



The Black Tongue

Marko Hautala , Jenni Salmi (Translation)

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For generations, the urban legend of Granny Hatchet has plagued the quiet residential area of Suvikylä in northern Finland. As the story goes, this immortal killer murders her victims with a hatchet, then buries the hearts in a potato field and eats them after they've rotted black. But not everyone is convinced it is just a story.

Maisa Riipinen has returned to her hometown to complete her dissertation on urban folklore at the same time that Samuel Autio has come home to arrange his father's funeral. As hazy, disturbing memories from their pasts meld with strange events in the present, Maisa and Samuel attempt to make sense of the town's fearful obsession with the mythical Granny Hatchet. But if it's only a legend, then why are people still vanishing without a trace?

From Finnish author Marko Hautala comes *The Black Tongue*, a gripping novel about a terrifying story with the power to silence—and the power to make those who dare speak disappear.

The Black Tongue Details

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Author : Marko Hautala , Jenni Salmi (Translation)

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From Reader Review The Black Tongue for online ebook

Mauoijenn ~ *Mouthy Jenn* ~ says

This was a weird book. Chilling with great descriptions. I definitely was creeped out. Love stories that make you think. If you like folklore and legend then this book is for you.

Anu Korpinen says

Kolme ja puoli tähteä. Ei hyytänyt ihan samalla tavalla kuin Kuiskaava tyttö, mutta kyllähän tarina oli mielenkiintoinen ja imi mukaansa.

Xxertz says

BLUF: This is a worthwhile read, but contains some odd (but infrequent) sexual content.

I was provided a copy of this book from netgalley.com in exchange for an honest review

Plot: The Black Tongue surrounds a neighborhood's urban legend. The story is intertwined around a few different individuals. We follow a young girl who is being introduced to the legend for the first time, an older woman who remembers the story from her childhood and decides to return to her hometown to write about the legend, and an older man (grew up with the woman) who returns to the neighborhood after the death of his father and reminisces on his childhood.

Pre-warning!: The first chapter is told from a teen's point of view and IS NOT reflective on how the book is written. Please, trudge through it – it's worth it.

Let's start with the good...: I can't tell you how good of a job the translator did against the original, but the story here flowed as if it was originally written in English, with the obvious exceptions of Finnish names. I didn't struggle to read through the translation at all.

It's interesting to see how everything ties together. At first, it really makes no sense on why we are following these different people, but it becomes much more complex as the story continues. I adore the story for this.

Another plus is that this book scared me. I'll admit, I am a wimp, but I haven't read a book that scared me in a while. This one did it. I slept with the light on for a couple nights.

...and then the bad: Awkward, awkward sexual moments. I'm not a fan of sexual moments anyways, but the ones in this book were exceptional strange.

Oh, and here is the stuff that doesn't matter, but I'm going to tell you about anyways: The translator changed a few names to be English, but not the majority. I can only assume it is because, at one point, the book refers to Samuel being named after the Bible. It would have made more sense to change all or change none, IMO.

Christine says

Every society has its own version of the boogiemán – a story to tell naughty children in order to scare them into behaving. Granny Hatchet is only an urban legend told to frighten the teenagers of Suvikyla, Finland. Or is it?

Granny Hatchet, as her name would suggest, carries a hatchet with her wherever she goes. She follows children who are out alone. Her hatchet never fails to strike between the shoulder blades. She removes their heart, buries it in her garden until it rots and turns black. Then, and only then, she eats the heart and thereby consumes their soul.

Maisa Riipinen grew up in Suvikyla among the row houses and amidst the refugees who lived there and, she is familiar with the legend of Granny Hatchet, more familiar than she cares to remember. As a student working on her dissertation about Urban Legends she dares to go back to discover if Granny Hatchet is still a story being told in the dark basement of the townhouse complex. As Maisa is daring to walk down memory lane Samuel Autio has also come back to his hometown to arrange his father's funeral. Samuel and Maisa had known each other as children and share a secret that neither wants to reveal. Will it come out now that they are both back home as adults?

The first part of this book drew me in. I was sitting at the edge of my seat enthralled with the gruesomeness of the Granny Hatchet story as it was being told to the children of the town. I gasped when one of the girls left the secret circle and it became clear she had a secret of own. Each mysterious footfall she heard had me holding my breath. And then ... well ... I'm not really sure. Jump to Samuel coming home and finding a strange movie playing in his father's abandoned apartment, the playing of which changed the telling of the story into flashbacks told by both Samuel and Maisa. Flashbacks that left Granny Hatchet in the literary dust never, really, to be properly revisited again.

At that point the book began to seem a little disjointed. The story began to jump all over the place, introducing us to an alcoholic, pedophilic hermit, a strange keeper of the marsh, Samuel's American girlfriend and her crazy, actor father none of whom had anything to do with Granny Hatchet. Then we are told about some strange sea serpent-like creature hidden in the basement of an old mansion located on an island no one is allowed to visit.

