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# Abandoning the Untrustworthy Risk Society: Salvage and the Critique of Modernity in Laura Gustafsson's Post-Apocalyptic Novel *Korpisoturi*

*Saija Isomaa*

*Abstract:* This paper examines Laura Gustafsson's third novel, *Korpisoturi* (*Wilderness Warrior*, 2016), as a work that combines conventions from both the mimetic and speculative genres. I suggest that the novel begins as a rather conventional psychological novel and a depiction of an "ordinary Finn", but the realist reading is challenged when a cataclysm occurs in the form of an international trade embargo against Finland, and the conventions of the post-apocalyptic novel and survivalist fiction begin to dominate the narration. My main argument is to claim that *Korpisoturi* makes use of two genre conventions of the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel: salvage and the critique of modernity, even if some of the critique of modernity is communicated through the protagonist's psychological development and thus the psychological novel. I also argue that despite Ahma, the protagonist, being a literary character, his psychological development resembles that of real-life American survivalists who adopt a self-sufficient lifestyle because they consider postmodern risk society untrustworthy.

*Keywords:* post-apocalyptic novel, survivalist fiction, self-sufficiency movement, critique of modernity, Finnish dystopian fiction

## 1. Introduction

Speculative fiction has thrived in Finnish literature since the 1990s: horror, fantasy, and dystopian fiction have boomed, and new genres such as climate

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fiction, urban fantasy, alternative history, and Finnish weird have been adopted or created by writers (see Soikkeli; Isomaa and Lahtinen). The blurring of genre boundaries is common, and individual works may combine conventions from several genres. Sometimes elements of speculative fiction are woven into a work that appears at first to be predominantly mimetic, challenging the reader to wonder how to interpret the work.

One such novel is Laura Gustafsson's third novel, *Korpisoturi* (*Wilderness Warrior*, 2016), which at first appears to be a rather traditional psychological novel about an alienated Finnish man named Ahma ("Wolverine" in English). Ahma adopts a survivalist ideology on an Internet forum, moves from the capital city to the northeastern Finnish countryside to lead a self-sufficient life, and starts preparing for an assumed future cataclysm by learning to farm and fight. Depictions of ordinary men who live as farmers or tenant farmers in the Finnish countryside constitute a major part of an old tradition in Finnish literature: the so-called *kansankuvaus* tradition (see, for instance, Laitinen) that has since the first half of the 19th century attempted to portray – or imagine – what ordinary Finnish people are like. Works in the tradition sometimes depict characters that leave their social community behind and seek solitude in an isolated place, and Ahma's relocation evokes the convention.

However, a realist reading of *Korpisoturi* is interrupted when a cataclysm actually takes place in the latter half of the novel in the form of an international trade embargo that is directed against Finland's racist politics. Ahma's survivalist mindset and skills are tested for real in a village community that runs out of food supplies and loses its technological infrastructure, such as electricity and media broadcasts. The villagers are left to survive on their own, creating alliances and fighting for food. The repertoires of the post-apocalyptic novel and survivalist fiction begin to colour the story, yet they never gain full control of it since the portrayed world remains relatively safe and depictions of violence and destruction are few. Nevertheless, the introduction of a trade embargo that has never taken place in historical reality is a speculative "what if" element that calls for a new type of reading in the middle of the story. By bringing together mimetic and non-mimetic elements in this manner, the novel challenges any straightforward reading, and its analysis can help readers to deal also with other such hybrid works.

To further complicate the matter, Juha Raipola has noted that *Korpisoturi* is not a serious post-apocalyptic novel; rather, it rewrites its conventions in a comical or parodic manner: it offers a critical deconstruction of the survivalist mind-set and its representation in postapocalyptic fiction (176). It is easy to agree with Raipola, because Ahma is not portrayed as the hypermasculinist survivalist hero that he imagines himself to be. In contrast, he is portrayed as an insecure man whose survivalist ideology – tinged with misogyny and right-wing emphases – misrepresents the world in which he lives, the friction between the two functioning as a source of comedy. Not even the cataclysm of the novel is a typical one: post-apocalypses usually portray international or global cataclysms that affect the world at large and change it irreparably, but the trade embargo is portrayed as affecting only Finland (see Hicks 6–7).[1] Ahma's post-apocalyptic fight for survival is mild in comparison to

[1] For instance, Heather J. Hicks considers post-apocalyptic fiction as portraying "globalized ruin" and suggests that the works depict catastrophes of at least a "national level and, by nature

the fights in contemporary anglophone classics of the post-apocalypse, such as the *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003–2013) by Margaret Atwood. In her trilogy, most of humanity perishes and the few survivors have a hard time staying alive in the dangerous post-apocalyptic world. Ahma might be in danger of dying of hunger, but it is due to his poor hunting and fishing skills – his future spouse Lynx (a woman from a survivalist internet site) has no trouble in acquiring food in the same environment.

