

RIKU MATTILA

Varissuo

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Varissuo

“Sirs, I think we have found it,” Chief Biologist Ojaranta emitted to the plants around the greenhouse table.

It took a while for the molecules to reach the sensory organelles of the prestigious audience.

“Elaborate,” King Manu replied after sniffing and processing the news.

Chief Biologist Ojaranta sipped a glass of Aura fertilizer, turned his leaves towards the UV lamp and started emitting:

“We have received a new batch of spectroscopy results from the Rubble space telescope that has found eight new exoplanets in the Kinky Way galaxy.

“It seems one of them - which we have decided to name “Varissuo” - has all the conditions for life: Carbon dioxide, liquid water and gravity of about 1 g. It does have a toxic concentration of oxygen in its atmosphere, which makes life improbable - at least intelligent life - but other than that, we consider Varissuo the most promising place in the known Universe.”

“On my orders, prepare a planted mission to the said planet, with the task of finding out whether Turkuforming its atmosphere would be technically and ethically feasible,” King Manu emitted. “In other words, if there is any intelligent life that would suffer if the composition of the atmosphere is changed,” he went on. “We don’t want that.”

“Yes, sir. The new Intergalactic Spaceship Turella, which was launched at the Pansio spaceshipyard last year, should be capable of handling such a mission, carrying two föris for performing a number of hops from the orbit to the surface and back,” Chief Engineer Myllysilta replied.

“Very well,” King Manu acknowledged. “Choose the best possible crew for the mission,” he thought aloud but soon corrected: “On second thought, let’s make Captain Kanerva head of the mission. Lightyears away, he can’t cause any more scandals. Lord knows, we’ve had enough of them. And you better go as well, to make sure that the systems remain operational. And for the third crew member, we need someone who can actually fly these things. Any suggestions?”

“How about Heil Farmstrong?” Understatement Secretary Horst Kibbutz suggested. “He is the best crap duster on the whole planet. If he can fly a Heideken triplane, modern spacecraft will surely pose no problems for him.”

And so Heil Farmstrong, crapduster in sixteenth generation, was nominated as the Varissuo module pilot for the mission. Turella was capable of maneuvering on Autopilot, so it did not need a dedicated pilot; an Aura can tied to the wheel to simulate the touch of a pilot would be enough.

Turku

Turku was an old planet, old enough that its core was solid and charged particles from the sun it was orbiting - named "Tampere" - were free to knock out its atmosphere into outer space. But before that had taken place, sufficiently intelligent life had evolved to build a network of greenhouses (known as "hese") where a habitable atmosphere could be maintained with composts ("kuppis") that took the toxic oxygen out of the air and turned into breathable carbon dioxide.

Plants and composts lived in symbiosis, and the composts had kept the atmospheric content of oxygen such that no animals or other opportunistic ruskoholes had evolved on Turku. The plants had not even considered the possibility of such creatures, except in some B class horror sci-fi movies.

Life on Turku was peaceful and harmonious, and in spite of the parliamentary dictatorship, no-one was properly oppressed. There were the occasional clashes between those from "this side of the river" and those from the "other side of the river",

but they were seldom fatal. With the well-functioning planet-wide welfare state, fights were mainly needed to bring some excitement into an otherwise steady life.

Nevertheless, all was not well on Turku: however carefully the heses were maintained, leaks were bound to happen, and the pressure kept dropping year by year, recently reaching the critical limit of 400 millijethro, under which casual pollination became impossible. Turku was facing extinction.

To ensure the continuity of life, a team led by Chief Biologist Jukka Ojaranta had been scanning the Universe for potentially habitable exoplanets. There had been a couple of false positives, the recent one in the Dragsfjärd galaxy: it did have plenty of breathable carbon dioxide, but a closer examination revealed that someone had been using the planet as a nuclear waste dump.

In any case, Varissuo looked like the real deal, and on a cold Jethrober morning, Intergalactic Spaceship Turella, carrying the föris Matti and Teppo, was launched at the Kakolanmäki Space Center, from launch pad 57Å. The crew was dormant and would not remember anything of the journey.

Teppo Has Landed

“**I** SS Turella approaching Varissuo orbit,” a loudstinker announced, waking Captain Kanerva, Chief Engineer Myllysilta and Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong from dormancy.

“Prepare to ignite Jethrothrusters for orbital insertion.”

“Preparing to ignite Jethrothrusters,” Chief Engineer Myllysilta acknowledged.

