

# THE FINNISH FANDOM - ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IT

Pasi Karppanen

**The aim of this article is to give you an overview of the Finnish fandom. The first version of this article was written way back in 1995, but it has been published numerous times as different versions in Finnish SF fan magazines over the years. We are publishing the updated and revised version of the article in our Worldcon Special to give the visitors as detailed a picture as possible of what the Finnish fandom is all about.**

## The origins of the Finnish fandom

The first signs of a phenomenon called the SF fandom were seen in Finland during the 1950s. However, it took over two decades before fandom as we know it started to emerge. The reasons for this are various. In the 1950s, Finland was still getting back on its feet after the war, economic resources were limited, and urbanisation was only beginning. This meant that there was no real chance for an organised fandom to be born.

The first Finnish science fiction convention was organised by the Student Union at the University of Turku in 1969. However, it is generally agreed that the foundation of the **Turku Science Fiction Society** in 1976 and the birth of its zine *Spin* in 1977 were instrumental in forming the Finnish fandom as we know it today.

SF societies in Helsinki, Tampere, Jyväskylä, Oulu, Espoo and elsewhere soon followed. Presently, there are a dozen or so SF clubs spread around the country, as well as about the same amount of more

or less regularly published zines, plus numerous unofficial SF, anime and role playing clubs and zines.

In fact, one feature that is characteristic of the Finnish fandom is that societies have always been the backbone of the fandom. They say that when an Irishman goes out to a pub, a Finn goes out and forms a society. Finland has sometimes been called the promised land of societies, and understandably so.

Finnish SF societies, especially ones born in the early days of the fandom, were traditionally formed around a city or a town. In the days before the internet, this was the best way to find like-minded people. Over the years, the role of town-based societies has changed, but their actives still form a major work force when it comes to doing everything which makes a fandom.

In many cases, the same geographical area contains not only one but several SF societies, some of which have been born more recently. The roles of these societies as well as the way activities are divided between the older and younger societies dif-

fer slightly from town to town.

What the Finnish fandom lacks in pure fannish nature, it makes up for in longevity. Most Finnish SF societies have had their ups and downs over the years, and periods during which activity has been low. However, sooner or later a new generation of fans has emerged and made the society their own. There are of course societies that have died and disappeared silently into history, but the oldest ones still function today. This applies to their fanzines as well.

There are a few exceptions to the town-based societies and their zines. The oldest one of these is the **Finnish Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association**. The latest addition to the national societies is **The Finnish Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy Research** (Finfar), founded in 2013.

Societies focusing on some specific franchise, genre or author have always been exceptions in the Finnish fandom. In most cases, the fans of one writer or TV franchise have grouped themselves around existing societies. There been have attempts at

forming smaller fandoms, of course, but in many cases these societies have disappeared as soon as the peak of interest has passed.

The biggest and longest-surviving exception in this respect is the **Finnish Tolkien Society**. On the other hand, a relative newcomer to the ranks of Finnish SF associations is the **Finnish H.P. Lovecraft Society**, founded in 2010. These associations will be handled in more detail later.

Finnish fans engage in similar activities as fans elsewhere, including running societies, publishing fanzines, presenting awards and organising cons and social gatherings. However, there are several features of the Finnish SF fandom which make it different from fandoms in other countries.

### The uniqueness of the Finnish fandom

One long-standing characteristic of the Finnish fandom is the ability of Finnish fans to work co-operatively. There has never been a "Finnish Science Fiction Association" nor will there likely ever be. The Finnish fandom is a collection of many different SF societies spread all over the country, all with their own characteristics and histories. Together they form a tight little community that has pulled together from the very beginning.

Another unique aspect of the Finnish fandom is that there has never been a big separation between science fiction and fantasy. Everybody understands the differences between the genres, of course, but inside the fandom the fans and writers of science fiction and fantasy haven't been separate groups. The times seem to be changing, though, and nowadays there is a new generation of fans who see themselves primarily as readers of fantasy, while science fiction is much more alien genre to them.

The lack of separation in the older generation of fans is in great extent due to the circumstances in which the Finnish fandom was born. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, both genres were equally marginal, and fans of science fiction and fantasy naturally teamed up. Therefore one should remember that although most societies mentioned in this article are called science fiction societies, all of them are in fact science fiction and fantasy societies. This applies to the fanzines and conventions as well.

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

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The first chairman of the first Finnish SF society TSFS, Tapani Piha, giving a speech at the association's 40th anniversary celebration in 2016.

between genres restrictive and completely unnecessary.

During the last decade and a half or so, we have even seen a rise of a new term for fantastic literature in Finland: speculative fiction, or "spefi" for short. The term doesn't have the acceptance of all the fans, but gradually it has established itself, even outside fandom. There are big Finnish libraries who have adopted the term and placed all science fiction and fantasy in their "spefi section". One undeniable benefit of the term is that it is a handy way of avoiding classification problems. All works of fantastic literature can be placed under it, without having to ponder whether they are science fiction, fantasy or supernatural horror.

Another unique characteristic of the Finnish fandom is the nature of the Finnish SF magazines. The fact is that there isn't a single commercial SF magazine published in Finland. There have been attempts at publishing one, but for some reason or another, they have always been cancelled after a few issues.

In the place of commercial magazines, however, there's a wide range of flourishing fanzines, semi-prozines and prozines. Many of them are very slick, printed on glossy paper, and look just as good as any professional SF magazine, with content to match. Zines such as *Portti*, *Tähtivaeltaja* and *Spin* have even been on sale at big bookstores. The zines also have a lot of library subscribers, meaning that their importance is much bigger than their actual print run.

One characteristic feature of the Finnish fandom I also want to bring up and personally value highly is the equality. Women have always had a strong role in Nordic countries. This can be seen in the Finnish fandom as well – it is not male-dominated in the same sense fandoms might be in some other countries. All genders work within the fandom side by side, and there have been as many female con runners, editors-in-chief and SF writers as there have been male ones, perhaps even more.

## Finncons

The logical starting point for presenting the Finnish fandom would probably be introducing **Finncon**, the Finnish national SF convention.

Finncons are big events and have been so from the very beginning, with thousands of attendees. In most respects, Finncons resemble any other big cons in Europe or USA, with panels, lectures and other programme, guests of honour giving speeches and autograph sessions, publishers and other vendors selling their products and so on. On Satur-

day night, there is the official con party with a traditional masquerade. Many programme items are nowadays held in English.

The one thing that sets Finncons apart from foreign cons, however, is that they are *free*. Yes, that's right. There's no entrance fee whatsoever. Since Finncon 1989, one of the convention's main principles 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 finds the event interesting – and so a new SF fan is born.

