

# So... I wrote a book.

## Now what?

by Heikki Hietala

I never set out to write a book. Unlike many debut authors today, who say they just decided to write a book, I didn't have a conscious start for Tulagi Hotel. Instead, I was sitting at the office one day, wading through more than a million words of documentation for a Microsoft product, when the urge to get a blank file hit me. I took one up, and forty-five minutes later, I had five pages of text with the words CHAPTER I on top of the file.

Twelve years later I had it in my hand as a book, published by a small Indie company in England called Diiarts. It has been quite a ride from start to finish, and in the following, I will outline the main events of that process.

I took my time writing the book. It is set in the post-WW2 Solomon Islands, and the protagonist is a fighter pilot of the US Marines, flying off carriers and island bases. Research was sometimes easy, sometimes it took months to uncover a tiny detail, but I decided not to run the project by deadlines, but by deliverables. In May 2008 it was finished, and I sent the 388 page PDF to a bunch of unsuspecting friends. Some of them read it, and when I asked them, would they have read it if written by John Doe and not a friend, they all said yes.

But the next event was much more promising. A friend sent me a link to the HarperCollins website, Authonomy, and urged me to upload it there. The site is a web-based beauty contest cum automated slush pile: people read books uploaded by other people, and if they like the book, they put it on a virtual shelf. The book gets points and rises in the

rankings, and the people get talent spotter points, all the more if they find books early that collect a large following. Every month, HarperCollins picks up the top five books on the main ranking list and puts them on the so-called Editor's Desk. This means a HC editor will read the book and give a review.

I fully expected my book to peak at maybe 500 and then sink back into obscurity – after all, it was handed the ID number 1726, so that many books were there when I uploaded. To my surprise, it started hiking up the charts. Soon it topped the genre charts, all four of them, then it got the weekly list and in May 2009 I saw it at #15 on the Ed's Desk list, with more than 8,000 books on site. And that was how high it went. To keep it up there would have required constant plugging at the forums and endless reading of others' work. I did my fair amount of that, but did not want to spend all my time there.

Another reason for me to stop pushing it up was the fact that even up till now, HC has not bought a single book they have reviewed. Getting to the desk would not be a guarantee of anything. In fact, HC displayed interest in my book twice before that already; once they picked it to be one of twelve books they sent to agents for their consideration, and another time they gave me 150 pounds for printing it as a Print-On-Demand book. Nothing came out of the agent showcase, for any of the twelve authors, but the other deal worked in a way, more on that later.

## The Authonomy experience

Getting exposure for any text is always a good thing. Authonomy had more than 13,000 registered users when I began to fade away from it. By that time there were many irritating features that were more and more evident in the use of the site. For example, the old guard would usually read two to four chapters of a book, then decide whether to back the book or not, and in addition, leave very useful comments. I collected more than 370 comments on Tulagi, many of which I did incorporate in the final book. When the masses hit the site, they'd glance through the first pages of the first chapter, back the book, and as a comment say, "Great book – backed with pleasure! Please back my book in return." This tit-for-tat backing is contrary to the very idea of a peer review site. If every book gets backed in the vain hope of rising in the charts, charts represent feverish backing, not quality of text.

Another problem was the so-called Klazart incident. Someone who had a large Internet following already, due to something quite outside literature, wrote a book and posted it. Then he asked the tens of thousands of people he knew to sign up and back the book. This of course forced the book through the roof within days, and it landed on the Ed's Desk the month it was uploaded. The resulting fight in the forums was in the scale of the 3rd Peloponnesian War, and it forced HC to do some slight changes to the ranking algorithm. No rules were broken by Klazart, mind you; it was just against the ethos of the site.

The third thing that put me off Authonomy was the death of the forum culture. The early members had fun in the forums, plugging their own books in the Shameless Plugs forum, and doing the same for others and acting generally silly in other forums. The later arrivals didn't really catch the idea of forming friendships and pushing the books of other people – they concentrated on making noise for their own book. Also, the worship of those with a high talent spotter rank



went way overboard, with people messaging the high TSRs relentlessly.