Also, the way in which *Korpisoturi* interrogates modernity differs from some other post-apocalypses in which the desolate post-disaster world and the need to rebuild a human community raise the question of the value of the past civilisation and modernity. In Gustafsson's novel, Ahma abandons the organised late modern society even before the trade embargo and chooses a premodern self-sufficient lifestyle in the countryside – he is not forced to give up the technological world but leaves voluntarily, seeking shelter from the negatively perceived society amidst nature, like some other characters of the Finnish *kansankuvaus* tradition (see Laitinen). At the end of the novel, when he is left alone with Lynx in the wilderness to start a family, he is able to choose again whether to maintain the inherited cultural tradition or start creating something entirely new, and he chooses the latter by burning his papers. This structure of dual choice stems from *Korpisoturi* being not only a post-apocalyptic novel but also a psychological depiction of an ordinary, antisocial person and a survivalist. The first choice is motivated by his psychological experiences and his conversion to survivalism. The second choice is more typical for the postapocalyptic novel, because Ahma makes the choice after the cataclysm, when the world needs to be reconstructed in some manner.

The novel's relationship to survivalist fiction is still complicated. The tradition of survivalist fiction came into being mainly after the Second World War, and it has had a bad reputation as "a nightmare at the bottom of the barrel of sf" (Clute 1188). It has been criticised for being politically extreme and socially prejudiced, sadistic, "sexist, racist, pornographic, gloating and void" (ibid.), and all too often "written by men for men, featuring men shooting other men after civilization's convenient collapse" (Nicholls 581).[2] James has claimed that survivalist fiction is an extreme exaggeration of certain aspects of post-apocalyptic fiction (53). *Korpisoturi* evokes the tradition mostly in its portrayal of the self-important male survivalists Ahma and Kapu, but the novel's negative stance towards the values they represent is communicated to the audience in the critical way in which the characters are treated. Ahma's psychological development that leads him to adopt "prepper" values in a stable society is not a convention of survivalist fiction but rather Gustafsson's thematic contribution

of our globalized political economy, assume dramatic effects elsewhere as well" (6–7). It is unclear whether the trade embargo in *Korpisoturi* has any dramatic effects outside Finland. In any case, most post-apocalypses portray a more profound disturbance of the social or the ecological order.

[2] Clute crystallises the genre by remarking that post-1980 survivalist fiction has become "established as a very particular kind of male-action story, set in post-holocaust venues where law-and-order has disappeared, and where there is effectively no restraint upon the behaviour of the hero, who therefore kills before he is killed, demonstrating his fitness to survive through acts of unbridled violence (which very frequently descend into prolonged sessions of rape and sadism)" (2208). Mark Payne notes that post-apocalyptic fiction has internalised the negative conception and post-apocalyptic novels may contain survivalist characters who are portrayed rather critically (128).

to the genre of the psychological novel. From the perspective of genres, the trade embargo is the event that turns a realist literary world into a postapocalyptic one, and different genres dominate the two halves.

In this paper, I focus on examining *Korpisoturi* with reference to two prominent genre conventions of the contemporary anglophone post-apocalyptic novel: salvage and the critique of modernity, which were identified by Heather J. Hicks in *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century: Modernity beyond Salvage* (2016). I argue that despite the comical and parodic tones of *Korpisoturi*, the novel still engages in a serious discussion of modernity by offering a detailed psychological portrayal of what makes Ahma adopt the survivalist mindset and values in the first place. I suggest that Ahma's conversion to survivalism can be seen as an emotional response to the risk society in which he lives: his bad experiences lead him to distrust social institutions, and the survivalist worldview with its preference for a self-sufficient lifestyle offers him a way to cope with negative emotions and find meaning in life. I ground this reading on Allison Ford's sociological analysis of the real-life American self-sufficiency movement. She analyses the movement as responding to the emotional burden that the risk society produces in its members. Interestingly, despite Ahma being a fictional character, his psychological development follows the pattern that Ford finds in her research. In this sense, Ahma's story seriously portrays the alienating features of late modernity that lead some people to adopt a survivalist mindset. Yet the novel critically distances itself from the primitive, anticultural idyll that Ahma creates with his spouse at the end of the novel as the new Adam and Eve – abandoning civilisation may be Ahma's choice, but it is not part of the novel's ethos.

Regarding salvage, I suggest that the convention connects *Korpisoturi* to the tradition of contemporary post-apocalyptic novels. Hicks has noted that since its beginning in the ancient Near East, apocalyptic fiction has been deeply intertextual in recycling material from earlier texts, and in this way "salvaging" earlier material (3). She claims that the contemporary anglophone post-apocalyptic novel uses the convention but also further develops the idea of salvage by making it a central theme and action: after the cataclysm, the survivors have to decide what to do with the remnants – both material and cultural – of the destroyed modern world, and they may try to rebuild aspects of modernity or reject the past and create something altogether new. *Korpisoturi* does not reproduce the convention fully, since the modern infrastructure is not destroyed to a mentionable extent, and the survivors – that is, almost all characters – need not live in a devastated world. However, the novel is deeply intertextual, and it shares some intertexts with other post-apocalyptic novels, most notably Daniel Defoe's survival classic *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which is a standard object of allusion in post-apocalyptic novels (see, for instance, Payne 3–4; Hicks 1). I will refer to some of these intertexts, focusing on those that are, in my opinion, relevant in assessing the novel's treatment of modernity.

## 2. Intertextual layers in *Korpisoturi*

I will begin by showing how *Korpisoturi* applies to the convention of salvage to create an intertextually layered text. Salvage (in the sense of deep

intertextuality) is a curious convention of the post-apocalyptic novel: it can be seen as answering a central question of the genre – what is worth salvaging from the past world – on a formal level by alluding to past works, which are thus "rescued" in its form. Naturally, a vague allusion to another literary work cannot replicate that work in any sense, and the salvaging in this sense is metaphorical. Yet even the attempt to rescue the memory of chosen parts of literary heritage by alluding to them, as if literary works formed some kind of metaphorical Noah's Ark saving knowledge of the past, is an interesting literary function for novels that are focused on the theme of survival.