"The Finncon brand", so to speak, was created in the first Finncons held in Helsinki in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Finncons are supposed to be big events, with no entrance fee, concentrating on literature. This 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 SF is "the third storm trooper from the right". Still, the main reason for this focus is the Finnish fandom's desire to concentrate on literature.

This concept has proved to be very successful. Over the years, Finncons have got bigger and bigger, becoming major cultural events in Finland. They have also attracted more and more English-speaking fans, since a part of their programme is in English.

In 1995, Finncon was held outside Helsinki for the first time, in the town of Jyväskylä. From then on, the task of arranging Finncon has rotated from town to town. In 1999, for example, Finncon was held in Turku for the first time. In 2008, Tampere, too, became one of the towns to organise Finncons.

Another interesting feature of the Finnish fandom is the fact that a bidding process, when it comes to con running, is a virtually unknown procedure here. Unlike in many other countries, the towns or con committees do not have to campaign against other towns for the permission to arrange Finncon, and the rotation is decided in mutual understanding.

This could also be seen as one of the secrets behind Finncon's success. No matter where Finncon is arranged, it has always been the endeavour of the whole Finnish fandom, not only of the local fans. Finland is, after all, a small country, and it is something of a wonder that Finncons are such big events. The main responsibility has of course always fallen on the fans in the town hosting the con, but organising cons wouldn't be possible without everyone doing their share.

**Finncon-yhdistys** (Finncon Association), found-



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Finncon-Animecon 2009, held at the Helsinki Cable Factory, had over 15,000 attendees.

ed in 2006, should also be mentioned here. The association acts as the official organiser of Finncon, despite the fact that the work is in practise always done by a local society. This makes it easier to apply for financial support and ensures the continuity of the con tradition. Additionally, a local SF society's budget won't be drained because of organising such a massive event.

And speaking of grants, Finncons wouldn't naturally be possible without money. Over the years, the Finnish con organisers have become very good at gathering funds from government grants and looking for sponsors and partners. This in turn is a result of the fact that SF as a literary genre has perhaps a better reputation in Finland than in some other countries. Why that should be, however, would be a subject of a separate article.

Significant amount of work is also being done to bridge the gap between fans and literature researchers. For example, academic meetings (more on those later) have been held together with Finncons for over a decade now.

When speaking of the history of Finncon, it would be remiss of us not to mention the existence of another large Finnish event, **Animecon**. Animecon can be said to have branched out from Finncons 1999 and 2003, although anime-themed pro-

gramme had featured in previous Finncons.

The organism known as Animecon soon outgrew its host. For nearly ten years, Finncon was known as "Finncon-Animecon", and colourfully dressed anime and cosplay teenagers became an inseparable part of the event.

After a while, the fact that Animecon had become permanently attached to Finncon raised rather audible as well as understandable grumbling among the fandom. Many fans felt they had lost their con to anime, and Finncon and Animecon had already become too big to be organised together.

In the end, the decision was made to separate the two cons. In 2010, Finncon became merely Finncon once more. The general consensus was that it would be good for Animecon to continue its voyage as a separate entity.

For Finncon, the separation meant considerable downsizing, making the event much easier to organise. However, it should be pointed out that Finncon was a festival with thousands of attendees even before Animecon came along.

Finncons were originally arranged every two years, but after the turn of the millennium it became an annual event. In fact, 2015 was the first time there was no Finncon in Finland, but a new event called **Archipelacon** was held in Mariehamn

in Åland. The con was based on the experiences gathered from an event called **Åcon** (more on that later).

Archipelacon appears to be an attempt to combine the best of both Finncon and Åcon. It presents a slightly different image from Finncon, and the plan seems to be to create an event that is smaller but more internationally focused than Finncons. Archipelacon is also the first bigger SF con in Finland in a long while to have an entrance fee.

The latest Finncon so far was held in Tampere in 2016. If you are holding this issue of Spin at Worldcon, or have got hold of your copy afterwards, you may know 2017 was the year there was a Worldcon in Finland instead of a Finncon.

What about 2018 then? Will there be a Finncon? Indeed there will be, this time back in Turku. The plans for Finncon 2018 are already underway, with none other than yours truly as the co-chair. I must have a few screws loose in my head...

### The changing times

At the time of the writing of the original version of this article, or the ones published a decade back, the Finnish con scene was a small one. There was one national con for SF, one comics festival, one for role players, one for anime. During the last decade and a half or so, however, the situation has changed dramatically.

In addition to Finncon, several large cons are arranged in Finland at the moment. Examples include a popular culture and media oriented version of Finncon called **Popcult**, an extremely professionally run and huge role playing and anime convention **Tracon**, an equally professional anime convention called **Desucon**, Finland's oldest roleplaying con **Ropecon**, and the **Tampere Kupliai** comics festival, just to name a few.

What's interesting, though, is that basically all Finnish cons, even the largest ones, are run by fans, for fans, and based on volunteer work. So far, at least, no commercial enterprises have started capitalising the Finnish fandom scene by arranging a media con.

One reason for that may be the fact the Finnish con scene is well booked as it is. In addition, the idea of having to pay an entrance fee to attend a con is still relatively alien in Finland. Even the cons which do have an entrance fee are relatively inexpensive. After all, their intent is not to make money, but merely to cover the expenses.

During the last decade, we have also seen the birth of dozens of smaller, one-day conventions

with hundreds rather than thousands of attendees. One such event was the first Harry Potter con **Tylacon** (roughly translated "Hogcon"), held for the first time earlier this year. In fact, it is safe to say that attending all geek-related Finnish conventions held each summer would be an impossible task at the moment.

An equally impossible task would be presenting all the cons here. Therefore I have limited the article only to activities run by the SF fandom.

### Other fandom events

Finncons are for the masses. They are large-scale events, the SF fandom's showcase to the world of mundanes. Apart from them, however, there are many smaller, informal gatherings of the SF fandom, cons as well as parties of all sorts, video evenings, summer picnics and so forth.

In most towns with a SF club, there are also monthly meetings of fans. These meetings are called "mafias" (the roots of the phrase go back to the Helsinki fandom in the 1980s), and they usually take place in a pub. The idea is that this is the place to get to know local fans if you have just moved to town.

In a way, the development of the Turku fandom is an interesting exception to this. During the last ten years, the SF societies' clubhouse in Turku, **Terrakoti** ("Terra Home") has become a "geek living room" of sorts, a place for the younger members of the Turku fandom in particular to meet, read magazines or books, have discussions etc. Also most of the SF parties in Turku take place at Terrakoti.

National book fairs are naturally important venues for the fandom to promote SF. The oldest of them is the **Turku Book Fair** held each autumn. Almost from the very beginning, the Turku Science Fiction Society has had a stand at the fair and has also arranged SF-related programme items during the fair. During the past few years, the SF stand has become a co-operative effort of several organisations in the Turku fandom.

