



**Title:** Helsinki Blood

**Author:** James Thompson

**Description:**

Kari Vaara is recovering from the physical and emotional toll of solving the Lisbet Söderlund case when he's approached with a plea: an Estonian woman begs him to find her daughter, Loviise, a young woman with Down syndrome who was promised work and a better life in Finland...and has since disappeared.

One more missing girl is a drop in the barrel for a police department that is understaffed and overburdened, but for Kari, the case is personal: it's a chance for redemption, to help the victims his failed black-ops unit was intended to save, and to prove to his estranged wife, Kate, that he's still the man he once was. His search will lead him from the glittering world of Helsinki's high-class clubs to the darkest circles of Finland's underground trade in trafficked women...and straight into the path of Loviise's captors, who may be some of the most untouchable people in the country.

**Reviews**

**Booklist:**

Nonstop action make this one read fans of Scandia noir will especially like.

***The Associated Press:***

Thompson stands out from that crowd [Stieg Larsson, Henning Mankell, Jo Nesbo, Arnaldur Indridason, and Yrsa Sigurdardottir] by writing in English and telling Vaara's gritty narrative in the first person.

**J. Kingston Pierce for [Kirkus Reviews' Mysteries and Thrillers blog:](#)**

Author Thompson was born in Kentucky, but he's lived in Finland long enough to assimilate the Nordic fondness for bleak, emotionally riveting crime stories. The vigor of Thompson's storytelling is a thing to behold.

***Bloomberg News:***

It's mayhem with an appreciatively leering wit.

It's not a book for the fainthearted. Still, if you hanker for a gory trip into the Helsinki underworld -- and yearn for a taste of tar-infused salmon -- this tough, spare novel is worth the read.

**Publishers Weekly:**

Edgar-finalist Thompson's compelling fourth Insp. Kari Vaara thriller shows the Finnish homicide detective to be not so much hard-boiled as deep-frozen. Kentuckian Thompson draws on his long residence in Finland to convincingly portray a grungy northern underworld filled with neo-Nazis, intelligence spooks, and Russian mobsters.

**Elizabeth A. White, syndicated columnist:**

James Thompson has created an immensely compelling and complicated character in Kari Vaara.

And it's that level of realism, in everything from the harsh Finnish weather to Vaara's calculating attitude to the often graphic violence depicted, that elevates the Kari Vaara series to something more than "just" crime fiction. Thompson has repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to tackle serious and often touchy societal issues in his fiction -- Finns' substance abuse and emotional isolation in *Snow Angels*, Finland's complicity with the Nazis during World War II in *Lucifer's Tears*, Finnish nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment/racism in *Helsinki White* -- but he has the skill as a storyteller to combine his intelligent and provocative social commentary with intense and engaging plots in an incredibly smooth and seamless manner.

It all makes for a series which both educates and entertains, and which consistently raises the bar on itself. Thompson has said that *Helsinki Blood* wraps up an arc and that there is something completely new in store for Vaara and his team. I can't wait to find out what that is.

**BookPage:**

*Helsinki Blood*, a dark and gritty thriller, marks yet another great installment in a first-rate series.

**[The Rap Sheet:](#)**

The Kentucky-born, Finland-living Thompson knows how to pen emotionally riveting crime stories, as dark as a Nordic winter. But it's a welcome surprise to find a ray of actual hope in the closing pages of *Helsinki Blood*. It seems Kari Vaara will live to be maltreated another day.

**[Bookreporter.com:](#)**

Thompson covers the waterfront of noir crime fiction to a degree and manner that few can match.

Thompson puts one in the mind of Ken Bruen, and while the literary styles of the two men are very different, they are truly sons of different mothers, with Bruen's Jack Taylor and Thompson's Vaara blood cousins. At one point I literally stood up and screamed, NO! NO! You can't DO that! Thompson could do it, of course, and he did. As Bruen often does, Thompson goes head first and full in where both angels and demons fear to tread. For those who picture Finland as a dull sort of place where little but fishing occurs, an afternoon with Thompson and *Helsinki Blood* will change your waking and sleeping impressions of that country forever.

**Denver Post:**

An English wag, noting the increasing number of crime novels coming out of Scandinavia,

referred to them as "Inspector Norse" books, a salute to Colin Dexter's now completed series featuring Oxford copper Inspector Morris. Most are fully homegrown, but James Thompson's Finnish series is from a Kentucky-born writer who moved to Helsinki 15 years ago. That's enough time to know the culture and enough distance to examine it through the eyes of an outsider.

The result is a painstaking and equally painful, almost surreal, rush through the various strata of Finnish society as Inspector Kari Vaara battles his own demons in his quest to find a young Estonian woman with Down syndrome who just may have fallen into the hands of powerful men who traffic in the lucrative sex trade. It's a tough book, beautifully and hauntingly told.

**Library Journal Prepub Alert:**

Kentucky-born Thompson now lives in Finland, so he got that chilly Scandinavian mood just right with his debut, *Snow Angels*, nominated for the Edgar, the Anthony, and the *Strand Magazine* Critics Award. In his fourth work starring Finnish detective Kari Vaara, an Estonian woman asks Vaara to find her Down syndrome daughter, missing since she went to Finland after being promised better work. Vaara jumps at the chance to prove himself, but the culprits may be beyond his reach.