Laura Gustafsson's *Korpisoturi* is allusive to the degree that the reader learns very soon to seek a deeper meaning to the story on an intertextual level, whether it can be found or not. To give a few examples of the convention of salvage in *Korpisoturi*, it is worth noting that already the title of the novel refers in the Finnish context[3] to a renowned autobiographical war novel, *Korpisotaa* (*Wilderness War,* 1940) by Pentti Haanpää, sedimenting its intertextuality. Haanpää's novel depicts the experiences of ordinary soldiers in the Winter War (1939–1940) between Finland and the Soviet Union. Ahma's decision to move specifically to north-eastern Finland near the Russian border can be read as an intertextual reference to the milieu of Haanpää's novel: at the beginning of Haanpää's novel, the inexperienced soldiers are taken to the northeast border. *Korpisoturi* also contains delicate references to another classical Finnish war novel, *Tuntematon sotilas* (*The Unknown Soldier,* 1954) by Väinö Linna, which portrays the Continuation War (1941–1944) and is one of the most popular Finnish novels of the 20th century. [4] These references invite the reader to read the novel as yet another novel about war in Finland, which is a rather unexpected invitation in a novel about a slightly comical "prepper" and the consequences of a trade embargo in a countryside village. In the frame of war fiction, Ahma can be interpreted as having waged a war against the late modern risk society, and also the international trade embargo against Finland begins to look like a form of warfare.

To make visible another literary layering of the novel, the names of Ahma and his love interest Lynx can be read as references to the superheroes named Wolverine and Lynx in Marvel's *X-Men* franchise, the Finnish noun Ahma translating as "wolverine" (see also Samola, "Botanics" 142). The word "*Wolverine*" – in English, in cursive, and written with a capital letter in a novel

[3] The word "wilderness warrior" is used in the US context to refer to explorers and native Americans, etc. In Finnish, the word *korpi* refers to a boreal forest type that has a somewhat wet soil. Finnish soldiers are perceived as wilderness warriors when they fight outside the cities in the forests. The word is used only in spoken language – it is not an official term and has a light or humorous tone.

[4] For instance, the description of Ahma's property "Tähän korkeaan havumetsään on joku joskus raivannut puuttoman puolikkaan hehtaarin" (*K* 13) evokes delicately the famous, ironic beginning of Linna's *The Unknown Soldier*, in which the foreknowing God has burned hectares of forest in Eastern Finland near the town of Joensuu to create a camp site for the war troops of Finland. As in Linna's novel, the depicted area is situated in northeastern Finland, giving further backing for the elusive allusion. Linna's novel is also explicitly mentioned with reference to Ahma's fellow survivalist Kapu, who arrives at his cottage during the trade embargo. Kapu uses a photo of the character of Rokka in the first film version of the novel as his profile picture (*K* 81). Kapu's behaviour is so negative that, first, Pamsu breaks his leg and then Linnea kills him, which can also be read as a critical attitude towards the tradition of Finnish war novels or the attitudes it has inspired in its audiences.

written in Finnish – is mentioned in the prologue-like opening episode of the novel (*K* 9),[5] and even the stray pig that wanders around Ahma's property adopts a superhero-like line by appearing to say "I'll be back" – in English – to Ahma before leaving (36), as if it were itself a superhero threatening Ahma with a future battle. The superhero references mostly serve a comical function, as their objects are not superior to anything in the fictional reality. They also communicate aspects of Ahma's hypermasculine survivor-identity: in comparison to the ordinary, unprepared people around him, he perceives himself as a superhero of sorts.

Intertextually, the motif of the pig alludes to the motif of the pigoon in Atwood's *MadAddam* trilogy. Pigoons are huge and threatening gene-manipulated pigs that have human brain tissue and collaborate to attack the few humans who survived the plague. Ahma reacts to the harmless pig as if it were a pigoon-like creature, which creates a comical tension between his hero-like self-identity and his actual behaviour. The novel seems to be winking to the reader who recognises the allusion. However, also Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is invoked as an intertext in the pig motif, since the pig leaves its footprints on the ground of Ahma's property, like Friday in Defoe's novel. In Western culture, the motif of the footprint is strongly associated with Friday and creates a link between the novels, making Ahma appear as a Crusoe-like colonialist who conquers a new territory to create a civilisation of his liking. There are also other resemblances between Ahma and Robinson Crusoe. For instance, both focus on living self-sufficiently, which means the constant observation of nature and spending much time on farming and daily chores that are fundamental for survival. Both men also keep a diary. Yet Ahma's "Friday" is a pig, and it is also the audience to his soliloquies – including his moral teachings about his private ownership of the turnips.[6] In contrast to its intertextual counterparts, the pig in *Korpisoturi* is portrayed in a comical light, echoing the general attitude of the novel. In sum, *Korpisoturi* frames its story with other texts, and they offer an interpretative context for it but also evoke the convention of salvage.