In 2001, the Turku Book Fair got a rival, the **Helsinki Book Fair**, which quickly became the bigger of the two. People in the Helsinki fandom have also co-operated from the very beginning with the fair organisation. For a number of years now, Helsinki fans have had their own stand at the fair, and the "Science Fiction Sunday" is a part of the official programme. In 2017, there will be a significant amount of SF programme on Sunday at the Turku Book Fair as well.

One interesting tradition that should also be

mentioned when speaking about the Finnish fandom are the annual co-operation meetings. In these meetings, representatives from all the societies around Finland report on the past year and discuss their plans for the coming year. The main reason for this is the sheer number of Finnish SF societies and activities. The meetings are arranged in order to help future projects, to spread information and to prevent booking future events on the same weekends.

For a number of years now, the co-operation meetings have taken place in a cabin in Tampere, with sauna and a pub night afterwards. A Sunday brunch has been added to the schedule due to the amount of topics that need to be covered. In other words, the co-operation meetings are much more than just meetings. They are also a chance for people who are active in fandom to meet each other without the hassle of a con to take care of.

One of the highlights of the summer for mem-

bers of the fandom are the picnics taking place in the summer. At the moment, two national picnics are organised annually: **Huviretki tienviantareelle** (Roadside picnic), inspired by the book *Stalker* by the **Strugatskys** and organised in Viikinsaari, Tampere, and **Suomenlinnan huviretki**, a summer trip to the Suomenlinna fortress island in Helsinki. Like the co-operation meetings, the picnics offer a chance for the core fandom to meet, but they are less official and more relaxed events, with fun and catching up as the main focus.

One rather unique form of co-operation within the Finnish fandom are the SF researcher meetings mentioned earlier in this article. By now, 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 one hand to share knowledge and experience among researchers, and on the other to prevent overlapping research.



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TSFS's booth at the Turku Book Fair 2015, with Tutka's very own TARDIS.

There is a similar mechanism for preventing overlapping SF-related events of which there is currently no shortage. As we all know, the summer in Finland is very short, and there is only a limited amount of weekends to arrange cultural events. The Finnish Concon calendar aims to help organisers of SF cons, roleplaying events, comic book festivals, book fairs and so on to avoid booking their events on same weekends. There is also a Finnish conrunner con of the same name.

### Sometimes small is beautiful

For many years, Finncon was the only “real” con for someone in the Finnish SF fandom. Finncon was, and still is, the biggest and most beautiful of the events run by the fandom, and it inevitably overshadowed many smaller ones.

With the birth of smaller geek-related events, the situation has started to change, and nowadays there is no shortage of smaller cons in Finland. Even inside the SF fandom there is now a number of events aimed particularly at the fandom of a certain town, with perhaps around a hundred participants instead of several thousands.

One of the oldest small-scale SF cons is **Tähti-vaeltajapäivä** (Star Rover Day) organised in Helsinki. Details of the first Star Rover Days are shrouded in fannish mystery, but during the last decade or so the event has grown considerably. On Finnish scale, Star Rover Day could probably be called a “mini-con”, because the number of attendees is only a couple hundred instead of thousands, and the whole event lasts only one day. There have been world-class guests of honour each time, panels all through the day, and a con party afterwards.

**Escon**, on the other hand, is a similar one-day convention held in Espoo (neighbouring town of Helsinki) by the **Esopo Science Fiction Society ESC**. The main difference between the two conventions is that Escon is usually an even more low-profile event than Star Rover Day – for example, it doesn't have a foreign guest of honour.

Another small con is **TamFan**, which has been arranged semi-annually for over a decade and a half now. As the name suggests, it is held in Tampere and concentrates on fantasy. Like Star Rover Day, it is only a one-day event, but in other respects it's a full-on mini-con.

A convention strongly resembling TamFan is **Turconen**, a one-day event held in Turku. The event was born in 2012 as a science fiction oriented counterpart for TamFan. The aim is to hold the event every other autumn in the Turku Main Library. In

2012, Turconen was a one-day event, but in 2014 the event lasted for two days, because it was organised together with a Swedish-language event called Fantastik.

As mentioned above, the gathering place and living room for the younger generation of geeks in Turku is Terrakoti. At the moment, the office is shared by six different geeky associations: two SF clubs, an anime club, a roleplaying and board gaming society, a console game club and a Swedish-language association for general geekery. In 2014, the associations arranged a con called **Terracon**, with the idea of creating an event for everyone interested in the above-mentioned activities where the associations could reach new fans and potential new actives.

In 2015, the actives of Terrakoti and **The Science Fiction Culture Cabinet at the University of Turku** (Tutka) in particular ended up arranging another small-scale event called **Aikavänkyrä** (roughly translated “Wobblycon”). The event in question was originally intended to be a **Doctor Who** seminar, but since it would have been otherwise cancelled, Tutka picked up the torch. The end result was the first Doctor Who themed minicon ever held in Finland, complete with a cosplay contest and an afterparty at Terrakoti.

Aikavänkyrä was also related to the organisation of a future Finncon. Tutka, the organiser of the event, had no previous experience of arranging bigger events, and for many Tutka actives Aikavänkyrä was their first contact with con running. It is safe to say that organising Aikavänkyrä lowered the threshold for tackling Finncon. Consequently, the organising committee of Finncon 2018 is formed by the organisers of Aikavänkyrä.

When speaking of the events organised in Turku, **Atonova** is also worth a mention. Until 2005, Finncon was mainly organised biannually. This meant that during the Finncon-free years, the Atorox award distributed by the Turku Science Fiction Society was awarded at the Turku Book Fair or another event. However, in 2002 the idea was born to organise a separate award event for the Atorox and Nova prizes, and thus Atonova was born.

Due to nature of the prizes, Atonova has always placed a heavy emphasis on writing. In addition to the award ceremony, panel discussions on the theme of the event have always been a part of the Atonova programme. Since Finncon has been an annual event for a long while now, Atonova has only been organised three times, the last one in 2015.

As stated earlier, Finncons have got bigger and bigger over the years – some could say too big for



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The first Finnish Doctor Who con Aikavänkyrää, held in 2015, is about to begin.

many older hard-core SF fans. It seemed that many of them wanted something less crowded. As a result, in 2007 a completely new kind of Finnish con was organised. The con was called Åcon, held in a hotel at the Åland Islands located near the Finnish coast.

Åcon could be called the first Finnish "relaxicon". Therefore Åcons have been much smaller than Finncons, closer to the typical Scandinavian con size. This may also explain why Åcons have managed to attract attendees from several neighbouring countries, most notably from Sweden.

