

FEATURES

The SF in Translation Universe #17



Rachel Cordasco

Welcome back to the SF in Translation Universe! This summer promises a fascinating and diverse line-up of SFT from Japan to Sweden and everywhere in-between. Here you'll find mythical creatures, people turning into trees, space elevators, and much more, so read on.

June brings us SFT from Japan (New Directions) and Korea (Restless Books). In Ryunosuke Akutagawa's *Kappa* (tr. Lisa Hofmann-Kuroda and Allison Markin Powell), the eponymous folklore monster (who drags toddlers to their deaths in rivers) is spotted by Patient No. 23, who pursues it to its lair. There, 23 finds a whole world of Kappas, whose culture and society mirror that of Japan in terms of morals, the law, economics, and romantic relationships. His return to the human world is difficult and he finds himself irritated by humanity (leading to his confinement in an asylum, thus "Patient No.23"). With parallels to *Alice in Wonderland* and *Gulliver's Travels*, *Kappa* is a fascinating modern-day morality tale. Korean author Jeong-Hwa Choi's *The White City Tale* (tr. Janet Hong) also explores society and social hierarchies, only this time the protagonist is a man fighting against inequalities in a quarantined city.

The three works of SFT out in July are all by women- one Russian, the other two Korean and Japanese. *Counterweight* (tr. from the Korean by Anton Hur) is the latest text in English by Djuna (of which little is known). A story about corporate intrigue, politics, and one company's destructive attempts to build the first space elevator, this promises to be yet another excellent work in the growing canon of modern Korean science fiction.

Unlike *Counterweight*, Darya Bobyleva's *Village at the Edge of Noon* and Maru Ayase's *The Forest Brims Over* fall into the surrealist camp. *Village* (tr. from the Russian by Ilona Chavasse) is about a settlement that suddenly finds itself cut off from the world. Voices call from the river, people start thinking strange thoughts, and the forest seems to be moving closer. Only one woman seems to realize what's going on. Meanwhile *Ayase's Forest* (tr. from the Japanese by Haydn Trowell) also takes up this theme of humans in close relation to the natural world, only here it is a woman literally turning herself into a force of nature. When a woman becomes resentful of her husband, who uses her as the subject of his novels, she eats a bowl of seeds and starts sprouting buds and roots. Her husband tries to keep her in an aquaterrarium, but she breaks out, turns into a forest, and begins to take over the city.

I'm especially excited about August because it means a new John Ajvide Lindqvist novel! Having read his "Places" horror trilogy, I know that whatever else he's written will be high quality. *The Kindness* (tr. Marla Delargy?) forces us to consider just how little it would take for people to turn against one another. A mysterious shipping container is dumped near a Swedish port town,

FEATURES
SF in Translation #17

and along with its horrifying cargo of twenty-eight dead refugees, there's a strange black sludge that seeps into the water. This sludge somehow imbues the inhabitants of the town with dread, after which they start acting out violently against one another.

Staying in Scandinavia a bit longer, we can look forward to Juhani Karila's *Fishing for the Little Pike* (tr. Lola Rogers). Winner of the Jarkko Laine Literature Prize, *Fishing* tells the story of one woman's annual trip to her home in Lapland to catch a pike. Pretty soon, we meet mythical creatures, a murder detective, and a deadly curse.

Finally, we have Polish author Rafal Kosik's *Cyberpunk 2077: No Coincidence* (tr. by ?), the latest in a video-game-to-print series that started with Andrzej Sapkowski's *Witcher* books. CD Projekt Red was also behind the *Witcher* computer games, and here they've partnered with Kosik to tell a story about a group of people who "discover that the dangers of Night City are all too real" as they pull off a heist for a mysterious boss.

I'm sure I'm missing some SFT, so please let me know what else should be on this list. Thanks for reading, and I'd love to hear what you're reading now and what you're looking forward to: rachel@sfintranslation.com. Until next time in the SFT Universe!