## Going POD

With the Authonomy 150 pound gift certificate, I headed down to the Print-On-Demand house Blurb.com, which is affiliated with HC. I downloaded their book design software, which was not entirely user-friendly at the time, and spent a fun two weeks inserting my chapters one by one. It had very limited features regarding layout and styles, and none of my fantastic visions of book design were realized, but hey, I got the book out in both hardcover and softcover. The quality was okay, actually, it was good. One person even bought the most expensive layout with a wraparound image hard cover. Keep it well, Pekka, it's the only one in the Universe.

The real kicks I got from the book were related to the fact that holding the book in my hand, after 12 years, felt really good. Then I realized one doesn't have to toil for more than a decade to get

there, any manuscript can be squeezed through the machine and called a book. This is actually one of the key problems with PODding – with no quality control at any point of the process, people will wind up with deficient products. Some, like my very first printed copy of the book, will have layout problems, but much more importantly, most books will never have passed through the hands of an editor.

Then what? I tried selling the thing. I managed to sell it to 26 people, which just about covers my friends and family. I created a Facebook page for it, I tried direct marketing, I even went back to Authonomy with the POD link and saw one person buy it. Clearly it was going to take a major effort to get off the ground.

At this point I understood the value of connections. At least here in Finland, with the market so small, getting a book noticed needs the author to know someone with good contacts. As I always aimed my book for the international market, I was faced with the double hurdle – I was a debut novelist writing in my second language. This rendered me all but invisible to agents and publishers. I decided to let the POD process lie low for a while and try something else.

## Getting an agent

One of the things I gathered from Authonomy was that getting an agent was a stairway to heaven. Armed with the latest edition of “The Writer’s ABC Checklist”, I prepared a query as per the finest query editing regulations, and sent it off to 48 prospective and respectable agents. In return, I learned there are 48 different ways of saying ‘no’, some of them terse, some more wordy, but nevertheless negative. I believe one’s book should be an exceptional piece of quality work for an agent to pick it up from the slush pile. Or... you must know someone with contacts with agents.

The thing with getting an agent is really the quality of the query. And the contacts. Agents today are bombarded with would-be authors just like publishers, and their slush piles run just as high. To them it does not make any difference whether you have put out a POD version of your book or not;

most want to see a tight synopsis, three chapters and a query that makes them smell success. No mean feat putting such a package together.

In a way I am not sure agents are vital in the sense they used to be before the digital revolution. Authonomy is an automated slush pile that bypasses agents, and there are very many other sites like that for publishers to tap into new writing, YouWriteOn.com is one of them. Agents, good ones especially, can of course help immensely in getting the attention of a publisher, but there are many agents that are really of no use at all. Luckily there are websites that list such agencies and help budding authors to steer clear of them.

## What about author websites?

Having written the book, I was surprised by the need to write short stories. In six months, I wrote sixteen of them. With the new production came the need to get reviews for them and pointers for writing short stories, which was a new format for me.

At this point, I was invited by some friends from Authonomy to join a new writers’ collective called Year Zero Writers. YZW is a forum for authors to showcase their writing and to discuss new ideas and themes in writing. I was surprised to land a seat at this collective, as most of their work is very modern and my own style is traditional in the extreme. Nevertheless, being shown on YZW has given me many important contacts and outlets, such as *Escape into Life* and *Emprise Review*.

I was also told of another site, called *The Book Shed*, a members-only site for which one has to apply with a short story. This is a very different site in the sense that its focus is on reviewing and refining stories, written by members. I must say the Sheddites, with their incisive commenting and no-holds-barred reviews, have done much to improve my writing. I usually work on a story alone, then have it read by a trusted set of web-based friends, and then take it to the Shed for a comprehensive workout. The end result is invariably much better than what I started out with, and repaying others in kind for their help is also a pleasure – you get to see many stories, of many

genres, and are sometimes able to offer useful advice.

Then there are the more general sites, such as Goodreads.com, Litopia.com, Freado.com and Mobilereads.com. These sites are excellent tools for networking and showcasing, and if you do POD or Kindle, or have an indie publisher, you usually have to create accounts on as many such sites as you can. Of course, with their user base, you have the chance of finding friends who are willing to work with you in marketing or reviewing, and I encourage you to have a look at these sites if you are in this phase of the process. Working these sites takes a huge amount of time and effort, though, so you may want to concentrate on a couple of sites and work up a real presence there.