## 3. "Prepping" as a means of regulating negative emotions

I proceed to discuss the way in which Ahma's choice of survivalism functions as his way of regulating his negative emotions, but also communicates a serious critique of modernity. Juha Raipola has analysed the portrayal of survivalist ideology and reality in *Korpisoturi*. Raipola points out that "prepping" for doomsday is a particularly masculinist culture: modern, femininised society is seen as a crisis of masculinity and producer of white male alienation, and after

[5] The reference occurs in the prologue-like first section of the novel, which depicts the behaviour of wolverines. All future in-text citations to Laura Gustafsson's *Korpisoturi* will abbreviate the novel as "*K*".

[6] In Defoe's novel, Crusoe takes Friday as his servant and teaches him Western culture and values, even managing to convert him to Christianity. In *Korpisoturi*, after the first shock of meeting such a threatening animal as a huge pig, Ahma pities it and starts treating it like a companion, talking to it and even missing its presence. As a comical echo of Crusoe's education of Friday, Ahma preaches morals to the pig on more than one occasion after finding out that it has violated his norms, such as his private ownership of turnips. Despite the sermons and threats of slaughter, the pig does not change its ways, and ultimately disappears without trace. Ahma's "Friday" might have suffered the destiny that Crusoe's escaped, being eaten by humans.

its collapse it is believed that strong, warrior-like male leaders will rebuild civilisation (177). According to Raipola, Ahma is a parodic version of the hypermasculine survivalist hero. He has naively adopted the survivalist discourse from online forums and combined it with ideas adopted from the Finnish deep ecologist Pentti Linkola (1932–2020), who is renowned for promoting drastic population decline as a solution to overpopulation. However, the novel repeatedly portrays how Ahma's attempts to perform hegemonic masculinity and to live as a misanthropic and misogynistic hermit fail in one way or another. Gender stereotypes are also questioned and inverted in a humorous yet critical way; for instance, when the ordinary female characters are more skilful in solving practical problems in the post-apocalyptic world than the male survivalists. In short, Ahma's survivalist ideology and his lived experience in the Finnish countryside do not match, which, according to Raipola, produces the "darkly comic" effect of the novel. (See Raipola 177–182, 184.)

Raipola's interpretation is very fitting and manages to make visible many central characteristics of the survivalist ideology in the novel. *Korpisoturi* opposes those values that survivalist fiction has traditionally represented. A sociological reading of Ahma's ideological conversion also reveals that the experiences and choices of the survivalist are portrayed realistically in the novel: Ahma's psychological development resembles that of many American real-life survivalists. Clute has claimed that survivalist fiction has relatively little to do with the concerns of real-life survivalists (1188), but Ahma's portrayal is different: his psychological development is life-like, and the first half of the novel (before the trade embargo) portrays his daily chores, like farming and cooking, in Crusoe-like detail. Due to Ahma's primitive, self-sufficient lifestyle without electricity and other modern amenities, his is a retro version of the premodern lifestyle.

Sociological research into American self-sufficiency movements has shown that attempts to become self-sufficient arise from unpleasant negative emotions that late modern risk society produces in its members. Allison Ford has studied two subcultures of the American self-sufficiency movements – "homesteaders" and "preppers" – and she shows that their daily practices are a strategy to manage the uncomfortable emotions that arise when individuals feel that, when living in late modern society, they are dependent on untrustworthy institutions. Ford emphasises that it is difficult to understand the movement unless emotions are taken into account, because emotions motivate action. Ford also points out that since "preppers" and "homesteaders" have embraced the culture of individualism typical of capitalism, they focus on making changes to their own lifestyle rather than fixing actual collective problems. Ford's observations are made about real-life American survivalism, but they also apply to certain features of *Korpisoturi*.

According to Ford, emotions arising in risk society are a motivation for some American people to become "preppers" (125), a subculture within the self-sufficiency movement that emphasises the need to prepare for different "shit hits the fan" (SHTF) scenarios and that puts an emphasis on personal security in the form of gun culture (131). An analysis shows that Ahma's conversion to prepping also has emotional aspects. Raipola touches upon the psychological motivation behind his choices and notes that his willingness to seclude himself from the world can be interpreted as a "psychological defense mechanism" that

is related to his lonely and fatherless childhood (182). Furthermore, in Raipola's interpretation, Ahma's aversive attitude towards women seems to be connected to his previous experiences with women. Yet Ahma seems also to be suffering from a high awareness of the collectively produced risks typical of late modernity (see Ford 126). The narrator focalises Ahma's thinking, which reveals his distrust of humankind and its destructive agricultural methods:

> Still somewhere sings a cuckoo, the great asshole of bird life. But Ahma's life as a parasite is over now. He will be self-sufficient, because there is no choice. Not for long. Alas, mankind is short-sighted. For a brief time, it may manage to force nature to function as it wishes. However, each field that is coated with glyphosate, each rainforest that is scalped, and each desert that is irrigated takes mankind a step closer to destruction. The ongoing destructive cycle is global rather than local as before. (*K* 17; trans. S. Isomaa)
>
> Vielä jossain kukkuu käki, lintumaailman suuri kusipää. Ahman elämä loisena on ohi nyt. Hänestä tulee omavarainen. Vaihtoehtoa ei nimittäin ole. Ei enää pitkään. Voi vauhtisokeaa ihmiskuntaa! Lyhyitä aikoja kerrallaan sen onnistuu pakottamaan luonto käyttäytymään haluamallaan tavalla. Mutta jokainen glyfosaattisuolalla päällystetty pelto, jokainen pilkottu sademetsä, jokainen keinokasteltu autiomaa vie harppauksen lähemmäs tuhoa. Ja käynnissä oleva sykli on maailmanlaajuinen, ei paikallinen niin kuin ennen. (*K* 17)