The participants of Åcon consist mainly of fans with a steady income, which many younger fans do not have. Therefore, two years after the first Åcon, it got a sibling event of sorts, held at exactly the same time. The con is called **Econ** (as in "economy class"), and it is aimed at poor SF fans.

The comedic, one-evening event held at Terrakoti and arranged by Tutka aims to parody real cons. Econ has had its own world-class guests of honour, such as "cardboard Darth Vader" or "a roll of toilet paper", etc., and its programme consists of completely spontaneous panel discussions. Econ has been held nine times so far at Terrakoti, with the exception of Econ 3 which took place at an extra-low-

budget ferry trip to **Eurocon 2011**.

To make things even more confusing, let's add to the list one last smallish and less than serious "con" held at Terrakoti with a similar-sounding name. This con is **BaCon**, and a major part of it consists of eating – you guessed it – the meat product of the same name, as well as watching audiovisual SF (usually *Star Trek*) and anime with related themes. BaCon themes have included, for instance, gender, race, money, friendship, gods, etc.

BaCon was arranged for the first time in 2008, and it has been held annually ever since. It is also worth mentioning that the main thing which sets BaCon apart is that it is officially multilingual, because it is organised by the Turku-based Swedish-speaking student society **Föreningen för Underligga Intressen** (FUI). The first Bacons were arranged with the assistance of FUI's Finnish-speaking counterpart Tutka. In 2017, BaCon celebrated its 10th anniversary.

Another similar, low-budget, small-scale SF event is **Lokacon**, arranged annually in October by the Jyväskylä SF society 42. Lokacon has been arranged for a number of years now, but the details of the event remain a mystery for the writer of this article, since he has so far failed to attend one.

## Finnish SF awards

Every fandom has its own awards. The Finnish fandom is no exception.

The most important Finnish SF award is undoubtedly the **Atorox Award**, which 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 1940s and 1950s.

Atorox is awarded to the best Finnish science fiction or fantasy short story published in the previous year. The winner is decided by a jury comprised of representatives from all the Finnish SF societies as well as individual fans. It is usually presented at Finncon or some other major SF-related event.

The award has a significant role in the Finnish SF scene and among Finnish SF writers. The field of Finnish SF short story writing is a thriving one, and nowadays the number of works on the Atorox long list is usually over two hundred. This is thanks to the

work done in the field and the number of Finnish SF zines and short story anthologies published annually.

The **Tähtivaeltaja Award** (Star Rover Award) is presented annually to the best SF book (novel or short story collection) published in Finland in the previous year. The book doesn't have to be an original Finnish work; it could also (as is frequently the case) be a translation.

In 2001, the award was granted to a Finnish book for the first time: the short story collection **Missä ju-nat käändtyvät** ("Where The Trains Turn") by **Pasi Il-mari Jääskeläinen**. So far the award has been given to a Finnish author only four times during the award's 25-year history. The last time this happened in 2013 when the award went to **Quantum Thief**, a novel by **Hannu Rajaniemi**, a Finnish writer living in Scotland.

The aim of the award is to encourage publishers to publish better SF. Particularly during the first decade of the 21st century, the books picked for the award have tended to be literary SF. The winner is



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The Atorox award ceremony in 2013.

decided by a jury selected by the **Helsinki Science Fiction Society**. The first Star Rover Award was given in 1986.

In 2007, the Star Rover award got a sibling of sorts, the **Tähtifantasia Award** (Star Fantasy award), also presented by the Helsinki Science Fiction Society. The aim of the award is similar to that of the Star Rover Award, with an emphasis on fantasy. It is given annually to a translated fantasy book.

The **Kosmoskynä Award** (Cosmos Pen Award) is presented by the Finnish Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association. The award is granted as recognition of excellence in the field of SF in Finland. In 2001, for example, it was awarded to **Johanna Sinisalo** for all the PR work she has done over the years for Finnish SF, and in 2014, as amazing as it is, to yours truly. In some respects, the Kosmoskynä award could be seen as the Finnish equivalent of the **Damon Knight Memorial Grand Master Award**.

The **Kuvastaja Award** (Mirrormere Award), presented annually by the Finnish Tolkien Association, was granted for the first time in 2001. The award has elements from the Star Rover and Star Fantasy awards, but it focuses on fantasy. The existence of the Kuvastaja Award is also the reason why domestic fantasy is not considered for the Tähtifantasia Award.

### Finnish SF clubs and zines

In many cases, drawing lines between zines and clubs in Finland is very difficult, if not impossible. The thing is, there has never been actual "fan-zine culture" in Finland, at least in the strictest sense of the word. The zines, in almost all cases, have been born around a town-based club. This has, on the other hand, given the zines longevity they might not otherwise have had.

Over the years, there have also been town-based SF societies that have flourished for a while but then disappeared, some of them more than once. This is the case with the town of Oulu, for example. There has been fandom activity in Oulu for decades, but so far there have been three clubs to run it.

First there was the **Oulu Science Fiction Society Polaris** with its zine **Mytago**, which was replaced by the **Oulu University Science Fiction Club** (OYS-FK). The latest incarnation, born some years ago, is called **Oulu SF society Iku-Turso** (the Eternal Turso).

This is often the case in smaller Finnish towns. If there's no university to sustain the fanbase and new people to keep the club active, several crucial persons moving away at the same time may kill the so-

ciety. That has happened twice in the town of Lahti, and lately the signs of life haven't been promising in Joensuu either.

On the other hand, lately there has also been activity in towns previously unknown on the map of Finnish fandom, such as Pori and Vaasa, and there are even rumours of something happening in Rovaniemi, way up in the north. This may very well be thanks to social media and Facebook which makes it very easy for people to connect with each other.

Besides the ones founded in late the 1970s and early 1980s, there are several clubs in Finland that do not publish their own zines. Many of them are younger and came into being in the 1990s, some even later than that. As with the zines, there have been numerous obscure SF societies over the years. Deceased organisations have been left out of this review.

One might say that starting societies is one of the favourite activities of the Finnish fandom. Over the years, we've seen the birth and in some cases also the disappearance of groups like "Ye Olde Cavaliers Scientificion Boozing Guild", "The Grumpy Bald Sci-fi Fans Association" and "Señor Humidor's Amazingly Sciencefictional Cigar Society". Don't ask.

Most Finnish fanzines have started out very modestly, with only a few xeroxed pages. Over the years, the field of Finnish zines has undergone quite a metamorphosis. Some zines have become bigger and bigger, some have maintained their fannish appearance, and some have disappeared altogether.

The zines which have ceased publication are not included in the following list. Although many zines have disappeared into history, there is still a wide range of zines being published.