### **And then... the Indie Press**

While on *Authonomy*, I made a few good friends, who eventually left the site to found their own press, called Dragon International Independent Arts or Diiarts for short. They wanted to publish historical fiction, and since my book is at the late end of what you can describe as such, we agreed to put it up as well.

Jason Horger, the head of Diiarts in the US, had already volunteered to edit my book (which was sorely in need of a good edit). I worked together with Diiarts on layout and cover issues, and they produced a hardcover, a softcover, and a Kindle version. I went to London for the launch at the Finnish Embassy's Institute. The book was also made available through all the regular channels, eventually reaching Akateeminen Kirjakauppa and Suomalainen here in Finland, The Book Depository and Amazon.

Getting your book out through an indie press is something like one step above going POD. You get some visibility through the publisher's website and launch and marketing efforts, and you may be able to do cross-marketing with the other authors in the roster. The press also takes care of ISBN number, the actual printing of the book (mine was done in India, and the final product is very nice in both HC and SB) and the delivery channels, which may be hard to navigate if you're going it alone. Of course, going with Lulu.com or CreateSpace will get you

access to Amazon and other bookshops.

The arm of the indie press is only so long; you will find that unless you happen to write a blockbuster that becomes a runaway success on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media, you'll find that you will do a lot of the marketing yourself. Where the big players are able to market your book even before it's in print, and have contacts in different countries with sales channels ready for negotiating translations, with an Indie press you're pretty much on your own in these regards.

At the end of the day, getting your book in print in one market is probably not the jackpot. What you want after publication is the sale of translation rights; the real success is in going global. Unless your Indie is extremely well connected, you won't get much help from them.

### **Public Relations**

Getting anyone to have a look at your book, no matter how you publish it, is a challenge. I really expected this step to be a bit easier, since my book was ostensibly the first novel by a native Finn to be published in English outside the country. Consequently, when I had the book in hand and went for media coverage, I was sorely disappointed with the limited interest I was able to garner. Apparently there are so many new titles appearing every year that to make it into the limelight is a question of lucky break - or good contacts.

I have sent the book out directly to editors and authors, sent press releases and notifications, and at every new publication of a shortie, reminded the recipients of the book. So far this has not really produced much more than one mention in *Helsingin Sanomat* and a very nice and useful interview in my trade union magazine, *Opettaja* (Teacher). Still, I have quite a few leads under development and am in no way discouraged by the difficulties in crossing the news threshold. After all, if it took me twelve years to write the book, I should be willing to work a couple of years to get it properly publicized.

The author websites are of course your main tool for publicity, but you should look for new

and innovative solutions. If you can get your book reviewed in the local village newspaper, it's a clear victory. It doesn't pay to overlook any possible channel. It goes without saying you need a page in Facebook, and some people say you must get a Twitter account, but I am not sure of the latter.

For short story work, getting a story included in an anthology is always a good way forward. These days, many anthologies are compiled by people you meet at websites, and when you have struck up relationships by reviewing for example, you may get one more outlet for your work. I have had short stories in "Words to Music" (49 stories by 40 authors worldwide), "Bits Bobs and Baubles" 2009 and 2010, and "13 Shadows Waiting for Sunrise", all through author websites.

### What I've found I needed most

To sum up, I'd say the process works in four stages. First, write a book that you are happy with. It doesn't matter at this point whether you see a market for it or not; just finish it and work with it until you no longer see a need for editing it. It may take a surprising amount of work to get there – I have six versions of my book.