Ahma shows a high awareness of global environmental risks related to the production of goods and food, and he criticizes the responsible institutions for short-sighted policies that are disastrous in the long run. He seems to voice both vulnerability related to dependence on institutions and a distrust of those institutions. Ford has identified both as sources of a wide range of problematic emotions, such as the fear and anxiety that "preppers" and "homesteaders" experience (126). Self-sufficiency offers an individualistic way out of the dependency and also helps to manage the problematic emotions. In the above citation, Ahma has already adopted the survivalist mindset and chosen not to be a parasite, like the cuckoo, which is an often-mentioned, positively portrayed bird in older Finnish literature, including the national epic *Kalevala* (1849). Ahma's critical portrayal of the bird reflects his rebellious rethinking of inherited cultural frames and attitudes.

An exploration of why Ahma adopted the survivalist mindset reveals that in the past, he had concrete experiences that showed him that capitalist institutions might not be worth trusting. Ahma was an anxious child with abandonment issues, and his decision to become a construction worker was fuelled by his childhood dream of owning a house that offers shelter and stability. He worked as a builder after graduating but quit when his superior demanded him to coat the wet concrete wall of a school, both of them knowing that it would produce a severe mould problem over time. The superior justified his demand by reminding Ahma that the business is not responsible for the problems that appear after the building is completed. This experience of the untrustworthiness of the building company was a turning point for Ahma. He became clinically depressed and isolated in his flat, until he found a survivalist online forum after googling the phrase "end of the world". Finding like-minded people gave him purpose and direction, and he started to prepare for the

assumed SHTF scenarios (*K* 77–90, 11). Ford refers to the role of cultural frames in how individuals negotiate environmental risk (128). Cultural frames, including story lines, help to organise perceptions of and responses to risks, and people usually select frames that fit their social worlds and will not endanger their valuable connections to others. Social belonging is thus important in choosing an interpretative cultural frame. The online community – which Ahma later describes as "half-alienated misanthropes" (*K* 229) – offered Ahma a sense of belonging, but also provides frames and story types for understanding the world around him. His choice of buying a remote site for "prepping" shows that he starts living in accordance with the ideology and its storylines.

The theme of untrustworthy structures and institutions is emphasised in that even Ahma's studio flat in Helsinki proves to be structurally unstable. One day a big crack appears in a concrete wall, and it gradually expands so much that Ahma realises it cannot be fixed easily: the problem lies in the very foundations of the whole apartment building, and the only solution to erasing it might be to tear down the whole structure (*K* 234–37). Again, Ahma meets a structural problem that is beyond his powers. The faulty houses of the city that are built inadequately by building companies and cannot be fixed by an individual function as motifs also for another general theme of the novel: the complicated relationship between the individual and the collective. In an organised community, such as a city where labour is divided and capitalist power structures prevail, the individual has limited power over her surroundings, starting from whether the apartment buildings around are properly built and structurally sound. Social structures make individuals dependent on others, even when the others are untrustworthy. By contrast, the old cottage in northeastern Finland is small in scale, carefully built by the original owners to last for decades, and also fixable by an individual like Ahma, making it emotionally safer than the huge buildings of the city. The cottage enables the independence and control that preppers and homesteaders seek and value (see and cf. Ford 129). Later on, Ahma is able to improve the insulation of his cottage by adding second window frames that he purchased second-hand, the recycling and craftmanship creating the spectacle of the material solutions found to cope in difficult conditions already showcased in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (Vasset 230). For Ahma, his cottage in the rebellious, austere direction of the east is a small, flourishing Eden (*K* 16). The biblical intertext evokes the idea of a site for earthly paradise and the creation of an ideal humankind, further developed in the ending of the novel. The cottage is a site for a premodern, independent, and self-sufficient lifestyle.

## 4. The psychology of a "prepper": Trust or distrust?

In a situation where others can be trusted, dependency is not threatening. However, Ahma's survivalism is based on the belief that institutions and other people cannot be trusted, and that is why he chooses self-sufficiency. The novel reveals how his attitude developed, but it also puts it to the test repeatedly by letting him meet new people and gain experience of their trustworthiness.

Ahma's distrust issues have a history in his complicated family relations and childhood experiences. He was raised by a single mother and never knew

his assumedly Polish father. They moved often, and as a child Ahma was already afraid of being abandoned (*K* 78). His relationship with his mother is not close, partly because their values and political views differ. His mother is not worried about the same cataclysms as her son. Instead, she fears the decline of humanity (100), which is ironic, because the values of the hypermasculinist preppers like her son may represent just that type of decline. During the trade embargo, Ahma's mother is doing fine in Helsinki, which reveals that prepping in the countryside is not necessary for survival.