The plan was to do a few days of orbital reconnaissance to get a closer look of Varissuo, before Chief Engineer Myllysilta and Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong would enter the “Teppo” föri that would bring them to the designated landing position on the planet.

From the orbit, Varissuo looked beautiful. It was mainly blue, probably dihydrogen oxide, but that was broken by green and white, most likely dry land.

“Do we have any instructions regarding selection of the föri landing site?” Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong asked.

“Nope,” Captain Kanerva replied.

“Darts it is, then.”

The astroplants spread a large aerial photo of the planet on the wall of the Turella command bridge, blindfolded Captain Kanerva, gave him a dart, rotated him a few laps, and took a few steps back. Captain Kanerva threw the dart at the photo. It hit a green spot at 62.03° N, 22.80° E.

“Undocking Teppo,” Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong announced.

Turella gave the föri a light push so that it was clear of the spaceship.

“Igniting Jethrothrusters.”

Slowed down by the thrusters, the orbit of Teppo started to curve downwards, and gradually the atmosphere added to the braking effect. There were about half a dozen three-mile-long steel wires hanging from the rear end of Teppo, to act as a kind of supersonic parachute. Once past the critical phase, the wires were reeled back in.

The approach went well in spite of the unusually thick atmosphere, and slowed down by the Jethrothrusters, Teppo landed gently on an Upper Satakunta bog.

Laura-Tuulikki

Outside metropolitan Parkano, a couple of miles west of the Lapinneva traffic hub, local dairy magnate Veli-Jukka Välinissinluoma had brought his business associates in for milking. Math was not his strongest side, but it did not take him unreasonably long to realize that something was not right. There were only two Ayrshire cows in the milking carousel. Laura-Tuulikki was missing.

“Maybe she has run after a rabbit and knocked down the fence,” Veli-Jukka thought. “Or, she has gone to see her fiancé again,” he continued, referring to inseminator Hakala who lived a few miles north of the Välinissinluoma industrial complex.

“Oh well, we will go after him in the morning,” he concluded. This was not the first time he and his Karelian Bear Dog Pamela (who, in spite of his name, was a male) had to lure Laura-Tuulikki back home from Hakala.

Planteater

Teppo stood slightly slanted in the middle of an Upper Satakunta bog, a few hundred yards south of the Häädetkeidas nature reserve. Chief Engineer Myllysilta and Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong looked out of the window in amazement. There were plants everywhere. They stood out in the open with no heses surrounding them. And they were *huge*! The tallest plant ever recorded on Turku had been only five inches tall. The plants surrounding Teppo were at least 200 times that.

“They’re big, all right,” Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong said. “Now let’s go find out if they can talk.”

With that, he put on his spacesuit, stepped into the air lock, opened the hatch, went to the ladder, tripped, fell head first to the bog and emitted: “Oh, fucking fucking fucking shit!”

Unfortunately, his spacesuit was airtight and no-one got to record those historical first words on another planet.

Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong and Chief Engineer Myllysilta approached the closest pine tree. They analyzed the

smell molecules it emitted, but their spacesuit only revealed dull odors of bark and resin, nothing to get excited about.

“Greetings, Varissuoling. We come in peace from Turku,” Chief Engineer Myllysilta emitted through the communication valve in his spacesuit.

The pine remained mute.

“You are not very social, are you,” Chief Engineer Myllysilta continued the one-sided small talk. “We come all the way from Turku to greet you, and all you have to say is to repeat the meaningless phrase ‘Kekkonen, Kekkonen, Kekkonen...’? Well, screw you too, bloody corpse!”

Attracted by the last sentence, a huge swarm of Upper Satakunta swamp mosquitoes surrounded the visitors. The astroplants were horrified: they had never seen anything that was not green, move.

“What are these? Flying composts? What kind of horror show is this Varissuo place?” Chief Engineer Myllysilta screamed with terror.

But worse was yet to come.

At the edge of the bog, they saw something big and brown slowly approaching their föri. It moved with its four legs, a sight that gave them the chills.

A walking compost! No-one will take us seriously if we report this back home, the astroplants thought in unison.

Then, without showing any emotion at all, the beast grabbed a couple of dozen specimens of cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) in its mighty jaws and, just like that, pulled them out of the ground and started biting them into juicy pulp.

This was too much for Chief Engineer Myllysilta and Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong, who spurted into their föri, closed the hatch and took off, determined to find a less horrendous site to explore the planet.

Laura-Tuulikki lifted its head from the cottongrass, whipped horseflies off its back with a swing of the tail, and continued grazing as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place.