Wait a minute! What happened?

Judging from the beginning of this book it could have been a really scary read that would have kept me up well into the night to finish it, but the narration lost its way and never really got back on track. I finished it, and it was not all horrible – there were goose bumpy moments – but overall I thought it could have been better had the author stuck with his original premise and given me the creepy urban legend story promised in the book blurb.

The only saving grace ... and the reason for my 3 star rating ... is there is a twist at the end that did have me letting out an involuntary gasp because I did not see it coming. It made it worthwhile to get to the last few pages. And the writing, for lack of a better word, was atmospheric. Mr. Hautala can certainly write prose that makes you feel the mist and hear the crunch of dry leaves. At least there was that.

* I received this ebook at no charge via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review *

Martha says

Thank you to NetGalley for the review copy!

The Black Tongue is a weird book. While Goodreads lists it as "horror/suspense/mystery", and it does have elements similar to the Nordic crime novels I so love, it doesn't fit neatly into a genre box. It has some elements of horror, and at times feels similar to the unreality of *Night Film* (an excellent book, by the way) or the TV show *Fringe*. In a way I think a good subgenre for this book would be "disquiet", because many pieces of the book are not so out-and-out horrifying as they are deeply unsettling.

This is largely due to Hautala's gift for invoking a sense of atmosphere. You can smell the sea and envision the creepy old house where Maisa experiences her terror. The story jumps around through three different time periods and multiple characters, but the underlying sense that something is not quite right is pervasive, running like a wrong thread through the background of these POVs. It's a very tightly written novel that's very hard to put down. As I read it I constantly thought of what a dark, dramatic movie it would make, with some excellent cinematography and lighting to bring out the creepier scenes in the book.

What lessened my enjoyment of this book was the simple fact that it ended with very little resolution for the characters, and to be honest, I'm not entirely sure what the story was supposed to mean. It begins with an urban legend--Granny Hatchet, the boogeyman of this small Finnish town by the sea--but spools off in other directions, teasing with other elements that may or may not tie into the legend.

I suppose you could say that Granny, like the legend of the Loch Ness Monster (referenced in the book), is created as a way to scare the local residents into silence. Or perhaps she's the result of rumors and gossip surrounding a mentally ill old woman, and after so many years she's just a convenient cover that someone else is using for their own purposes.

Or perhaps Hautala is trying to say something else entirely: his story has echoes of the Brothers Grimm--famous for imparting moral lessons through their stories--and perhaps here the moral behind Granny Hatchet is: don't ask questions, don't seek answers, just keep your head down and follow the established routine. The older generation is trying to prevent too much change in the younger generation, even as they fail: communism falls out of fashion, leaving people like Samuel's dad without a crutch, and new floods of immigrants to the country bring with them new ways and new ideas.

But these are all just ideas, because honestly, I'm not really sure what to make of the book. On top of the diverging story lines, it's not always clear if the characters involved are entirely mentally present, or if they're experiencing psychological breakdowns that lead to hallucinations, paranoia and other disconnects from reality. Is it possible Granny Hatchet really exists, and the novel is a sort of magical realism turned dark? Or are the characters taking the urban legend a little too far?

Overall, this was a great book, very dark and spooky--I just wish it had a more conclusive ending. I know sometimes art is supposed to provoke questions, not provide answers, and this book definitely gets stuck in your head for days on end. Maybe later on I'll have an epiphany and decode the message within. In the meantime, I still enjoyed it, even if it felt a little murky at times; but if you enjoy a more clear-cut horror

story, you'll probably be left frustrated at the end as you try to decipher what it all means.

Annika Ahvensalmi says

Hautalan paras, ehdottomasti!

Titus Hjelm says

Ensinnäkin, en tiennyt, että suomenkielistä kauhukirjallisuutta (joitain novelleja lukuunottamatta) on edes olemassa. Jo siksi tämä oli iloinen yllätys. Ja kirja on hyvin kirjoitettu--paljon paremmin kuin monet angloamerikkalaisista tusinakauhuista. Se tempaisee mukaansa. Bonuksena 80-luvun hevarinuori, joka myöhemmin väitteli uskontotieteestä tuntee olevansa kirjan miljöössä kuin kotonaan. :)

Hautala on siis kyvykäs, mutta Stephen King-vertaus ontuu. King rakentaa yhteisöjä. Hänen kirjoissaan saattaa mennä 100 sivua ilman viitettäkään tunnistettavaan "kauhuun". Kuokkamummossa taas jokainen kohta on viritetty pitämään yllä kauhua, välillä jopa pelottelumaisesti. Tässä mielessä Hautala on lähempänä vaikkapa James Herbertiä kuin Kingiä tai John Ajvide Lindqvistiä. Yhteisöäkin kyllä rakennetaan, mutta ohuesti ja helposti tunnistettavien luokka-ja etnisten erojen varaan. Usein Kuokkamummo vaikuttaa enemmän elokuvakäsikirjoitukselta kuin kirjalta, mikä tekee siitä sujuvan ja kauhullaan painostavan, mutta pinnallisen.

