy zine. It has lots of activities of which most are concentrated around Helsinki. It also has a lot of subdivisions called *smials* all over Finland, some of which are as active as the actual society. The Finnish Tolkien society also presents the *Kuvas-taja* (Mirrormere) award for the best domestic fantasy book published the previous year.

Marvin – the Lehti

Helsinki University Science Fiction Club
 Editor Teemu Ahonen
<http://www.helsinki.fi/jarj/hysfk/>

Of all the zines in Finland, **Marvin** (Marvin – the Zine) is probably the one that looks most like an actual *fanzine*. It's xeroxed-looking, about 30 pages long and in A5 size, usually filled with lots of weird inside humour and other baffling bits.



For many years it was done by a different group of people each time so you never knew what to expect. Every issue had a different theme, including such as pornography, religion, swords, turkeys, concrete, hot chocolate and so on. There have been issues like "von Märviken" with lots of ufo-related stories, for example an erotic sf story from "Emmanuel Arse", "Gentlemen's War-Marvin" and pulp-styled Marvin special "Stupendous Stories".

The Helsinki University Science Fiction Club is also one of the main forces behind the Finncons in Helsinki. You pronounce HYSFK "Goo-GooMuck". Don't ask.

Escape

Espoo Science Fiction and Fantasy Society
 No permanent editorship
<http://www.esc-ape.net/>

Espoo Science Fiction and Fantasy Society, ESC for short, is one of the newcomers. Espoo is one of the largest cities in Finland, but due its closeness to the capital many don't see it more than a Helsinki's suburb. ESC's goal seems to be changing that conception and showing that even Espoo can have its own unique brand of fandom.

Many of the first issues of ESC's zine **Escape** have had an "Espoo-



ethnic" viewpoint. One of the articles for example stated that "Living in Espoo is like living in Mars". Escape looks much like Marvin, but is even more fannish in appearance. One reason for that may be that many of the fans behind Marvin and HYSFK are active in ESC as well.

In 2005 ESC also organised a small mini-con before Star Rover Day in Helsinki. The con was aptly named **Escon** and was targeted to secondary school teenagers. There has also been talk about the next Escon in a few years time.

Mundane

<http://www.helsinki.fi/~mtkivela/mundane/mundane.htm>

Mundane was the yellow paper of the Finnish fandom and represents the other end of the fine line of glossy Finnish semiprozines. It was made by a group of people from the Helsinki fandom and looked exactly the way some people think a *fanzine* does, rather crude with only few xeroxed pages.

The articles it consisted of were full of inside humour and therefore were most likely incomprehensible for people outside the fandom. Unique with Mundane was also the fact that you couldn't subscribe to it anywhere. It was put together by

a group of fans in Helsinki and available only through the local 'mafia' gatherings. The issues of the zine are therefore sought after collectibles and owning a first-owner copy is a sign of real fanhood.

Mundane has been dormant for a number of years now.

Turu Mafia Zine

Editor Tero Ykspetäjä

Turu Mafia Zine (Turku Mafia Zine) has more or less the same principle as Mundane. You can't subscribe to it anywhere, but have to be present at Turku mafia to receive your copy.

The main difference between the two zines is that Turu Mafia Zine is much more comprehensible and easier to understand for a non-insider. It consists mainly of news and other bits and pieces you can actually use.

Another thing that sets the zines apart is naturally the age. Whereas Mundane belongs to the mythical past of Finnish fandom, the first issue of Turu Mafia Zine was published in fall 2004.

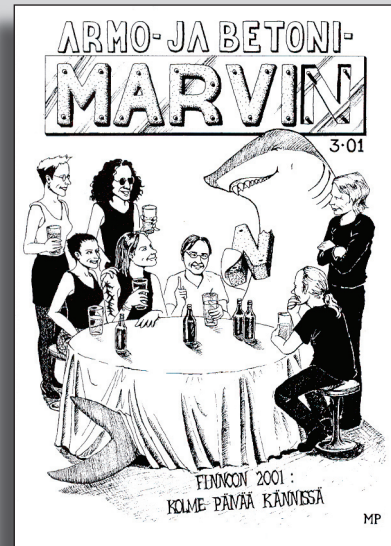
Zine's editor *Tero Ykspetäjä* is also rather active in documenting the events of Finnish Fandom in his excellent **Partial Recall** blog.