Time-out

Back on orbit, Teppo docked with Turella, and the crew gathered to recite what they had experienced on Varissuo, and to decide on how to proceed.

“There is plenty of life, out in the open, but the one we tried to interview was not intelligent at all,” Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong started his report.

“No matter what I emitted, it kept repeating some meaningless mantra... ‘Kepponen, Kepponen, Kepponen’ I think it was.”

“No, ‘Hetkonen, Hetkonen, Hetkonen,’” Chief Engineer Myllysilta corrected. “Anyway, it seems that there either is no intelligent life on Varissuo, or else we landed in some kind of a mental asylum,” he continued to describe his impressions of northwestern Parkano.

“Did you try to establish contact with any other locals,” Captain Kanerva asked. “After all, that Kepponen guy could have been just a local mental case, like the ones we have locked in Luostarinmäki back home. Or, he could have been paralyzed with the sudden shock of the close encounter.”

Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong and Chief Engineer Myllysilta looked at each other. Finally, Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong opened his glands and started emitting the horror story about the walking, plant-eating giant compost Laura-Tuulikki.

“My first impression is that the high oxygen content of the atmosphere has prevented the evolution of intelligent life, and it has become a planet ruled by composts,” he concluded.

“Let’s not jump into hasty conclusions,” Captain Kanerva emitted. “Let’s try another spot.”

Two Businessmen

The next landing spot was selected on the same general area but away from the giant autistic plants, close to what looked a bit like the hedges back on Turku. Perhaps they could contain more intelligent life? Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong used the Jethrothrusters to gently drive the föri to a touchdown at 61.76°N, 23.02°E. The landing spot was more even than the previous one, and the soil was firm and solid. Before making another headless scouting tour outside the föri, Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong and Chief Engineer Myllysilta decided to observe the surroundings from inside the vehicle first.

Meanwhile, malt barley entrepreneur Penjami Hakkoonperä was driving his Valtra back home from Hankkija Hämeenkyrö, where he had acquired new blades for his vintage Aros reaper. On the way home, he had stopped at the local pub “Vanha Frans” for a few pints. The hay season was at its best, and he was planning to get a few hectares cut before dawn.

The road was narrow, the tractor was wide, and entrepreneur

Hakkoonperä's reaction times had taken a toll at Vanha Frans. Consequently, it came as no surprise that he ditched his Valtra when trying to avoid hitting the local moonshine magnate Torsti Raitisluoma, who met entrepreneur Hakkoonperä on the wrong side of the road with his Erkkola utility vehicle.

Entrepreneur Hakkoonperä and moonshine magnate Raitisluoma stepped out of their vehicles and started drafting an action plan to get entrepreneur Hakkoonperä's Valtra out of the ditch. Moonshine magnate Raitisluoma served some light refreshments from the back of his Erkkola, and before any concrete measures were taken, both businessmen lay unconscious in the middle of the road.

Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong and Chief Engineer Myllysilta were observing the performance through the window of their föri in the middle of entrepreneur Hakkoonperä's barley field. Teppo was barely three feet tall and practically invisible amongst the barley, and the plants were free to make observations without a risk of being seen.

When the show was over, Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong and Chief Engineer Myllysilta decided to go out and have a closer look. The astroplants sneaked out of their föri - no speeches this time - and found themselves in the middle of tight jungle of barley.

"Hello, Varissuolings. We come in peace from Turku," Chief Engineer Myllysilta tried to open discussion, but the barley just went

"Koff, Koff, Koff..."

in a hypnotic monotonous rhythm. It seemed that life in Ikaalinen was not any more intelligent than it had been in Parkano on their first landing.

The plants approached the businessmen and their vehicles with utmost care, their horror encounter with Laura-Tuulikki fresh in their turnapses. Before stepping on the road, they took their time to make sure the way was clear.

Eventually, they had the courage to step on the road. They walked to entrepreneur Hakkoonperä, who lay in the middle of the road with his eyes closed, snoring heavily.

"This is very close to what the composts are back on Turku. Even the stench is the same," Chief Engineer Myllysilta started analyzing entrepreneur Hakkoonperä, "but I can swear I saw it moving a while ago. Now," he poked entrepreneur Hakkoonperä's cheek without getting any response, "it seems to have gone to a state of dormancy."