The biggest of them look more like actual SF magazines than fanzines and could be called pro-zines or semiprozines. In some cases, the society itself has more or less disappeared, and all that's left is the magazine it publishes. This is the case especially with **Tampere Science Fiction Society's** zine **Portti**.

The following list contains Finnish zines and the 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 quarterly. All of them are run by volunteers, meaning none of the people behind them get paid, including illustrators, writers and editors.

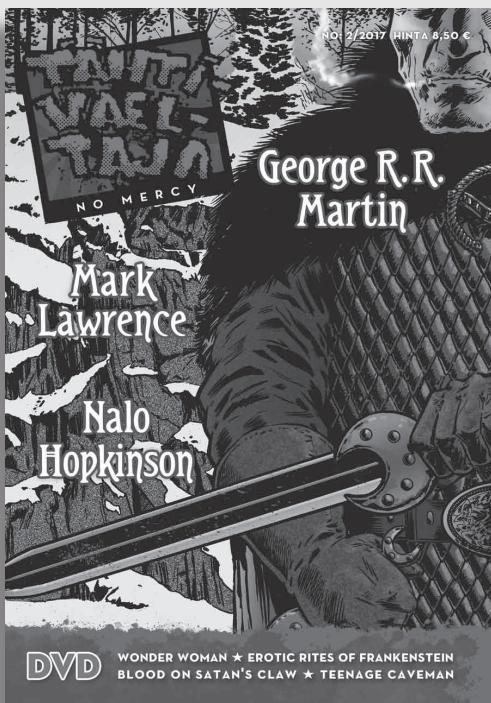
Most Finnish SF associations have their own pages on the internet as well. They are mainly in Finnish, but usually there's a summary page for non-Finnish speakers.

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

**Tampere Science Fiction Society's Portti** (Gateway) is undoubtedly the biggest and most successful Finnish SF zine. It is professional-looking, printed on glossy paper, over a hundred pages per issue, and nowadays in full colour. It has been published since 1982.

The Tampere Science Fiction Society also arranges an annual SF short story competition, which is without doubt the most important Finnish SF writing contest, with substantial cash-prizes. The competition has been arranged since 1986, and the prizes have grown bigger and bigger. Over two hundred short stories are submitted to the competition annually.

One can't deny the fact that *Portti* is the most successful Finnish SF zine. On the other hand, it tends to be an island of sorts, and one could argue whether it is actually a part of the fandom. For a number of years, the *Portti* competition dominated the short story writing scene, and the stories published in *Portti* as well as the winners of the *Portti* competition tended to dominate the yearly Atorox poll.



During the last few years, the situation has changed drastically, and the field of Finnish SF short stories has become much more heterogeneous. The biggest reason for this has been the growing number of publication channels, first by the advent of online magazines and later by the anthologies created by several small publishers. However, judging purely by the number of pages, *Portti* remains the largest SF magazine in Finland.

Tähtivaeltaja  
Helsinki Science Fiction Society  
Editor: Toni Jerrman  
<http://www.tahtivaeltaja.com>

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

*Tähtivaeltaja* is a professional-looking SF magazine, printed on glossy paper, with about 100 colour pages, published since 1982. From the very beginning, it has been the Finnish SF magazine with the most edge. One main element of *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 *Tähtivaelta* looked almost as much a punk zine as an SF one.

For a SF publication, *Tähtivaelta* has an art direction emphasising illustrations which express considerable appreciation for the female form. 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 *Tähtivaelta* is still the best SF zine in Finland. Especially in the early days, the branch of SF *Tähtivaelta* supported in particular was comics. In fact, many well-known artists started their career in *Tähtivaelta*.

*Tähtivaelta* has also done valuable work by publishing articles on new and upcoming trends and writers in the field of SF for Finnish readers, often beating its foreign counterparts.

## Spin

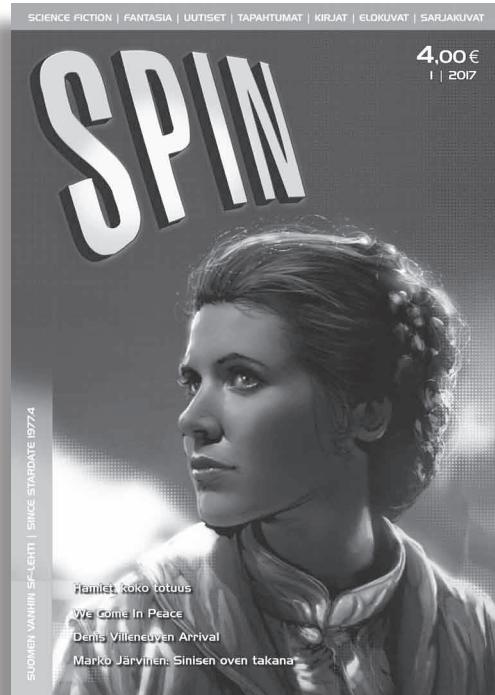
Turku Science Fiction Society  
Editor: Anna Mattila  
<http://www.tsfs.fi>

Founded in 1976, the **Turku Science Fiction Society** is the oldest of the Finnish SF clubs and therefore forms the starting point for the history of the Finnish fandom. TSFS's **Spin** is also the oldest of the Finnish SF zines. It has been published since 1977 and has had its ups and downs over the years.

As noted earlier, there has always been a very clear distinction between fandom "generations" in Turku. This can be seen clearly in the history of TSFS. There has been clear-cut separation between the boards of different generations as well as quiet periods between generations of fans, when the level of activity is lower or new forms of activity are being formed.

For the time being, the most active period of TSFS took place at the turn of the century. For a decade, it was probably the most active and energetic SF society in Finland. One proof of this were the Finncons of 1999 and 2003 in Turku. This was also a turning point for *Spin*, and there was a dramatic rise in its profile and quality. *Spin* took on the look it still has today: professional-looking, printed on glossy paper, about 40–60 pages, with colour covers.

Because of its long history, TSFS is in many ways one of the cornerstones of the Finnish fandom. It presents the Atorox award, organises SF coverage at the Turku Book Fair, is the co-organiser of the **Nova** and **Noviisi** short story writing competitions and runs an SF reading circle with the Turku City Library. The club's extensive SF library with over a thousand books is also worth mentioning.



