

THE CAMPSITE vol 1 - FORSSA

It was a hot, humid, overcast August night, pretty dark even for Finland. Since it was 3am, not much was happening. I sat in the reception of the camping site I was working at for the summer, together with my co-supervisor, friend, and night shift specialist Jore. He was bouncing a golf ball against the floor and then the wall, and catching it. He counted out the throws. "Seven-forty-two... seven-forty-three... seven-forty-four..."

I was arranging the traveler identification forms that would be taken to the police in the morning, since the police had told us in no uncertain terms that they preferred them alphabetically by surname. The third slip in a stack of three copies only had a faint imprint of the information written by the travelers, and it took all the movable illumination we had in the reception to see the data. Three lamps on the desk made life hot for me.

"Eight-twenty-yy... eight-twenty-one..."

The defeatist mood of the night shift was worsened by the fact that the cashier girls had denied the supervisors access to their music cassette collection for the nights. This was because our smoothest operator had successfully courted the shapeliest of the cashiers, only to drop her at the sight of a new sport coupe model among the gardener girls. The battalion suffered from the action of a single soldier.

"Nine-forty-one... nine-forty-two... damn!" Jore said as the ball bounced off his knuckles and rolled under the sorry excuse of a fridge we had for keeping our food two degrees cooler than the ambient air. Rather than brave the ogres living under the fridge, he picked a new ball from our depleted minigolf stock.

The only cassette we had was better than nocturnal Finnish radio programming AD 1987. Still, playing the same plastic pop song every 60 minutes should be proscribed in the Geneva conventions. Jore scanned the pitiful set of channels in the sea of static, only to drop the chase in desperation. "There's only talk available, on farming and such, and then there's last week's football analysis", he said. He started bouncing his golfball.

I needed a bit of fresh air, and as it was on the hour, I went out and did the rounds of the site, checking that the saunas were locked, all boats were drawn up far enough on the beach, and the gates were locked. I loved walking the beat. The fullness of the summer was upon us but none of the melodrama of autumn had fallen yet. I knew every rock along the paths, every hole ripped into the perimeter fence by enterprising bottle collectors and all the nooks and crannies our site had for impromptu lovers and their quick snuggles.

All the locks were in place, and nothing out of the ordinary was to be found along the beat. As I wound my way back up to the reception, I saw a beat-up old Toyota Corolla parked at the far

corner of the reception parking lot. It wasn't there when I left. It was just within the tired yellow streetlight's cone. There was one man in it, and he was watching me as I went into the reception.

Jore made it past one thousand bounces and told me as much, but I cut him short.

"What's with the Toyo there?" I asked.

Jore looked surprised. "What Toyota?"

"That one" I said and took him to the back room which was dark and only had a row of windows at the top of the wall. We stood on the sofa which had seen better days and peeked out.

Jore said, "Never seen that before." He dropped down to sit on the sofa.

"Some supervisor you are too," I said and went back to the front with Jore in tow. "We got to check him out."

I grabbed the gear, which meant a can of mace and a rubber truncheon, usually referred to as the youth guidance counselor, and then I glanced out of the window into the null-color neon lit front of the reception. A long shadow preceded the Toyota man as he sauntered up to our service windows. My first thought was one of relief, as he was skinny and small, but at that time, one always thinks of possible concealed weapons. Jore and I both slipped the mace cans under the desk for quick access, and opened our windows. After all, we were there to serve prospective campers.

The guy slithered up to Jore's window and we got our first good look at him. He appeared very gaunt. A five o'clock shadow looked more like a five days' shadow. His hair was worn in a greasy fountain directed up from the lobes and then down and back towards the neck, and a barber was sorely needed to make it look remotely human. He was in his early thirties, as far as I could tell.

Still, the oddest thing was his attire. He was dressed in a worn-out national costume, of which there are dozens of local subtypes, but I couldn't tell where he was claiming to be from. National costumes in Finland are worn by three groups of people: the Romani minority, retired teachers when reciting the Kalevala or attending a country festival, and finally, folk dancers.

This guy looked definitely mainstream, not Romani, who take pride in the way they dress. He didn't strike us as a dancer of any sort, and teaching was right out. Jore gave me the slanted look with the notched-up eyebrow. There was an awkward pause as both parties pondered which one should open the channel. He beat us to it with a "Hello" so muted we hardly heard it.