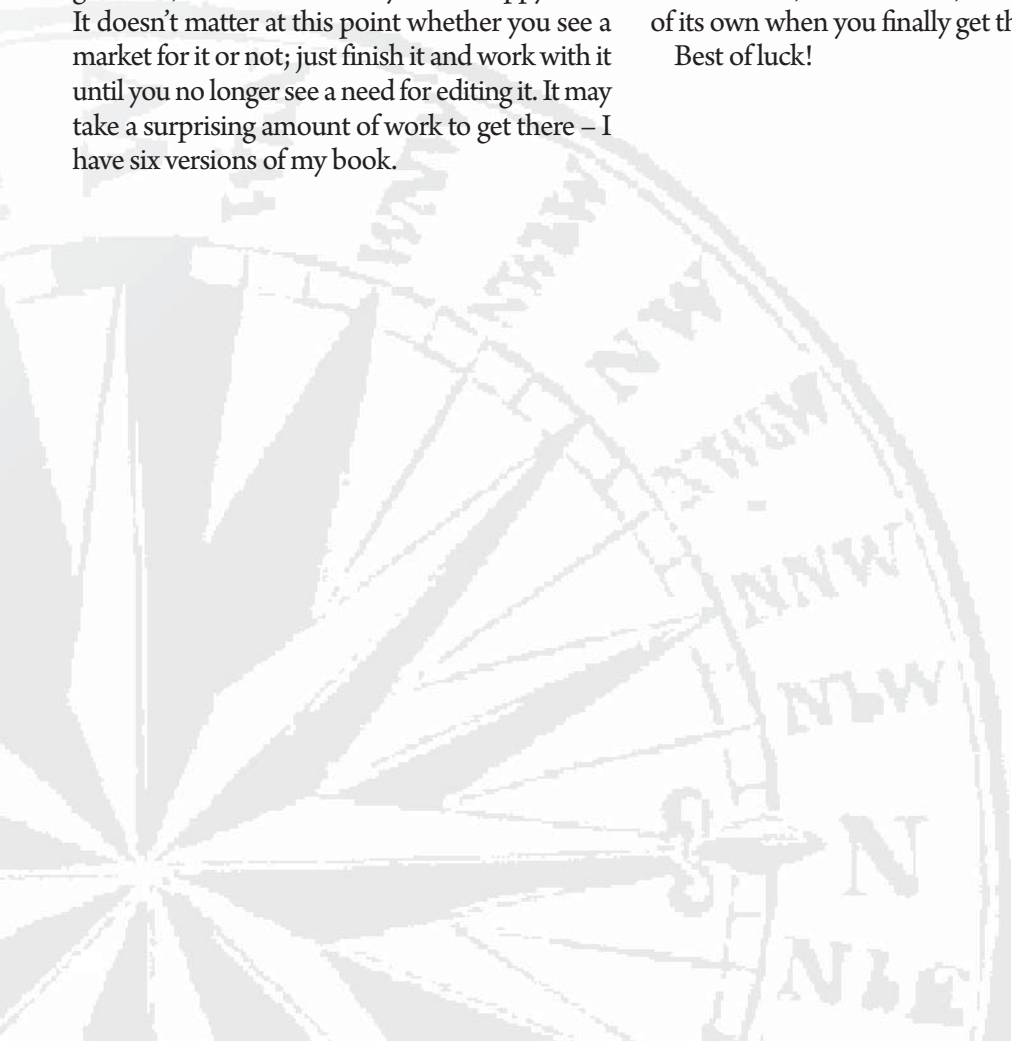
Then, find an editor for it. You have no clue as to how much remains to be fixed in your work, until you see the result of a diligent author's walk-through. Jason Horger found about fifty to a hundred things to fix in every chapter of *Tulagi Hotel*, and a second editor, one very interested in air-planes and technology, found howling technical errors that would have knocked off any feeling of reliable research in the book. To leave the outside editing out is equal to shooting your book in the foot; it will not have the same chance of success as an edited one will. Be prepared to pay for the work, it is worth every penny.

The third stage is to decide what to do next – POD it yourself, go the agent/publisher query route, or find a willing Indie. Every route has its pros and cons, and your book actually should help you decide which way to go.

And when you have the finished product in hand, be prepared to market it ceaselessly through as many channels and contacts as you can. There is no end to this, it is hard work, but it brings rewards of its own when you finally get there.

Best of luck!

Heikki Hietala





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Heikki Hietala learned to read at four but is still trying to learn to write. His World War 2 era debut novel, “Tulagi Hotel”, was first published by Diiarts (England) in 2010, and is now reissued by the Pennsylvania-based Pfoxmoor Publishing. Even if he is a native Finn, he writes in English. He holds an MA from the University of Jyväskylä where his major subject was English Philology.

Hietala has written some forty short stories, most of them falling into the speculative fiction genre, but real life and humor stories have also appeared to the surprise of many. His flash piece “Lord Stanton’s Horse” won the Flash500 competition in September 2010,

and “The Campsite vol. 1” was highly commended in the Global Short Stories competition in March 2011.