Other sf/f clubs

Besides the aforementioned, there are several clubs in Finland which do not publish their own zine. Many of them are younger and were born in the 90's, some even later than that.

As with the zines, there have been numerous obscure sf/f societies over the years. In the mythic history of Finnish fandom especially there were many weird little societies and zines that would make a subject for an article of its own. Such departed ones have been left out from this review. Only those are included that actually show signs of life.

One might say that starting societies is one of the favourite activities of Finnish fandom. Currently there are



clubs like "Ye Olde Cavaliers Scientifiction Boozing Guild" and "The Grumpy Bald Sci-fi Fans Association". Again, don't ask.

The Science Fiction Culture Cabinet at the University of Turku

<http://www.utu.fi/tutka/>

Turku University sf/f Club, **Tutka** (Radar) for short, is the second sf/f club in Turku and was founded in the beginning of 1995. Its idea was to offer an alternative to TSFS, since some people felt it had already become too heavy and bureaucratic.

For a number of years it organized extremely popular video evenings, with pre-shows of sf/f series that were not yet known to the masses in Finland, most popular of them perhaps the **Babylon 5**. With the growing Internet market and downloading the series' from the net, the video evenings lost their popularity.

For some years now, Tutka has been laying low. Recently, however, it has started to gather new energy and there's hope it will some day rise to its former glory. At present, the strategy of Tutka is to function more like a club and encourage its members to be more than just rank-and-file fans.

One of its founding members, and society's current president *Tero*

Ykspetäjä, is also active in other branches of fandom as well, on local as well as national level. Tutka also has an irregular line of publications called **Kabinettikertomuksia** (Cabinet Stories).

Spektre

<http://spektre.fi/>

Spektre, short for "Speculative fiction in Tampere", represents the second generation of fandom in Tampere. There has of course been fandom activity in Tampere as long as fandom has been around but unfortunately the Tampere fandom split more or less in two in a very early stage. Another part grouped around **Portti**, another around **Aikakone**.

Aikakone (Time machine) is a part of Finnish sf/f history. It was originally URSA Astronomical Society's zine, founded in 1981. In 1991 Aikakone society continued publishing the magazine, and behind it were some of the early giants in Finnish fandom. The zine became bigger and more professional-looking and for a number of years, Aikakone was undoubtedly one of the best Finnish sf/f zines, if not *the* best.

Unfortunately in mid 1990's Aikakone began to have trouble getting new issues out on time due to financial difficulties and eventually it was cancelled. Everything was not lost, however, for it left as its heritage excellent electronic archives.

With **Spektre** around, there's hope the old scars would be forgotten. The start at least has looked promising. **Spektre** has functioned now a few years. Like OYSFK, it arranges mafias, video evenings and other informal gatherings, but has no plans whatsoever of publishing a zine.

In that time, however, **Spektre** has played an active role in the fandom. It has hosted the fandom's annual co-operation meeting several times. **Spektre** also revived a few years ago the swell tradition of the Viikinsaari "Roadside picnic", a summer meeting of the fandom, with a boat trip to a nearby island.

At present, **Spektre** and the Tampere fandom seem to be the most likely candidate for the next light on the Finnish sf/f skies. Stay tuned.

Oulu University Science Fiction and Fantasy Club

<http://www.student oulu.fi/~oysfk/>

For a number of years, the Oulu Science Fiction Society, **Polaris** was

the active force sf/f-wise in Northern Finland. It published its **Mythago** (Mythago) fanzine and was the presenter of the hilarious Lumimies (Snowman) award.

Over the years **Mythago's** issues became more and more rare and now it seems the **Oulu University Science Fiction and Fantasy Club** has taken its place. Being a newcomer nothing much can be said about it. OYSFK arranges video evenings and other fun stuff.

Due to geographical reasons OYSFK is a loner in the north, but it has working ties with the rest of the fandom.



© Pasi Karppanen

The gathering of fandoms. Tero Ykspetäjä (Turku) and Jukka Halme (Helsinki) at Viikinsaari picnic in Tampere, discussing about the expedition to traverse the Northwest Passage

Joensuu Science Fiction Society

<http://www.scifi-seura.tk>

Like ESC, The Joensuu Science Fiction Society is also one of the newcomers. It was founded in 2004 and much of the JSFS's activity circle around the society's discussion forum on the net.