"Hello. What can we do for you?" Jore asked the guy. "If you'd like to come and camp for the night, we're sorry, but the site is closed. We could let you in, if you pitch your tent right behind the reception and keep the silence," he suggested.

The guy pivoted his head on the top of his skinny windpipe. I'd never seen a bigger Adam's apple, and it lolled up and down as he prepared to speak. It looked like he was swallowing a yo-yo.

"I'm not here for camping." He put his hands into his jacket pockets, deep enough to take in half the forearms.

"Well, in that case, you can stay in your car until the morning and we won't charge you for the night. Some folks sleep on the parking lot, and we don't mind. Just keep quiet, will you?" Jore must have thought the case was about to be closed.

The guy shot his line and caught us both by surprise. "I get impulses."

"Come again?" I asked. For the first time he noted me. I didn't like his eyes. The gaze didn't come from the eyes, it started deeper than the usual retina level.

"I get im-pul-ses."

Jore gave me a hand signal under the desk to grab the mace in case things turned sour. "What kind of impulses would that be, pal?"

"Criminal activity impulses."

I looked at Jore and he looked at me. No one had told me of such impulses before.

"How so?" he asked.

"When there's a crime being committed, I get impulses. They're like electric shocks. If I'm close to the crime scene and the criminal activity, I get them real strong." The yo-yo resumed its oscillation and the guy went silent.

Under the desk, Jore motioned for me to dip in, so I did. "So, what do you do when you get these impulses?"

The guy moved towards me and took a stance halfway between our windows. "I used to call the cops. But that was too hard on me. The cops would always ask me to take them to the crime scene. But as I got close to it, the impulses got too hard to take."

I felt sorry for the little guy. He was obviously the result of cuts in the mental health sector. Impulses... yeah right. "So what do you do these days? You don't call the cops anymore?"

He looked straight into my eyes and said, "I have a deal with the chief of police of my home town."

"Where's home?" Jore asked.

"Forssa." Jaysis, this guy was 250 kilometers from home.

"What's the deal with your chief?"

"The chief of police told me to do this: whenever I get impulses, I don't call them anymore to tell them there's a crime. I just get in my car, and I drive in the opposite direction, and they'll see me go. Then they know there's a crime scene in the other direction and get there and take care of the trouble."

I said, "Let me get this straight. You've just hopped in your car, like three or four hours ago, in the middle of the night, and drove up to Jyväskylä, just because you have these impulses in your head?"

The guy looked at me. I looked at him. This time, in the colorless light of the neon tubes, I saw into his eyes, and I saw it wasn't my world there. It was his world. In his world, he was the telepathic crime buster, friend of the chief of police of Forssa, and I was the peon, working my way through college to reach a mediocre position in civil service, while his supernatural impulses helped solve crimes.

And in his world, he was not affected in the least by cuts in the mental health sector.

All of a sudden he put his thumbs to his head, using his palms as antennas. He rotated his head again. "Oh... I feel another impulse. And another one." He seemed to triangulate the origin of the impulses, and managed to find southwest from whence he had come. "Look guys, nice talking to you but I got to go on. I'm not far enough from the crime scene yet." He turned and took off. Gone were the slinky toy movements, this was a man on a mission half running across the parking lot.

When he sped off northwards, we sat silent for a while. Then I said to Jore: "So... what do we write in the supervisor log?"

He looked at me and said, "I'll think of something if you'll do the remaining beat."

I was only too happy to oblige. The site was calm, even the last night fever people had passed out in their tent or close to it anyway. At the boat beach I saw a pair of proud ducks with ten battery-operated hatchlings in tow, on their way to the reeds for a morning meal. I was delayed by a talkative retired policeman who often appeared very early at the site gate, eager for a chat, so by the time I got back to the reception, Jore had left.

In the evening I reported in for another night, not with Jore this time but another guy. It always was a busy time, that seven o'clock switch. Campers came and went, people hired minigolf gear and asked whether canoes are safe for beginners, and the cashier girls flirted with a busload of Dutch volleyball players.

At some point in the middle of the hustle I had a look at the supervisor log. Jore had written a Spartan entry:

"August 8-9th. Calm night. The police chief of Forssa is a GENIUS."