## Kosmoskynä

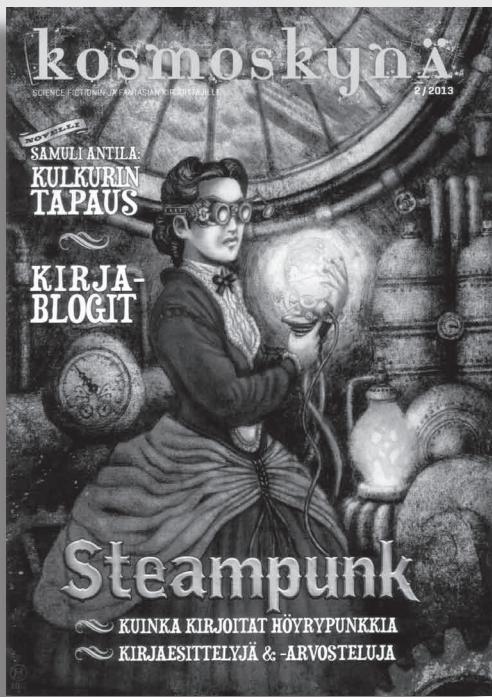
Finnish Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association  
Editor: Miia Outinen  
<http://tieteiskirjoittajat.net>

**Finnish Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association's** (FSFFWA) magazine **Kosmoskynä** (Cosmos Pen) has been published since 1984. It, too, has had its ups and downs over the years. The zine has had numerous editors-in-chief, and each run with a new editor has had a very distinctive look.

Being a writers' zine, *Kosmoskynä* has always concentrated on writing. There are columns and articles on writing, interviews of novelists, information about writing competitions and writers' guides. *Kosmoskynä* has also had a regular column called Cosmic Colosseum since 1999, which reviews Finnish SF short stories published in zines.

FSFFWA has a wide range of activities for writers, such as a free feedback service for members, writing courses and so on. It also has close ties to TSFS. The Nova short story writing competition, aimed at beginning writers, is one of their co-operative projects.

*Nova* has been arranged since 2000 and has in many respects become the second most influential SF writing competition in Finland. In 2007, *Nova* got



a sibling as well: Noviisi (Novice), an SF short story writing competition aimed at 13–17-year-olds, arranged semi-annually. At the moment, both competitions are organised by FSFFWA, TSFS and Tutka.

The Finnish Tolkien Society  
<http://www.suomentolkienseura.fi>

**The Finnish Tolkien Society** was founded long before the fantasy boom or the movie versions of *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Hobbit*, all the way back in 1991. Although **J.R.R. 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 has put out not one but two zines: *Legolas* and *Hobittilan Sanomat* (Hobbiton Times). Of the two, *Legolas* is the actual zine, and *Hobbiton Times* more like a members' bulletin. Both are A5 in size, *Legolas* about 40 pages, *Hobbiton Times* 20 or less, black and white only. *Legolas* is the older of the two, published since 1991.

The Tolkien Society has lots of activities, most of which are concentrated around the Helsinki area. It also has a lot of subdivisions called "smials" all over Finland, some of which are as active as the actual society.

In 2012, a new leaf was turned over in the society as the Tolkien Society decided to combine their forces with the online forum **Kontu** (Shire). The society's name was also changed, and nowadays it is known as **Suomen Tolkien-seura Kontu** (The Finnish Tolkien Society Shire).

The society also presents the **Kuvastaja** (Mirrormere) award for the best domestic fantasy book published in the previous year.

### Alienisti

Editor: Lasse Ranta  
 Jyväskylä Science Fiction Society 42  
<http://www.scifi42.fi/alienisti/>

**The Jyväskylä Science Fiction Society 42** is one of the societies that have more social than zine activity. It burst into fandom in the early 1990s and has since then became one of the cornerstones of the Finnish fandom.

The 42's most important contribution to the Finnish fandom has undoubtedly been acting as the major driving force and main organiser behind the Finncons held in Jyväskylä. The first Finncon was held in Jyväskylä in 1995 and so far the latest in 2014. One of the secrets behind the Jyväskylä Finn-



cons is that 42 has managed to create working ties with the **Jyväskylä Arts Festival**.

42 also has a zine called **Alienisti** (Alienist), published yearly, with a new issue usually out for Finncon. Even though Alienisti can't compete in content with some of the bigger zines, it's a good example of fitting activity with the resources available. 42 also arranges its very own small-scale con called **Lokacon** annually in October.

**Marvin – the Lehti**  
Helsinki University Science Fiction Club  
<http://hysfk.fi/>

Of all the zines in Finland, **Marvin** (Marvin – the Zine) was for a number of years the zine that looked like a zine. It was xeroxed-looking, about 30 pages, and in A5 size, usually filled with lots of weird inside humour and other baffling bits. With *Marvin* you never knew what to expect.

Every issue of *Marvin* had a different theme and layout, including pornography, religion, swords, turkeys, concrete, hot chocolate, world conquest, socialism and so on. There were issues like "von Märviken" with lots of ufo-related stories such as an erotic SF story from "Emmanuel Arse", "Gentlemen's War-Marvin", and a pulp-styled *Marvin* special "Stupendous Stories".

Some years ago, the people behind *Marvin* began to play around with the magazine format. One issue of *Marvin* was a "crazy scientist" wall calendar, another a sleek-looking Cosmopolitan style magazine and so forth. They have also published several steampunk-themed vintage newspaper style issues of *Marvin* full of strange news. In fact, most issues of *Marvin* during the last few years have followed that format.

**The Helsinki University Science Fiction Club** is one of the main forces behind the Finncons in Helsinki. Additionally, the **Finnish Weird** project is one of the more ambitious projects of HYSFK.

You pronounce HYSFK "GooGooMuck". Don't ask.

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

As the 2006 version of this article was published, **Usva** (Mist) held the title of the youngest Finnish SF zine. At the time of its creation, it was also the only Finnish SF e-zine, which readers could down-

load free of charge in PDF format. It is one of the few Finnish SF publications that fulfill the criteria of an actual fanzine. *Usva* was, and still more or less is, created by one person: author, editor and fan **Anne Leinonen**.

*Usva* has been published quarterly since 2005. Some of the issues have had 80 pages or more. It consists mostly of short stories, and during its five year run it has published hundreds of stories. The policy of *Usva*'s editor is to focus on diversity and publishing good stories, regardless of genre. One could say the zine has taken on the bold challenge of bridging the gap between mainstream and SF readers.

*Usva* has published pure science fiction, fantasy and everything in between and around them. A big part of *Usva*'s image are short stories which represent "Finnish New Weird" (or, as it has been since branded, "Finnish Weird") – stories with their roots deep in realism. Some of the short stories published in *Usva* are only marginally SF and can be placed in the hazy area somewhere between SF and mainstream prose. *Usva* has also done several English Specials (2006, 2007 and 2010) worth checking out.

One thing that should also be mentioned when speaking of Anne Leinonen are the "Usva camps" organized for a number of years now. Usva camps



are weekend-long SF writer retreats, a sort of miniature version of the **Clarion** workshops, that allow writers to do writing exercises and receive peer feedback of their texts.