Joka tapauksessa hieno uusi tuttavuus ja varmasti tutustun seuraavaankin Hautalan teokseen.

Cats of Ulthar says

REVIEW: THE BLACK TONGUE by Marko Hautala

Reading THE BLACK TONGUE reminded me more of the unabridged Grimms' fairy tales than it did horror per se. Like Grimms', the villain [in this case villainess] is really awful, but her evil is almost more a force of Nature than a deliberate intent--almost, not completely. Granny Hatchet seems something unavoidable, an implacability. Herein lies the other comparison to the Grimm Brothers: the moral lesson. Don't go out at night. Don't leave the city confines. Don't walk in the woods or on the beach, especially at night. Leave tribute--and never, ever, mock Granny Hatchet.

Greg at 2 Book Lovers Reviews says

This may seem odd, but I have been keeping my eye out for a Finnish author for a while now. I have had some fantastic stories from Swedish, Danish (mmm...I love danishes), and Icelandic authors. I don't know if it is something about their long winters, but they write some incredibly dark stories that I connect with. So, when I saw Marko Hautala billed as "the Finnish Stephen King", I knew I had to read The Black Tongue.

While I am always a bit skeptical when an author is compared to one of the greats, I went into The Black

Tongue with an open mind. This story exceeded my expectations. I was immediately shocked and drawn into the small town of Suvikyla, Finland. I was completely unaware of the legend of Granny Hatchet, but before the first chapter, I knew more than I could have ever needed to know about her.

The Black Tongue revolves around three individuals: Sagal, Samuel and Maisa. Each of them has had their lives forever changed by Granny Hatchet. The story moves back and forth through time with each of their interwoven stories. Marko Hautala did a marvelous job of slowly building a connection between each one. As the story moved forward, the myth of Granny Hatchet became more real, and the horror of each character's story was revealed.

Marko Hautala has an impressive catalogue of books, The Black Tongue being the first to have been translated into English. I truly hope that more of his books are translated in the near future. I was utterly pulled into this story and shocked at how it all came together. This is definitely an author to keep an eye on.

*I received a copy of the book from the publisher (via NetGalley) in exchange for an honest review.

Annie says

It's been a long time since I've read an out-and-out horror story. I picked up Marko Hautala's *The Black Tongue* because it was set in Finland and, according to the description, was about a folk story that might be truer than any one wants it to be. That part turned out to be true, but *The Black Tongue* ended up being much weirder and scarier than I was expecting...

Read the rest of my review at A Bookish Type. I received a free copy of this book from NetGalley for review consideration.

Elisa says

I received a free copy from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. Thank you, Amazon Publishing! This book is hard to describe. It's horror, psychological suspense and social chronicle all rolled into one. It's not an easy read; the language is very poetic, with many detours into the minds, memories, nightmares and fears of the characters. At first, it's hard to figure out how the stories mesh with each other, but eventually it all makes sense. It took me a while to get into the plot but, once things got moving, I couldn't put it down. Urban legends, grown-up fairy tales, bullies and a Somali girl trying to find her place in Finland are combined with passages so horribly scary that they made my skin crawl. This is a book worth reading.

Horace Derwent says

i've just seen a dutch edition of this in a used bookstore, and i didn't know what it was about, but i recognized the author's name

i will buy a copy of english edition soon

Emilie says

Legenda kuokkamummosta on karmivan outo ja älyttömän pelottava, mutta myös niin tajuttoman koukuttava! Teksti oli välillä karua ja puhe rumaa, mikä ei yleensä ole minun makuuni, mutta tällä kertaa se toi kirjan miljööseen sopivaa autentisuutta. Kirjasta jäi pyörimään kymmeniä kysymyksiä päähäni ja jos jossain törmään Hautalaan, istutan hänet kyllä piinapenkkiin. Tämän kirjan rinnalle kaipaisi lukupiiriä, jossa voisi keskustella omista teorioista... Huikea lukukokemus!

Tiina Susanna says

Aika karmaiseva.
Lisäselvittelyitä tehdessäni osa on jopa tositaustaisia..

Veera says

Cittarin alepökkarien seasta lähti matkaan, en tiennyt tästä kirjasta tai kirjailijasta etukäteen mitään.

En ole aikoihin nauttinut lukemisesta näin paljon. On ollut lukublokkia ja nyt teki mieli vaan lukea ihan pienimmässäkin raossa ja työpäivän minitauoilla. Ensimmäinen kirja jota ylipäätään kannoin töissä mukana. Pakko antaa viisi tähteä, kiitos tälle tarinalle, sain lukuintoni takaisin!