An ideologically and emotionally important relative of Ahma is his grandmother, who suffers from a memory disorder and finally passes away, leaving Ahma a small heritance that enables him to buy the cottage. The grandmother is a belligerent person, a variation of the "sotahullu" or war maniac that is a character type occurring in Finnish literature. She served in the Second World War as a "Lotta", a member of the Finnish voluntary paramilitary organisation for women. She relives her memories of that time, and reacts to the much later world as if it was part of the wartime world; for instance, threatening an Estonian carer with a pistol for racist reasons and preaching her wartime nationalist agenda to Ahma. Ahma's attitude towards the two relatives characterises his world view and values on a larger scale: he dismisses the mindset of his liberal mother and sympathises with the conservative, nationalist, right-wing grandmother who misinterprets the contemporary world through her memories of the war. It is fitting that Ahma inherits the funds to buy the scene for prepping from his grandmother. He also has a Sami knife that he inherited from his grandmother (*K* 13). It does not bother him that he has to lie to her about having successfully completed his national military service, even though he was exempted (33). Lying was already a survival mechanism for Ahma in childhood regarding the whereabouts of his father, and he also lies to Pamsu that he works as a fisherman. His many lies foreground his problematic relationship with others but also lead the reader to wonder whether his survivalist ideology should also be viewed as another lie with which he chooses to soothe himself socially.

The object of Ahma's distrust seems to be the modernity that makes individuals powerless and dependent on others. Ahma abandons the urban lifestyle of his mother and tries to learn the skills and lifestyle of the self-sufficient pre-war generations that appear to him as more grounded and safer. He collects old housewives' guidebooks and other similar guides to learn to live self-sufficiently. In the depiction of the furniture and appliances of his cottage, old Finnish household trademarks, such as Helsingin Teräskaluste and Porin Matti, are mentioned (*K* 14–15), creating a retro atmosphere to the narration. The cottage strikes the reader as a "museum" of the traditional lifestyle, having been built at the beginning of the 20th century and showing few signs of later additions (13). Ahma's choices reveal that he rejects the lifestyles and values of the previous few decades and wishes to return to a much earlier mentality and structures of emotion. He even hangs on the bedroom wall a handcrafted "haustafel" that contains the famous words by Augustin Ehrensvärd, the 18th-century builder of the UNESCO site of Suomenlinna maritime fortress in Helsinki, which recommend that Finns stand on their own two feet and do not rely on foreign offers of help (14). The cottage is thus metaphorically Ahma's "Suomenlinna fortress", which he builds for his defence against other people.

Mark Payne has remarked that survivalists need to distance themselves from other life forms and the human tendency to feel empathy so that they can encounter others as fundamentally different adversaries (129). Ahma's fortress is a sign of this survivalist attitude that does not come naturally to him. Curiously, it is obvious that Ahma would not even exist without his open-minded, liberal mother, who conceived him with a foreigner and decided to raise him as a single mother, but he still chooses the values of his grandmother, nevertheless later also rejecting versions of nationalism that he finds outdated (*K* 54). Ahma's choices are a metaphorical matricide. He wants to "cancel" many things in contemporary society and return to an earlier lifestyle. His attitude and its background function as a critique of modernity. However critically the novel may portray Ahma, it does not deny his experiences or the environmental or social problems that lead him to choose survivalism.

## 5. Cataclysm as a test of the survivalist ideology

Having discussed Ahma's survivalism from a psychosocial point of view, I proceed to consider the cataclysm as a test of his survivalism. The distrustful Ahma attempts to be independent of untrustworthy institutions, but the theme of dependency is also treated on a more general level, namely in the depiction of international relations between countries. The cataclysm that takes place in the imagined Finland is not a major natural catastrophe, but a trade embargo directed against the racist politics of Finland. As a member of the European Union, Finland is required to take its share of the refugees that are coming to Europe (as in the European migrant crisis in 2015), and after the fictional Finland refuses on the grounds of the crimes that some of the newcomers commit, economic sanctions are applied.[7] The imagined Finland is not economically self-sufficient, but dependent on the EU and Russia, which shows in the chaos following the trade embargo. The villagers end up being in a state of emergency, like the refugees. Global modernity means interdependency and requires international collaboration, whereas the premodern, self-sufficient lifestyle seems to promise independence but also comes with a price.

Mark Payne notes that the protagonists of post-apocalypses make choices on the axis between adversarial and communitarian human relations in trying to keep themselves alive (129). Despite his misanthropic attitude, Ahma also collaborates somewhat reluctantly with other inhabitants of the area even before the trade embargo, especially with the two women Linnea and Pamsu, whom Kapu considers as "a Madonna and a whore", respectively (*K* 205). Laura Gustafsson used Greek gods and goddesses as characters in her first novel *Huorasatu* (2011), and also the characterisation of sexually active Pamsu and virtuous, all-round Linnea – to whom Kapu also refers as an amazon (*K* 179) –

[7] The events leading to the trade embargo are not recounted in detail, but in addition to minor crimes committed by some of the refugees, there was also a "denial of service" type cyberattack that successfully shut down Finnish online bank services, incorrectly identified as launched by terrorist masked as refugees but in reality launched by domestic anarchists. Finnish neo-Nazis reacted aggressively, causing the unrest that led to the political consequences (*K* 103–106, 112–114, 121).