## Escape

Esopo Science Fiction and Fantasy Society  
<http://www.esc-ape.net/>

**The Esopo Science Fiction and Fantasy Society, ESC** for short, was founded in 2004. Esopo is one of the largest cities in Finland, but due to its closeness to Helsinki, it is often overshadowed by the capital. ESC's goal has been showing that even Esopo can have its own unique brand of fandom.

Many of the issues of ESC's zine **Escape** have had an "Esopo-ethnic" viewpoint. One of the articles for example stated that "Living in Esopo is like living on Mars". Early issues of *Escape* looked much like *Marvin*, but were even more fannish in appearance. One reason for that may be that many of the fans behind *Marvin* and HYSFK were active in ESC as well. ESC is also behind **Escon**, a minicon mentioned earlier in this article.

In 2009, ESC announced that it would make changes to its strategy. Instead of merely putting out two issues of *Escape* per year, it started to also

publish specials, some of which have resembled actual books. The first ESC special, made in 2009, was **Fantastic Espoo**, a travel guide to Espoo with blatantly fictional content.

In 2011, ESC continued the series with **Tieteiskirjailuja** (roughly translated as "speculative needle-work") and in 2013 with a short story collection of paranormal stories based on and inspired by Finnish folklore. In 2015, ESC published its first English Special, called **Escape from Helsinki**.

## Kuiskaus pimeässä

H.P. Lovecraft Historical Society  
<http://www.hplhs.org/>

Due to the small number of Finnish-speakers, societies or zines focusing on only one, clearly defined area of the SF field, a franchise or a writer, have been relatively rare in Finland. **The Finnish H.P. Lovecraft Historical Society**, founded in 2010, is the latest attempt in this series.

At the time of the previous publication of this article in 2011, the society was only stretching its tentacles and taking its first slimy baby steps. The first issue of its zine, **Nyarlathotep**, since renamed **Kuiskaus pimeässä** (Whisper in Darkness), was published that year.

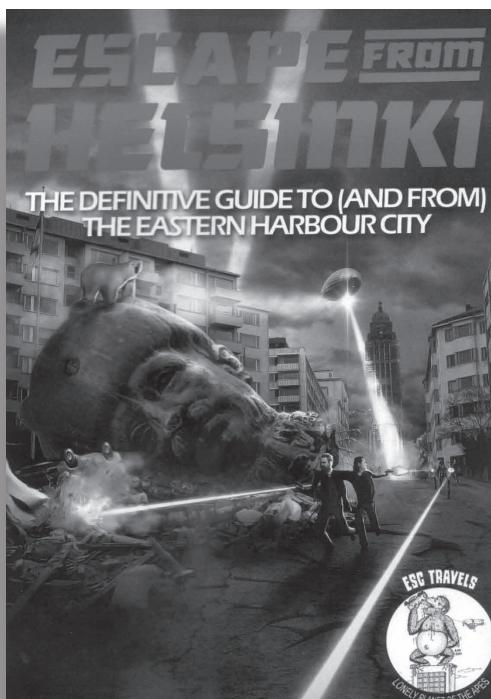
For a while it appeared that this society, too, was following in the footsteps of its predecessors into an even swifter death. During the recent years, however, the society has got a lot of new actives, and it has had various co-operation projects with other SF societies in Finland. In 2016, it was also the main organiser of a one day horror convention called simply **KauhuCon** ("Horror Con").

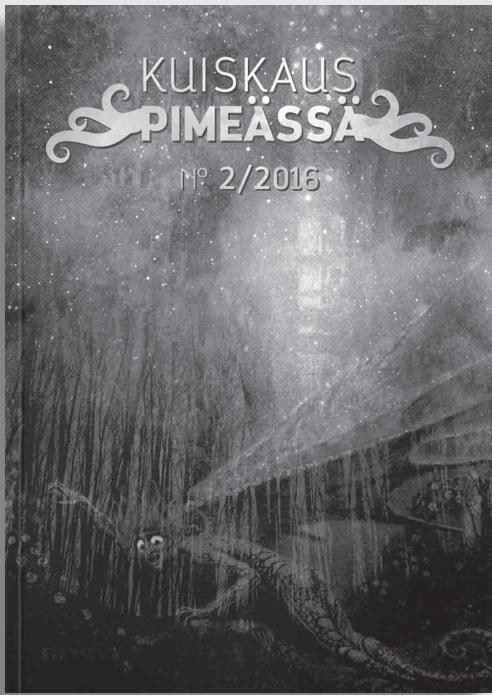
Literary horror seems to be on the rise in the Finnish fandom in general. This may be because the generation which spent its adolescence reading works of Finnish fan writers during the first "Lovecraft boom" in the 1990s has now reached adulthood. One proof of this is the birth of a new horror zine called **Kuolleiden silmät** (The Eyes of the Dead) a few years back.

## Kultakuoriainen

Editor: Tuomas Saloranta  
<http://urs.fi>

Every action has a reaction, and the whole history of literature seems to be shaped by reactions, usually to the preceding literary movement. This is also the case, although on a small scale, in the Finnish





SF scene.

One could say that one of the major trends in the Finnish fandom during the last decade and a half has been the attempt to break or obscure the barrier between SF and mainstream prose, as well as to steer the genre towards more literary SF. In 2010, however, a group of writers, lead by short story writer **Tuomas Saloranta**, declared that they felt Finnish "speculative fiction" had already become way too ambitious and artsy.

They wanted to return to the old values, shamelessly straightforward adventure stories in the footsteps of **Robert E. Howard**, **H.P. Lovecraft** and **Edgar Rice Burroughs**. This literary movement was called "Uusrahvaanomainen spekulatiivinen fiktio" ("Neo-vulgar speculative fiction" or "Neo-Pulp"), **URS** for short. After its birth, we've seen the publication of several anthologies as well as an URS-themed zine.

The zine was originally called **Uusrahvaanomaisia tarinoita** (Neo-Vulgar Stories), but the name has been changed to **Kultakuorainen** (The Gold Bug) since then. Like *Usva*, it is being published as an e-zine, and everyone interested can download it free of charge.

In 2011, the first URS paper anthology, **Pimeyden reunalla** (On the Edge of Darkness) was published by Tutka. After that, we've witnessed an explosion of new SF theme anthologies by different

small-scale publishers – more anthologies in a few years than during the last few decades combined!

Many people, including its founder, have said that as a literary movement, URS has already filled its purpose; the movement and the writers gathered around it have significantly renewed the publishing situation in Finland. At the moment, *Kultakuorainen* is on a hiatus due to Saloranta's other numerous literary projects, including his own one-man publishing house **Kuoriaiskirjat**. URS also has its own bar-based mafia.

