

Q&A with Antti Tuomainen – Translated by David Hackston

What was the inspiration for The Mine?

AT: For me, a book usually announces itself when a few seemingly separate things come together and I realise that, yes, this would be a book. This was the case with *The Mine*. First, I had a hitman looking for a good story. Second, I wanted to write about the relationship between a father and a son. Third, in Finland we had a sort of a mining boom a few years ago, which turned out to be a bubble. (A toxic bubble, to be exact.) It was an interesting phenomenon and I wanted to somehow investigate that from one angle or another. I hope I do it in a way that readers might find interesting.

Some of the best crime fiction contains social messages; did you set out to draw attention to environmental issues in this book?

AT: The main thing is always to tell a good story with good characters. That is my ambition. I attempt to keep any social aspect unobtrusive, even though I might like it to be there. So I would say that I want to draw attention to the story and smuggle some information along with it, while being as discreet as possible. It is a thin line, I know, but I try my best.

At its heart, The Mine is also a story of relationships, particularly that between an estranged father and son (and a husband and wife). Relationships feature heavily in many of your novels. Can you elaborate on why?

AT: That is what I'm interested in: human beings. The secrets we keep; the conflicts we have, both internal and external; how we are unknown even to the people closest to us. And how tragic or comical – or tragicomical – the results are when we are trying to do either the right, or what is seen to be 'the right thing'.

Revenge, power and corruption are also major themes in your work. What is your message here?

AT: They are strong motivators. The best characters are obsessed, driven by some ultimate need; they're people who will stop at nothing until they get what they want.

There are several violent crimes in *The Mine*, but the descriptions tend to be less gory or bloody than in most Scandi-noir fiction. Is there a reason for this?

AT: I believe that everything that goes into a book or a story should be there for a reason. If a lot of blood is needed to advance the story or to tell it better, then a lot of blood there should be. If not, then it is gratuitous and, by now, boring – which is even worse. What Sam Peckinpah did, very few do better.

What was your route to publication?

AT: A long one. When I was 18 or 19 I knew I would be a writer. But I didn't publish my first novel until I was 34. So it took 15 years. In between I wrote two novel-length manuscripts (still mercifully unpublished), short stories, film scripts, plays, poetry. All unpublished, of course. Also, I worked as an advertising copywriter for 12 years until becoming a full-time writer at 41. So it's taken a few years in every way. All in all, I have to say I'm very grateful for everything.

Did your success take you by surprise?

AT: Oh yes. I never dreamed about having my books published abroad, let alone in 28 countries. To go into a bookshop in London and to see my book there – I find that downright thrilling.

What's next?

AT: A book called *The Man Who Died* (that's the Finnish title, anyway), which will be published in Finland in September 2016. It's a good one, I've been told. I hope you will like it.