play with cultural gender stereotypes.[8] When the trade embargo begins, Ahma continues to collaborate with Linnea and Pamsu, but also with a fellow survivalist, Kapu, who arrives at Ahma's cottage and tries to start leading the group. The misogynistic and self-centred Kapu uses Ahma and the women opportunistically for his own benefit, making selfish deals with other groups of men to their detriment, and he epitomises the kind of toxic, untrustworthy masculinity that Clute seems to associate with survivalist fiction. However, Gustafsson rewrites the genre conventions by creating strong female characters, especially Linnea, who finally cold-bloodedly shoots Kapu dead after he has – along with many other despicable deeds – threatened the life of Linnea's newborn biracial baby. In the fictional world of *Korpisoturi*, hypermasculine survivalism appears as toxic, and it is tolerated only to a certain degree by Linnea. Kapu considers Linnea as a weak burden due to her having just given birth to a baby, but she is actually the fittest for survival of the four. Samola has suggested that Linnea's name refers to the Swedish botanist Carl von Linné ("Botanics" 143). Epitomising birth, nurture, and closeness to nature, Linnea is morally superior to the egoist survivalist values and their willingness to treat other people solely as means.

The events during the trade embargo make evident that Ahma is not the kind of fierce, hypermasculine survivalist that he wishes to be. In *Korpisoturi*, this is his redeeming feature in the eyes of the women, who see through his hypermasculine discourse and recognise his soft core. Kapu is the only central character who is killed during the trade embargo, which can be considered as communicating the novel's critical stance towards his way of seeing the world. Kapu despises Ahma for being "a friend of girls" (*K* 206), but in *Korpisoturi* it is this specific quality that helps Ahma survive. After all, it is another young woman, Lynx, who comes to save the lonely Ahma from starving.

## 6. A postcultural, Even Posthuman Eden?

The destruction of the world as we know it can also be perceived as a chance to create something better to replace it, as apparently happens in Noah's story in the Bible. Heather J. Hicks suggests that post-apocalypses discuss modernity, for instance, by describing how characters react to the remnants of lost modernity, both its material detritus and immaterial cultural inheritance (3). *Korpisoturi* also portrays a new beginning by ending in an idyllic vision of Ahma and Lynx starting a life together self-sufficiently on Ahma's property amidst the beauty of the northern spring, Lynx pregnant with Ahma's child. All the other villagers have disappeared somehow, and Ahma and Lynx are alone in their Eden, starting humankind anew. In some of the previous passages, there are references to the biblical images of Eden and the snake, or the Tempter, in the portrayal of Ahma's humble property and his longing for a

[8] Linnea in particular is almost like a goddess of agriculture and nature: she knows the premodern techniques of farming but also primitive medicine, healing Kapu's infected wound by growing bacteria-eating maggots in the middle of winter. She gives birth to a biracial baby boy during the trade embargo, like Mary giving birth to Jesus in primitive circumstances, but she also does not hesitate to kill Kapu, Ahma's fellow survivalist, who travels to the village during the trade embargo and treats Ahma and others disrespectfully. On Gustafsson's first novel *Huorasatu*, see Samola, *Siniparran bordelli*.

spouse and a family, and the ending can be interpreted as activating the frame of Eden as a site of the creation of a (new) humankind. The motif of new Adam and Eve is a convention of SF (see Clute and Nicholls 4), and the post-apocalyptic novel can easily be used as a platform for imagining the beginning of a new human race.

The character of Lynx is only briefly referred to in the main part of the novel, and she is foregrounded only at the end of the novel, when Ahma is left alone on his property without food supplies. Ahma's reminiscences reveal that he met Lynx online in the survivalist forum and assumed her to be male, agreeing to a meeting. However, Lynx proved to be an independent, exceptionally skilful young woman, and they met irregularly, spending time together at home but also committing acts of vandalism in a luxury department store and elsewhere. Ahma fell in love with Lynx, but somehow lost contact with her, which broke his heart. His choice to move to the wilderness is affected by his previous discussions with her, and Ahma assumedly sends Lynx the address of his cottage in the hope that she will visit him. Lynx finally comes and finds Ahma starving to death in the cottage. Being an exceptionally good hunter, Lynx very quickly manages to hunt and fish for them. She agrees to stay with Ahma, and she soon falls pregnant. Ahma's broken heart is mended, and the idyll seems to be perfect – for the characters. There is nevertheless a darker side to the pastoral, as Ahma finds out that Lynx has come into possession of the wooden spoon he crafted and gave to Linnea. Linnea intended to give it to her newborn son. Lynx refuses to answer how she got it, the silence leaving room for the worst scenario:

> Lynx falls silent. Ahma goes through in his mind Lynx's other things, food, everything. A candle casts shadows onto her face, and her eyes gleam, as do her small, sharp teeth. "What have you done?"
>
> … Ahma grabs Lynx's face. It is not good at hunting because it must hunt, but because it takes pleasure in hunting. Not in killing. Gaming. Lynx does not tell that it feels pain even if the pressing must feel bad. It says nothing.
>
> And that is good. (*K* 254; trans. S. Isomaa)

> Lynx vaikenee. Ahma käy mielessään läpi Lynxin muut tavarat, ruuat, kaiken. Kynttilä heittää sen kasvoille varjoja, silmät välkkyvät. Ja terävät pienet hampaat. "Mitä sinä olet tehnyt?"
>
> … Ahma tarttuu Lynxiä kasvoista. Se ei ole hyvä metsästäjä siksi, että täytyy, vaan siksi, että se nauttii siitä. Ei tappamisesta. Pelistä. Lynx ei sano, että sitä sattuu, vaikka puristuksen on pakko tuntua pahalta. Se ei sano yhtään mitään.
>
> Niin on hyvä. (*K* 254.)