Hietala’s work has appeared in five short story anthologies so far, and shown on websites such as *Emprise Review* and *Escape Into Life*. Two of his stories were included in the anthology “Words to Music”, for which forty authors were sent a random song to use as inspiration. His flash fiction has appeared in the Rammenas collection “In These Hands”.

He is a member of *Year Zero Writers* and is active in the *Book Shed writers’ conclave*. Hietala is able to quote Monty Python interminably.

# Stuorra-Jouni

by Heikki Hietala

The frosty snow sounded like starch under Aslak's reindeer-leather boots as he strode towards the goahti tent of Stuorra-Jouni, the shaman. There were men standing around Jouni's large abode already, even though the bitter cold air made them shiver and the wind swept down the fjells like a pack of wolves. Above the little Sami village, Arctic lights danced and flirted with the stars.

Aslak reached the man nearest to the door of the goahti and turned him around by the shoulder. "Well? Is he walking the Gorge?"

Vulle the One-Eared, Jouni's apprentice, looked at Aslak. "No... he's still drumming, can't you hear? And half an hour ago, he demanded more dried mushrooms. It's never taken him this long to descend into the Gorge. I wonder what's wrong."

Aslak acknowledged the other elders and looked at the goahti. Through the worn leather tent, he could see Stuorra-Jouni stepping around the fire, banging his drum. "DUM- dum-dum-dum-DUM-dum-dum-dum..." was the simple and hypnotic rhythm, to which the shaman sang his wailing joiku in a tired voice. Vulle started towards the door of the goahti, but Aslak held him back.

"Let's leave him to it. He's mightier than any other shaman around here, he's not called Stuorra by accident. He will find a way into the Gorge," Aslak said. As if to underscore his words, a mighty bang of the drum was heard, and the form of Stuorra was seen to fall to the ground. "Now! Go see to it he doesn't writhe into the fire!" Vulle entered the tent and closed the flap.

Aslak turned to the elders. "Well, what do you think? Can we survive the onslaught of the wolverines without Stuorra's magic, or is it vital he gets to talk to the spirits of the beasts?" Aslak asked. The elders looked around for signs of opinions on each others' faces, and then Mihkkal, the oldest of the group, spoke.

"No. So far the wolverines have killed fifty-five pregnant cows and dozens of first year calves. It's still only late February. Our herds will be decimated before the winter ends, and that will

be the end of our tribe too. It's up to Stuurra now – we cannot guard the herd in the woods." Mihkkal shook his head.

"Damn... I sure hope he still has his magic. I mean, he did get the wolves to move east when they gave us trouble last. It's a good thing he came back already from his last trek south. I don't like it when the shaman is not with the tribe." Aslak glanced at the fireworks in the sky.

"And don't forget, it was his shaman skills that provided us with the murderer of old Nilla! We'd still be wondering if he didn't walk the Gorge and meet Nilla in the netherworld, and hear who stabbed him!" said Limping Alvar.

"Yes, yes. He'll soon be back from the Gorge and tell us what he has found out. Let's go to my goahti, it's too cold to stand around here. Vulle will come and tell us when Jouni returns." Aslak led the procession of elders to his tent and offered them creature comforts by the warm fire.

Some time later their low-voice chat was interrupted by Vulle's appearance. "He's back from the Gorge!" he gasped, but he was shoved aside from the goahti doorway by Stuurra- Jouni himself. Naked from the waist up, sweat steaming off his back into the freezing night, the old shaman entered the tent wild-eyed.

"I've descended into the Gorge, and returned. I met the spirit of the bear, and paid him my respects, but he wouldn't talk to me. I saw the spirit of the wolf, and he allowed me to approach him, but he wouldn't tell me anything. I went looking for the spirit of the wolverine, but he was nowhere to be found. So, I turned to Ukko the Supreme God and prayed for a long time in the shadows of the gorge, with the spirits of the dead walking past me."

The elders all shivered when they thought of what the shaman had gone through once again. Aslak ventured to ask: "Did Ukko let you approach him?" A venerable shaman like Stuurra-Jouni might come back and claim contact with Ukko.

Stuurra-Jouni turned his face to Aslak, his pupils like charcoals in a ring of white.

"No."

Aslak was surprised. "No? You didn't get any word from Ukko? Or the bear, or the wolf? Who did you talk to then?"

Stuurra turned to face the fire. "I met the spirit of the arctic fox, and he spoke with me."