"I still haven't gotten my crown around the idea that the roles here seem to be upside down," Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong thought aloud. "The plants seem to be immobile and dumb as the Raisio-folks back home, and helpless against predatory composts. The composts stink and produce carbon dioxide like the kuppis on Turku, but according to our sensors, it makes up less than half a percent of the atmosphere.

"This must mean - as we already have witnessed - that the majority of biomass here is in the form of plants. They have to compete for the tiny percentage of breathable CO₂ so hard that they are unable to move or develop any intelligence."

The barley around went "Koff, Koff, Koff" in the wind.

"And what comes to composts," Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong went on, pointing at entrepreneur Hakkoonperä, "I mean look at this. They seem to be capable of moving, but other than that, they show no sign of intelligence."

Entrepreneur Hakkoonperä was drooling on his cheek.

“No sign of a flowery aroma. No signs of any communication. They just move, kill and stink.”

There is no telling for how long Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong would have been going on bashing the poor entrepreneur, if the sound of an approaching tractor wouldn't have interrupted him.

Metal Mayhem

Machine entrepreneur Kyösti Kylä-Myyrä was tired. He had been clearing the roadsides with his tractor-mounted hydraulic reaper since dawn, and there was still ways to go. His 1986 Belarus Progress had a non-synchronized gearbox and no air conditioning, which made the cabin hot as hell. Besides, Kylä-Myyrä was a chain smoker.

He had just passed the Hakkoonperä agricultural complex and come to the large opening surrounding it, when he saw something that made him stop. There was an Erkkola utility vehicle in the middle of the road. He changed to neutral and pressed the break pedals until the socialist wonder wriggled to a screeching halt.

Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong and Chief Engineer Myllysilta looked in terror of the mass murder. A metal beast, like straight out of the movie “Terminator: Doomskyrka”, was cutting helpless plants by the million. Then it stopped, and from inside it, a compost emerged in a puff of smoke. The astroplants were below wind from Kylä-Myyrä, and when the

stench of sweat and homegrown tobacco reached their sensory organelles, Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong stated:

“That does it. No signs of intelligent life here either. Off we go.”

They entered the föri and took off. Just when the anthrothrusters ignited and set the surrounding barley into flames, moonshine magnate Raitisluoma opened his eyes. He looked at the accelerating miniature spacecraft, then at the bottle in his hand, smiled, and took another sip.

Revised Plan

On orbit, Captain Kanerva had made observations of his own:

“It seems that there has been no intelligent life around the landing spots we have chosen so far. But,” he pointed at a spot on the photo a few dozen kilometres southeast of the previous location, “these here are definitely not natural formations. Go there next and see if you can find any signs of the civilization that built them.”

“Teppo does not have enough Jethrofuel to make another landing,” Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong observed. “We must switch to the other föri.”

The duo climbed into Matti, closed the hatch and down they went.

Surprise on the Roof

Hakametsä Ice Hall, finished in 1965, was the first indoors ice hockey arena in Finland. Most people know that it is the home arena of Tampereen Ilves. Very few people know that its curved roof contains a hidden party terrace for VIP events. Even fewer realize that it also makes a perfect landing spot for intergalactic miniature spacecraft.

At that night, Ilves was celebrating home victory over Dnepropetrovsk Outboard Engine. There was a secret terrace party for the players and their significant others, among whom there were six previous holders of the Miss Finland title, one Miss Universe, and one Miss Silakka from the annual Helsinki herring market.

The weather was cold, but it was offset by the warm beer and the dazzling fireworks that lighted up the Upper Satakunta sky. The ladies were beautiful, as always, and among them, the ultimate queen was, as always, Viivi Pumpanen. As much as the

other ladies tried to conspire against her, no amount of artificial add-ons could compete with the culmination of 6.5 billion years of natural selection. The outdoors venue had enabled generous use of perfumes, and if you closed your eyes and ignored the drunken out-of-tune chanting of the old hockey classic “Mats Sundin är homosexuell,” you could well have imagined being in the middle of a flowery meadow.

In the midst of the “Kissanpiearu” fire crackers, no-one paid any attention to the föri that Jethroboosted on the roof of the Hakametsä ice palace, right next to the barbecue grill where a recent Ilves acquisition kept harassing the barbecue master by demanding “Onk naked?”

“More composts,” Chief Engineer Myllysilta noted. “Still no signs of intelligent life.”

“Let’s not be too hasty. Better go outside and have a closer look.”

The astroplants sneaked out of the föri on the slippery roof and started making their way towards the party terrace. Once there, they met with a gruesome sight: half a dozen daffodils, with their stems brutally cut, were placed in a vase to die.