The animalistic features of Lynx are emphasised: her gleaming eyes, sharp, little teeth, and obmutescence. The text even uses the pronoun "it" instead of "she". The shadows on her face seem to be a metonym for the darker side of her character, and she refuses to reply to the moral question Ahma poses, either failing to understand the moral point of view or refusing to consider her actions from such a perspective. Ahma's reaction leaves room for the interpretation that Ahma has recognised Linnea's belongings in Lynx's possessions and arrives at the conclusion that she has met Linnea, probably even killed her and

the newborn. The novel does not reveal what happened – maybe Linnea left, or maybe Lynx killed her. The novel cannot fully believe in the new Eden that is in the making, and the spoon episode communicates this hesitation to the reader.

In general, the character of Lynx remains ambivalent: very little is told about her, and the little that is told through Ahma's memories portrays her as somewhat unemotional and anarchistic. Whether she could kill for a spoon and other goods remains open. Read intertextually in the frame of Marvel's *X-Men* universe, Lynx's inability to understand Ahma's feelings for the villagers becomes understandable. In *X-Men*, Lynx is an animal-like female fighter and a mutant who has no social skills or education. Wolverine saves her from a scientist named Reigert Ilves who used her for experiments, and at one point Wolverine and Lynx live together in the wilderness in a cottage before Wolverine finally releases Lynx to live in a feral state in the Canadian wilderness.[9] In *X-Men*, the animalistic, feral side of Lynx is emphasised, and hints to the similar feralness of Lynx also appear at the end of *Korpisoturi*, Ahma even seeing a footprint of a feline near a moose that Lynx has killed, as if to suggest that Lynx hunted the moose in feline form. Read intertextually, both Ahma and Lynx are superheroes, but without the intertextual frame, their names connect them with animal species, the association being nonhuman rather than superhuman. The woman who reproduces in the new Eden is neither Linnea nor Pamsu – the Western female stereotypes – but the animalistic Lynx, which creates an impression of a post-human Eden.

The novel ends with Ahma collecting his unfinished texts and extra papers and burning them with other "old, broken and unnecessary" things as an effort to banish misfortune from his life (*K* 254). This also remains ambivalent: is Ahma actually replaying his earlier dream of burning the library of Alexandria and getting rid of Western civilisation? (66) What is the new Eden like – is it a "natural state" that has given up inherited human values and norms? References to Rousseau and Hobbes (118–19) suggest that the novel is aware of the philosophical discussion concerning human nature – the question of whether humans are inherently good or evil and how humanity manifests outside organised society. The burning of the texts – book burning being a literary motif typical of dystopian fiction – as well as the animalistic characteristics of Lynx suggest that the new Eden gives up most of Western culture willingly, entirely rebooting civilisation. Their choice is critical of modernity.

## 7. Conclusion

I have aimed to show that Laura Gustafsson's *Korpisoturi* is a curious combination of mimetic and speculative elements and genres, and recognising the hybridity helps the reader make sense of the novel. I have argued that *Korpisoturi* uses two conventions of the contemporary anglophone postapocalyptic novel: salvage and the critique of modernity. Yet I also suggested that some of the critique of modernity is communicated through Ahma's psychological depiction, meaning that the critique is not restricted to

[9] See marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Lynx_(Earth-616) (Accessed 4 May 2022). The word *Ilves* is Finnish and means "bobcat".

the post-apocalyptic characteristics of the novel, but is developed more broadly. The trade embargo functions as a turning point that breaks the mimetic illusion in its non-historicity and makes room for the speculative genres of the post-apocalyptic novel and survivalist fiction, however critically these are stylised in order to communicate a critical attitude to the reader. A psychological novel that evokes the *kansankuvaus* tradition turns rather easily into a post-apocalyptic novel but weakens the conventions by portraying a small cataclysm that barely qualifies as one and by adding comic and parodic accents to the portrayal. The novel shows that speculative fiction can be combined with mimetic genres in surprising ways. Similar hybrid compositions are likely to become more common in the future.

The motto of the novel, "I do not envy the conscience pure of the blind man in his bliss world", is taken from the lyrics of "Painting my horror" included in the album *La Masquerade Infernale* (1997) by the Norwegian band Arcturus, and it can be interpreted as communicating both Ahma's attitude towards the "blindness" of non-survivalist people as well as the narrator's evaluation of Ahma's narrow worldview, this ambivalence characterising the novel as a whole. Even if *Korpisoturi* is clearly critical towards the values of the survivalists, it still portrays Ahma in an understanding way, even letting him have the family idyll for which he has been secretly longing. The ending is rather hopeful for both a psychological and a post-apocalyptic novel, but it also shows how the dissimilar genres can come together and reach their summation in a single work.

*Biography:* Associate Professor, PhD Saija Isomaa works as a Senior Lecturer in Finnish literature at the Tampere University. She specialises in literary history, historical poetics, and genre studies. She has led a Kone Foundation research project on Finnish dystopian fiction, *Synkistyvät tulevaisuudenkuvat: dystooppinen fiktio nykykirjallisuudessa,* in 2015–2019, and is currently leading another Kone Foundation project, *The Historical Poetics of Finnish Literature* (2022–2025).
Contact: saija.isomaa@tuni.fi

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