Aslak let fly a scornful laughter, and regretted it straight away – one does not laugh at the shaman who walks among the dead. But then, he decided to push the issue. "It's wolverines we have here in great packs. We've never seen them in such numbers, and have never lost so many reindeer to them, and all you do is converse with the spirit of the fox! A mighty shaman we have!" The elders accompanied him with chuckles, but soon they fell silent.

Stuurra-Jouni took a sip of water from a leather water bag with his hand, then turned to Aslak. "How many times have you walked the Gorge, Aslak? How many? A thousand? A hundred? Three... or none? I still remember when you were thigh-high and already you had a big mouth, and I was a shaman by then. Now, with this wolverine onslaught at hand, you choose to ridicule me, your shaman, and yet I am the only one who can even try to do something! My apprentice, Vulle here, has tried to enter the realm of the earth for a year now, and he's not even been near the Gorge yet. And you, Aslak, make the elders laugh at me, like I was nothing but a worn-out water bag!"

Aslak said, "I wish no quarrel with you, Jouni, you know that, and we all know you're our only hope. But you must come back with better results, or our tribe will perish."

"You didn't ask what the spirit of the fox said," Jouni muttered, and took some more water.

The elders watched intently as Aslak asked, "And what did the spirit of the fox say?"

"Our tribe has gone greedy. There's too many reindeer now, and Ukko has given the task of culling the herds to the wolverine. That's why I couldn't find the wolverine's spirit – he was leading the attack. And that's why the bear and the wolf wouldn't talk to me, they're high beasts

too, and will not meddle in Ukko's business." Jouni scanned the faces of the elders in the light of the fire, and saw anguish.

"So... we must convince the gods and spirits that we are not greedy by sacrifice. I suggest we round up half the silver and half the gold in the tribe and offer it to the gods."

The elders began a mumbling conversation. Jouni let it go on for a while, then said, "You can discuss all you want, but that's the way out."

Andaras, the largest of the elders, took the lead. "Why should we waste our gold, when there's a sure-fire way to satisfy the gods and spirits? Is Jouni afraid to take that option?"

Jouni turned to face Andaras. "I bet you're referring to what Sammol the Thumbless did behind the Ailigas fjells, when the bears attacked their village and took human lives?"

Andaras pushed his thumbs under his knife belt and said, "Damn right. Sammol was not afraid to sacrifice well, and behold, all was well right after he offered the maiden and the youth to Ukko and the spirit of the bear. Why should we lose our gold and silver, if it is not enough? We should go for the biggest value straight away, I say."

Jouni turned his back to Andaras. "That's easy for you to say. You have no wife, no children, and only an aged mother that would not do as an offer. Instead, you have more gold and silver in that casket of yours than all of the others combined. We have heard that silver clinking when you let it flow from your hands into the casket, and seen you drink from that golden goblet." Andaras looked about him and saw many elders agreed with Jouni.

Aslak said, "I understand we must do all in our power, and if human sacrifice worked with Sammol, it may work with Jouni too. That is, if you're a shaman worthy of Sammol."

Jouni spun around like a spindle. "Let there be no doubt that I, Stuorra-Jouni, am indeed an equal of Sammol! I've seen his spirit in the Gorge now that he's dead, and he has given me his blessing. So be it! If it is sacrifice you want, that is what you get. I want everyone to carry half his silver and gold to me, and then, I want Aslak's youngest daughter Milka and Jussa's youngest son Nihkke to be delivered to me too – for the demanded sacrifice."

Aslak tried to argue further, but Jouni silenced him with an icy stare. "And... I want your best bull, and three of Andaras's best cows. Nothing less will suffice. The whole loot must be in my hands by first light. If not... my magic will fail, and all will have been in vain. So the future of your precious reindeer herds and this tribe lies fully with you now." Signalling to Vulle, Jouni left, and the elders scrambled out of the goahti into the biting cold.

**T**he first faint and almost colourless light of the day revealed much hustle and bustle at the goahti of the old shaman, where three sleds with their reindeer were lined out. Crying women caused a commotion as they accompanied Nihkke and Milka from their respective family goahtis. Nihkke was consoling his mother who clung to him, tearing at his arms and trying to stop him from going, and arriving from an opposite direction, Milka led an equally distraught procession of women. But the youngsters had resigned to their fate, and took their seats in the third sled.