One sign of the changing times and the impact of the URS movement is the foundation of a publisher called **Osuuskumma**. Osuuskumma is a co-operative publishing house founded in 2012 by a group of writers and fans inside the fandom. In a couple of years, Osuuskumma has managed to establish itself as a publisher, and nowadays it puts out an impressive number of SF titles annually.

One interesting phenomenon one should mention at this point is also a concept called "The Codex of Stepan". It is a writing project conceived by a group of URS writers which revolves around a mysterious manuscript found from in silver mine in the Czech during the 15th century.

Even though the project is heavily inspired by the Cthulhu lore, as well as all the Finnish H.P. Lovecraft pastiches done during the last two decades, but the concept itself is original. The idea of the project is to function as a shared world, and so far it has spawned three short story collections.

## Fafnir

The Finnish Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy Research  
<http://journal.finfar.org/>

As stated earlier in this article, the Finnish fandom has had close ties with the academic field. In 2013, it was decided that a separate society was needed to promote research on science fiction and fantasy and other related genres in Finland. The society was called **The Finnish Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy Research** (Suomen science fiction- ja fantasiatutkimuksen seura ry), FINFAR for short.

FINFAR publishes **Fafnir**, the **Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research**. Fafnir is a peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary academic journal published by FINFAR. The journal aims at serving as an international forum for academic exchange on science fiction and fantasy and for discussion on current issues in the field.

Fafnir publishes various texts ranging from peer-

reviewed research articles to short overviews, essays, interviews, opinion pieces and academic book reviews on any subject suited for the paper, and it is published in electronic format four times a year.

### The Science Fiction Culture Cabinet at the University of Turku <http://tieteiskulttuurikabinetti.fi/>

Turku University SF Club, **Tutka** (Radar) for short, is the second SF association in Turku, founded in 1995. Its idea was to offer an alternative to TSFS, since some people felt it had become too bureaucratic. For a number of years, Tutka organised extremely popular video evenings, showing SF series which were not yet known to the masses in Finland, most popular of them being perhaps **Babylon 5**.

After being relatively inactive for several years, Tutka was taken over in 2008 by a whole new crew, with visible results. At the moment, Tutka is undoubtedly the most active SF society in Turku. Tutka specialises in activities that can be organised with minimal preparations and that are above all fun. The club arranges parties and video evenings as well as other social activities, and it has several annual fannish traditions. Tutka is also behind **Var-**

**jomafia** (Shadow Mafia), a weekly meeting of SF fans at Terrakoti.

In addition, Tutka is a small-scale book publisher. In 2016, the society published a short story collection **Spekulatiivinen Turku** ("Speculative Turku"), consisting of science fiction, fantasy and horror stories taking place in Turku. So far the latest of Tutka's publications is called **Tyrän saanut ampiainen** ("Wasp with a hernia"), a collection of bad poetry, written as a part of the Towel Day bad poetry matinée arranged in Turku annually since 2006.

As it was stated earlier, in 2015 Tutka tried its wings for the first time in con running, and it is now the main organiser of Finncon 2018.

### Föreningen för Underliga Intressen vid Åbo Akademi <http://underligaintressen.wordpress.com>

One of the relative newcomers to the family of Finnish SF societies is **FUI**. Its name is an abbreviation of the words **Föreningen för Underliga Intressen**, roughly translated as "The society for strange interests".

FUI is also based in Turku, or to be more exact, at Åbo Akademi, the Swedish-speaking university



© Riku Ahlsten

The members of Tutka attending the Douglas Adams inspired bad poetry matinée armed with beer and salted peanuts. The event has been arranged annually at Cosmic Comic Café in Turku since 2006.

in Turku. FUI's idea is to offer a meeting place for all students of Åbo Akademi interested in science fiction, anime or gaming.

In many respects, FUI could be called Tutka's Swedish-speaking-counterpart, and the two societies have close ties. FUI was founded in 2006 and has so far arranged several fun and fannish gatherings for its members, including BaCon, mentioned earlier in the article, as well as an annual sporting event consisting of throwing pieces of computer hardware.

Also, the society seems to have a strange fascination with cabbage. Again, don't ask.

### 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 at a very early stage. One part grouped around *Portti*, another around the now departed SF zine *Aikakone*.

Spektre has functioned for a decade now. It arranges mafias, video evenings and other informal gatherings, but has no plans whatsoever of publishing a zine. However, Spektre plays an active role in the fandom. Among other things, it hosts the fandom's annual co-operation meetings and the Viikinsaari picnic.

Spektre was also the main force behind Finncon-Animecon 2008 as well as Finncons 2012 and 2016, all held in Tampere. One reason for the success and professionalism of the cons in Tampere is once again co-operation. Cons such as the comics festival Tampere Kupliai, the roleplaying and anime convention Tracon and the Finncons held in Tampere all have had close working ties for a number of years now.

### Risingshadow <http://www.risingshadow.fi/>

Considering Finland's reputation as being at the forefront of new technology, it's surprising that compared with many other countries, there have been only very few SF-themed websites. Most Finnish SF societies and zines have their own web pages, but in almost every case, they exist merely to promote the actual zine or society, not as an inde-

pendent medium.

One explanation for that is tradition. During the course of the last forty years, Finnish fan and pro-zines have taken the role webzines have in countries where fandom came into being more recently. Had the Finnish fandom not existed in its present form from the 1970s, there would probably be many more SF-related websites.

When the first radically updated version of this article was published in 2003, there were just a couple of SF discussion forums in Finland. In a few short years, their number practically exploded. We have also seen the birth of several Finnish webzines. However, in many cases, the life-cycle of a discussion forum has been quite short.

The largest, most long-lived and successful Finnish discussion forum for SF fans is without doubt **Risingshadow**. The forum was born as a database of fantasy novels, but it branched out quickly and became a popular, flourishing discussion forum. At the moment, Risingshadow also holds its own monthly mafia bar meetings.

In the beginning, Risingshadow was above all a forum for fantasy fans who were clearly younger than the average fandom members. As the years have passed, the differences have balanced out, and although traces of this history still remain, Risingshadow works closely together with the rest of the fandom. Among other things, Risingshadow has an excellent bulletin board for SF books being published in Finnish and other related news.

The literature database, however, is still the core of the Risingshadow website. It's worth a mention that the forum also has an English side for non-Finnish-speakers.

### In conclusion

So there you have it, Finnish fandom in all its glory. This was naturally only one view of it, and a different author 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 most easily done by visiting one of the Finnish cons. There is a big chance you attended Worldcon 75 in Helsinki, but missing it doesn't mean the end of the universe. There will be Finncons for years and years to come. See you around the galaxy.

*Partly translated in 2003 by Liisa Rantalaiho. Copy-edited in 2011 by Val Grimm. Additional translations in 2017 by Suvi Kauppila.*