JSFS has "mafias" twice a month and like most young sf/f societies it arranges video evenings and other fun stuff. So far it hasn't had very much contact with rest of the fandom, but hopefully that will change some day.

Spock's Hut

<http://www.tky.hut.fi/~shut/>

Spock's Hut, located in Helsinki, is one of the sf/f societies in Finland almost solely concentrated on audiovisual sf/f. Like the name implies, SHUT was originally founded as a *Star Trek* club and its zine **Outpost** was something like a *Trek* version of **Free Galaxy** (although founded much earlier).

Although most of the articles in *Outpost* did concentrate on *Trek* related issues, the society itself wasn't simply for fans with pointy ears. The last news told that the the society had directed its interest in other major branches of tv sci-fi as well.

At the moment it seems the society's engines are running only on half or rather, *impulse* power and there hasn't been a new issue of *Outpost* in ages. Declaring someone dead is risky business, though, especially with *Star Trek* involved.

Finnish sf/f webzines and related sites

When the first version of this article was written back in 1995 Internet itself was only beginning to take form. Since then the net and world in general has changed considerably. Now most exchange of information between Finnish sf/f societies

is done through the web, a concept that itself would have been pure sf when the fandom was born.

Considering Finland's reputation as being in the forefront of new technology, it's surprising that compared with many other countries, there have been only very few sf/f webzines. Most Finnish sf/f societies and zines have their own web pages, but in almost every case they exist merely to promote the actual zine, not as an independent media.

One explanation for that are the historical reasons. During the course of the last thirty years, Finnish fan- and prozines have taken the role webzines have in countries where fandom was born more recently. Had the Finnish fandom also been born later, not thirty years ago, there would probably be much more sf/f related webzines.

In the last years even this seems to have changed. When the previous version of this article was published in 2003, there were just a couple of sf/f discussion forums in Finland. Since that time their number has practically exploded, after the necessary software has become accessible to everyone.

However in many cases the life cycle of a discussion forum has been quite short. Many forums that have started looking very flourishing have disappeared quietly. Especially writer forums have multiplied rapidly and it is very probable they end up only competing with each other. This means it is very difficult to estimate which all of the forums currently on the web will survive.

As far as websites acting as an independent media, **Babek Nabel** ("Free Thought", known affectionally also as "Leban Kebab") is probably the closest one. It was started in 2001 by the fans in Helsinki as a fandom discussion forum that would work better than several separate mailing lists.

Babek Nabel was originally known as *Avoin Kirja* ("Open book") but was forced to change its name in 2002 due to copyright reasons. During the time it has been on-line, **Babek Nabel** has indeed seemed to achieve its goal. Nowadays a big part of the general fandom discussion takes place there.

Risingshadow on the other hand might very well be the place where the future of Finnish fandom is. Most of the members there seem to be young fantasy fans and the discussion that takes place there is very active. It also has excellent bulletin boards for sf/f related news and upcoming "mafias". The interface in **Risingshadow** is also much nicer than in **Babek Nabel**.

And naturally, there are many, many others. There is a discussion forum for fantasy fans called **Green Dragon**, several forums for sf/f writers, for example FSFWA's **Net Colosseum** and **Deathwriters.com** and many more. As far as activeness is concerned, there seems to be a strong next generation of sf/f fans growing up in Finland.

In conclusion

So there you have it, the Finnish fandom in all its glory. This was of course only one view on it and somebody else might have given a different picture altogether.

The only way to get an absolutely accurate view is of course getting to know the Finnish fandom personally. And that is easiest to do by visiting one of the Finnish cons. If you missed Eurocon 2003, why don't you visit some of the Baltcons or Eurocons after that. You didn't think 2003 would be the last time, did you?

Partly translated by Liisa Rantalaiho

Sites of interest

Finncon
<http://www.finncon.org/>

Finnish SF FAQ
<http://www.tsfs.fi/sffaq/>

Finnish Science Fiction Resources
<http://kotisivu.mtv3.fi/jussiv/sf/suomisf.html>

Links for sci-fi writers
<http://koti.mbnet.fi/pasenska/links/links.htm>

The World of Finndom
<http://www.emcit.com/emcit109.shtml#Finland>

Partial Recall
<http://partialrecall.blogspot.com/>