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## Scholars Opposing Forces – Report on FINFAR 2013 Meeting

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The 14th seminar of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research in Finland (or more commonly known as FINFAR meeting) took place between the 4th and the 5th of July, in the summer of 2013. This time all the eager researchers of speculative fiction gathered in Helsinki since Finncon, the biggest fantasy and science fiction convention in the Nordic countries, was held there as well. The 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the Metsätalo building at the University of Helsinki smelled of coffee, sandwiches, and fruits as approximately twenty researchers and commentators spent several hours on both days engaging in conversation about opposing forces, which was the theme of this year's seminar.

This year we had a special guest commentator, Doctor Stefan Ekman from the University of Lund. A lecturer, scholar, as well as the leader of the fantasy literature section of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts (IAFA), Ekman was very honoured of being the guest of honour of both the FINFAR meeting and Finncon. The seminar's other international guest, science fiction critic and publisher Cheryl Morgan, has regularly been taking part in the FINFAR meetings, and was very much welcomed with her ultimate knowledge on speculative fiction.

Young scholars were also helped by speculative fiction experts such as Irma Hirsjärvi, Liisa Rantalaiho and Markku Soikkeli from the University of Tampere, Paula Arvas and Merja Polvinen from the University of Helsinki and Sofia Sjö from Åbo Akademi University. All the presented papers had two specialized commentators who gave pointers, advice, and well-argued criticism on how to improve the paper.

Young researchers, both Master's level and Doctoral students had prepared papers concerning their theses or articles they were working on. The idea of the FINFAR seminar is that all the papers are read in advance so the half-hour time is left for conversation and comments – not for reading the papers aloud.

Thursday, the first day of the seminar, was filled with comics and classics. After the welcoming words and introductions from the organizers, the seminar commenced with the presentation about Black Knight as an opposing force in Don Rosa's Disney comics by yours truly. Next, Hanna-Riikka Roine from the University of Tampere presented her paper on fan fiction. She discussed whether fan fiction is opposing the system of genre. Straight after Hanna-Riikka, one of the organizers, Päivi Vääänen discussed the liberal and conservative forces in Samuel Delany's *Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand*. One of the classics of fantasy, *Narnia* series by C. S. Lewis, was dealt with in Nicholas Wanberg's paper about race and related ideologies.

Overwhelmed by the great papers, the group of scholars took a comfortable lunch break in a nearby sushi restaurant discussing, perhaps, some academic matters as well as plans for the Finncon weekend.

Just before the coffee break, commentators were given papers on some of the biggest names of speculative fiction, when Tapio Salomaa talked about his paper on H. P. Lovecraft's vision on religion, and Jyrki Korpua presented a section of his future doctoral dissertation about J. R. R. Tolkien's *Legendarium*. Thursday was concluded with zombies: Marjut Puhakka's paper

commented on the differences between zombies and humans. The final paper reminded the scholars that there are very good fantasy authors also in Finland, as Emilia Uusitalo discussed the functions of naming and nomenclature in Anu Holopainen's series called *Syysmaa*.

After a long Thursday, the second day of the seminar was a bit shorter, so all the interested participants were able to go to Kaapelitehdas, where Finncon started at 2 o'clock. However, there were still quite a lot of interesting papers to talk about before the seminar was over. Esko Suoranta's presentation was about William Gibson's *Bigend* trilogy and dealt with individuals as opposing forces. Jari Käkelä, another organizer of the seminar, talked about Isaac Asimov's and Robert Heinlein's visions of future histories. The dichotomy between a man and a machine as well as between a man and a monster, was the main theme of the rest of the Friday. Minja Blom's paper concerned different vampire TV series and what kind of humanized aspects vampires might have. Aina-Kaisa Koistinen continued with science fiction TV series *Bionic Woman* and how it represented the cyborg body as a controlled tool.

Following a deserved coffee break, Kaisa Kortekallio from the University of Oulu and Jani Ylönen from the University of Eastern Finland both discussed humanist and posthumanist themes in their papers. Kortekallio's paper was about Simon Ings' *Hotwire*, and Ylönen discussed M. John Harrison's novel *Light*.

The discussion during the two-day seminar was vivid and rewarding for both the young scholars and the commentators, who were heard to say how much they enjoyed the papers. Stefan Ekman even commented how broad Finnish research on science fiction and fantasy is compared to Sweden. Perhaps this was the last comment they needed to begin the founding of the society of Finnish science fiction and fantasy research. Great things happen in FINFAR meetings.