Andaras then brought out three slender but well-fed reindeer cows, and tied them to the third sled. Aslak had already brought his finest bull, and patted it with an absentminded expression on his weathered face. Men of the tribe brought their gold and silver in little bags, and Vulle piled everything in a casket bound to the sled. Some tried to hide a bit of their wealth in their satchels, but Vulle forced them to open up and drop everything in the casket.

Overseeing the entire process was Stuorra-Jouni. He had dressed up in his finest clothes, of colourful blue, red and yellow cloth, and a wolfskin coat. Many golden ornaments were stuck

to his jacket, and he had a necklace of wrought silver. He had slung his biggest shaman drum across his back. Vulle had been ordered to prepare his biggest sled for the occasion.

Jouni seemed to grow in stature as he walked to the line of sleds. “We’re off. Soon, there’ll be no more wolverines. Bid farewell to your people, Milka and Nihkke – you are saving them from a terrible calamity. As for you who remain behind – think of what is really important in your life, and repent your greedy ways!” And he snapped his reins and headed east, into the rising sun, followed by the two other sleds.

They rode all day, stopping for short breaks as needed by the reindeer. By nightfall they had covered some 30 kilometres, and Milka and Nihkke expected them to stop for the night. But Jouni drove on, into the ice-covered forests, illuminated by a quarter moon. With the snow reflecting the light it was feasible, but the youngsters feared for their lives with the wild speed.

After midnight, Jouni led the party up a fjell. The reindeer struggled to keep the sled moving among the trees, but after a while they reached the barren side of the fjell. Jouni stopped and got off the sled. “This is as far as we go now. Help me gather firewood.”

Milka and Nihkke thought this would be the end of their lives and asked Jouni how they would be sacrificed. Jouni looked at them astonished. “Look, I asked you to collect firewood so we can get warm for a while. We need lots of it too. Nobody is going to get killed right now but we will freeze soon.” The youngsters exchanged a curious look, and went to the task.

Jouni himself went down the fjell with an axe and felled three trees, slashed the branches off, and then hauled them up with his reindeer. Nihkke and Milka worked hard on their firewood, and collected a sizable pile, but when Jouni saw it, he ordered them to get twice as much more. He started collecting firewood himself.

When at last he was satisfied with the collected wood, it was a sizable pile indeed. Milka and Nihkke did not dare to ask what would happen now, but their anxiety shone in their faces in the pale moonlight, so Jouni told them what would happen.

“As soon as you are rested, and have eaten some, I want you two to take the reindeer and the sleds, and ride east. After a few hours, you will see where the sun rises. Ride towards it, then let it be on your right all day. Ride east as many days as it takes to get to the White Sea, then turn north. You will find my old tribe there, and they will help you. My sled is filled with food and tools for you.”

The youngsters did not comprehend what he said. “But surely you brought us out here to Little Ailigas to offer us to Ukko? Will you not sacrifice us on this holy mountain?”

Jouni took out his massive Lappish knife and began to prepare the meal by slicing meat off a frozen reindeer leg. “What good would that do? You’re better off alive. Get a cooking fire going so we can eat – I’m famished.” Nihkke started a fire, and Milka helped Jouni with the preparations.

An hour later they had steaming reindeer stew in their wooden cups, and Jouni thought the time was ripe to explain. “The times are changing. What happens now is a sign of how the times will change. You remember I went on a trek south a couple of months ago, like I always do? And Vulle was the shaman in charge for that time, even if he’s not more than an apprentice?” The youngsters nodded.

“I went south to the village where they have gohtis made out of wood, and they look like nothing we have, but they are square boxes painted red. I only wanted to buy a new knife, but then I heard Magga the Mighty was living just outside the village now. You will not remember Magga, but he used to be the shaman of the shamans. When any of us had a problem, we’d go to Magga, and he’d enter the Gorge just like this – Jouni snapped his fingers “ – and be back just as soon with all the information.” Nihkke and Milka looked at him wide-eyed; villagers rarely heard any inside stories of shamans.

“I found his goahti, but I should have understood he was in a bad way already from the look of the tent. Nevertheless, I went in to greet him. He was skunk drunk and I had trouble waking him up, but he didn’t even recognize me at first. I took away his bottle and forced him to come to his senses, because I had to hear what had happened to him.” Jouni spat into the fire in disgust.