“Shit, we must have entered some compost death cult ceremony,” Chief Engineer Myllysilta emitted quietly.

“Sshh, let’s be still and we’ll fit in,” Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong replied.

Viivi Pumpanen’s champagne glass was empty and she decided to go for a refill. But before that, she took a tiny bottle of her *message de fleur* perfume and sprayed it on her wrists.

This place is beautifully decorated, she thought to herself. All these seasonal flowers; daffodils and... what are those?

She had noticed the two astroplants and decided to have a closer look.

Chief Engineer Myllysilta saw her first.

“Oh shit. Looks like that compost is heading straight for us. I think it is looking straight at me...”

...but darn it, it sure has pretty eyes, he continued to himself, unaware that he was facing the most beautiful being that had ever lived in the universe. She kept coming closer and closer, and eventually her perfume reached the sensory organelles of Chief Engineer Myllysilta.

Chief Engineer Myllysilta was a tough plant, as tough as they come, but too much was too much. He started pollinating wildly, then fainted and fell off the table.

“Oh my, how did that happen?” Viivi Pumpanen said and picked the tiny creature from the floor. Chief Engineer Myllysilta woke up, opened his eyes, and started pollinating even more wildly before passing out again. Now, the perfume also reached Varissuo module pilot Farmstrong’s sensory organelles, with a similar outcome: after a moment of wild, spontaneous pollination, it fell off the table.

Viivi Pumpanen held the spaceplants in her hands and thought what to do with them. Then she put them in the vase in the middle of the daffodils, filled her glass and walked back to her table.

The party was reaching its peak when the astroplants woke up in the vase. More and more glass refillers visited their table, and the plants found a pattern: while the big, hairy ones reeked as you would expect of a compost, the tiny, pretty ones

seemed capable of intelligent communication. None of them as cleverly as their first contact, but way more than they would have expected of a compost. Besides, the Varissuolings seemed to be using some other means of communication as well. They seemed to be moving their material input openings to interact with one another, and the emotions that the first creature's eyes had awoken in them, hinted of a world beyond smells that they had never even imagined possible.

Mission Report

Report from Our Research Expedition to Varissuo

As ordered by King Manu, our team has performed a research mission to the planet Varissuo in the Kinky Way galaxy. The mission was carried out under the command of Captain Ilkka Kanerva on the Intergalactic Spaceship Turella, and comprised three föri landings piloted by Varissuo module pilot Heil Farmstrong, accompanied by Chief Engineer Tahvo Myllysilta. The landing locations were chosen on the same general area, but at different biological environments.

Findings: We found no evidence of intelligent plant-based life that would suffer if we should proceed with Turkuforming the planet's atmosphere breathable. The planet's ruling species seems according to our findings be a sort of a living compost who, based on our findings, does not in general appear to be capable of communication or any other intelligent activities beyond fulfilling their basic bodily needs.

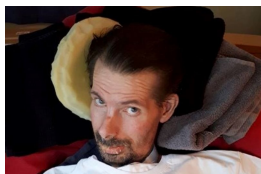
MISSION REPORT

On our last föri landing, however, we found a group of creatures whose intelligence possibly even surpasses our own. Besides smell communication, which at times was, in fact, poetical, they also seemed capable of some sort of telepathy.

Moreover, one of the specimens we encountered was so unbelievably beautiful that it alone is a sufficient reason to not tamper with the planet's atmosphere.

Conclusion: Based on our findings, we do not recommend Turkuforming, i.e. radically increasing the CO2 content, of planet Varissuo's atmosphere. If life on Turku becomes impossible, however, an enclosed colony in the region covered by our two first föri expeditions may be considered.

Aboard Intergalactic Spaceship Turella,
Varissuo-1 Mission Crew
Captain Ilkka Kanerva
Varissuo module pilot Heil Farmstrong
Chief Engineer Tahvo Myllysilta



About the Author

Born in 1974. Nuclear engineer since 1999. Husband of one since 2003. Father of one since 2013. Friend of one since 2015. First ALS symptoms in 2010. Diagnosis 2012. Complete paralysis 2014. On life support since 2015. Invasive ventilation since 2017.

Life is good for me, but for most ALS patients it is not. We should increase our efforts to make me one of the last persons to die of this disease caused by the badly engineered biomass body. Check out <https://lahjoitus.alstuttu.org> and consider a donation.

You can connect with me on:

🌐 <https://thebackupcolony.org>

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