“There’s a new god coming from the south, he said. When people moved into the painted wooden goahtis, they forsook the old ways of the shaman, and began to shun him, because the men who carry the new god told them to. The new god is more powerful than the old ones, they say, and they have meetings once a week where the new god is present.”

Milka asked, “But... no one ever sees Ukko the Supreme God except when he’s angry and throws his hammer around in the clouds and there’s thunder and lightning – how can this new god be seen?”

Jouni squinted his eyes and said, “He can’t be seen either, but the worst thing is this: Anyone can go to him and pray to him directly, and once a week, the new god allows people to eat his flesh and drink his blood – not for real but through bread and wine. This, Magga told me, opens a channel directly to the god, and people can ask him for help.”

The youngsters were horrified.

“So... Magga said this to me: if he was the only one who could go and walk the Gorge, and discuss with the spirits, he stood no chance against a god that allows himself to be eaten by anyone, weekly, and will help people without a shaman in between. People stopped asking him for guidance and turned to the shamans of the new god. That’s why he’d taken to the bottle, to drown his sorrows and hope to descend to the Gorge for good, and fade away from the Earth.”

Jouni threw another piece of wood into the fire and watched the cinders dance up into the dark sky.

“And that’s why we’re here. I was just waiting for something big to happen so I could start this operation. I am not going to go Magga’s way and drink myself to death. I have different plans. You’re a part of the plan. Back at the village, Vulle is such a weak apprentice, he’d never have learned any real shaman skills, and now, with the new god reaching our tribe within a year or two, he will fall before him.”

“But why did you take us if you will not sacrifice us?”

“Because I saw you look at each other when I presided over the wedding of Anni and Einar, and because I want to punish your parents for their greed. You will start a family of your own with the White Sea tribes. As long as you never come back to tell what happened, this will work out all right. You have the tools and a goahti in my sled, and these reindeer will get you started with your own herd. Just tell everyone I presided over your wedding before you left. I’ll give you some gold and silver too just to tide you over.”

Stuorra-Jouni stood up. “It’s time for you to go. The Sun will rise in about three hours. Connect the sleds and off you go.” Jouni unloaded the casket of gold and silver from the sled, and took out two satchels, then gave these to the youngsters.

Milka and Nihkke thanked him for saving their lives and bid their farewells, and took off downhill with the reindeer. As soon as they were beyond Jouni’s sight, he went to work. First he constructed an A-frame of the trees he’d cut. This frame he positioned beside the pyre they’d amassed, and set it to lean over the pyre, suspended near the vertical by a rope. He set fire to the pyre and began beating his drum. The steady beat comforted him for what was to come.

When the fire was at its peak, its red and yellow flames consuming the dried age-old Lappish pine, and the heat of the fire making him sweat, Jouni opened the casket of wealth, and began to throw the gold and the silver into the fire, a handful at a time. His hoarse joiku song echoed in the valley and was responded to by wolves far away. Last, he picked the golden ornaments from his jacket and let the fire eat them one by one, and the very last item he flung into the pyre

was his massive silver shaman necklace. He picked up the drum again.

Stuorra-Jouni ended the drumming and singing when he felt himself transformed into a form that could descend to the Gorge in the centre of the earth. He stripped his upper body naked and ignored the north wind that tore at his flesh. Armed with his knife, he climbed to the top of the A-frame and stared at the pyre that would consume his mortal form.

With his eyes on the fire, he cut the rope.

At the village, people were awakened by an inhuman howl that echoed in the fjells around them. Fearful, they arose from their goahtis and turned their eyes to the east. Some later said it was just Arctic lights; others said Arctic lights don't show distinct spots of red, like a fire does when new firewood is thrown in and the embers are disturbed. All they knew for sure was, this was a shaman at work, and they prayed his work would bear fruit.

**T**oday, if you go to Lapland to pan for gold, the locals will say that there's a special creek you might want to try. Some say that it's not only gold you will see in the gravel and sand on the bottom of the creek that runs down the side of Little Ailigas. There are prospectors that have found silver as well, which hasn't happened anywhere else in Lapland, and these nuggets were not irregular in shape like gold nuggets are.

These nuggets of silver were in the shape of tears.

Heikki Hietala

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