**Kirkus Reviews:**

Kentucky-native Thompson has created in Kari a hero as dyspeptic as Kurt Wallander and as prone to vigilante justice as Harry Hole.

**Seattle Times:**

Over in Finland, homicide detective Kari Vaara returns in *Helsinki Blood* by James Thompson, an American and longtime resident there.

Vaara, violent and unpredictable, is not doing well. He's in agonizing physical pain from his last case. His beloved wife has deserted him and their infant daughter. Not to mention that bad guys are after the fortune that Vaara and two colleagues have stolen. (No one ever said that Vaara's an angel.)

Keeping the cop's world from falling apart is his loyal posse of friends. They rally round to care for Vaara and the baby and find his wife. Meanwhile, Vaara privately takes on the case of an Estonian girl who may have been lured into the sex trade -- a job that he hopes will absolve him of previous sins and win his wife back.

**C.J. Box, New York Times bestselling author of *Force of Nature* and *Breaking Point*:**

James Thompson's prose blend of chilly Scandinavian atmosphere and dark Southern Gothic is unique and jolting, like an ice-cold straight razor slashed across sweaty flesh. In *Helsinki Blood* there are equal measures of violence, detection, pathos, blood...and finally, sweet redemption.

**M. J. McGrath, author of *White Heat* and *The Boy in the Snow*:**

*Helsinki Blood* is as dark and bracing as a Nordic winter...Kari Vaara blasts other maverick cops out of the (icy) water.

**Leighton Gage, author of *Blood of the Wicked*:**

I can't get enough of this author. No one writes noir better, Nordic or otherwise.

**Quentin Bates, author of *Frozen Assets* and *Cold Comfort*:**

Inspector Kari Vaara's latest nightmare barrels along at a breakneck pace as he faces enemies on his doorstep as well as his own demons within. James Thompson's spare, no-frills action is straight to the point. *Helsinki Blood* as raw as it gets, it doesn't pause for breath and it takes no prisoners.

**Richard Godwin, author of *Mr. Glamour*:**

If you want to read crime fiction that is distinctive, read this. There have been many comparisons of Thompson's style to other Nordic writers, but I think the analogies fall short and miss something that has emerged from the dual culture at work in his novels. He is not a native of Finland and that gives him an edge. Thompson has carved his own particular niche out of the first rate writing coming out of the Nordic countries, and it is one that leaves you thirsty for more. There is a combination here of a precise cold scalpel and humanity. Thompson is an inheritor of Gothic Noir, and creator of the detached and involved, the ruined and redeemed Vaara, an Inspector who embodies all the contradictions that inhabit a life. I highly recommend this.

**Jenn's Bookshelves:**

I've been a fan of this series from the beginning and it has been quite an interesting journey watching Kari's character devolve into a cold, uncaring and incredibly flawed character.

The majority of this novel is quite dark which seems to be a trademark of Thompson's writing, the cold Finnish climate seeping into the souls of Kari and his crew....That said, my faith in Thompson's writing prevailed and ultimately I was rewarded with a promise of hope and recovery in Kari's character.

I do recommend it, along with the other books in the series. My strong feelings/response to this novel simply indicate how skilled Thompson is at involving his readers in his writing, eliciting a strong response in me that not many writers can. Recommended.

**A Bookworm's World:**

Thompson is Scandinavian noir at its best.

**Mystery People:**

James Thompson has slowly but surely made a name for himself as an author to watch in the world of crime fiction. His series character Kari Vaara, a man who seems to get a little rougher around the edges with each novel, has quickly become one of my current favorites.

Often times authors in the crime genre write characters who seem invincible, but Thompson is happy to dive head first into the psychological issues that plague ordinary people who have faced extreme circumstances. All of this works to deepen the scope of the characters. By the end of *Helsinki Blood* you feel as though you really understand

the motivations behind the actions. Each character is given care and attention, which humanizes them on a level few writers ever reach.

The appeal of the Kari Vaara series is broad enough for fans of all types of crime fiction. I picked up Thompsons first novel, *Snow Angels*, on a whim and now I eagerly await new material. If you give him a chance, Thompson will make a believer out of you as well.

#### **Nordic Bookblog:**

*Helsinki Blood* is a fascinating book. It is very well-written, with an intense and rich plot and lots of twist and turns, but first and foremost with a living breathing Inspector Vaara, spellbinding with his Weltsmertz and suffering. He is so human it hurts; even when he does the right thing which is fairly rare he often does it for the wrongest of reasons. And when he thinks he is helping the weak and saving humanity, he is really mostly engaged in helping himself and his friends. And the convoluted contradictions, delusions, savagery and general mess that is the story in *Helsinki Blood* is exactly why you ought to read this book.

#### **Noir Nation:**

If you want to read crime fiction that is distinctive, read this. There have been many comparisons of Thompsons style to other Nordic writers, but I think the analogies fall short and miss something that has emerged from the dual culture at work in his novels. He is not a native of Finland and that gives him an edge. Thompson has carved his own particular niche out of the first rate writing coming out of the Nordic countries, and it is one that leaves you thirsty for more. There is a combination here of a precise cold scalpel and humanity. Thompson is an inheritor of Gothic Noir, and creator of the detached and involved, the ruined and redeemed Vaara, an Inspector who embodies all the contradictions that inhabit a life. I highly recommend this.

#### **The Reading Room:**

*Helsinki Blood* solidifies Thomson's status of a great storyteller who goes well beyond creating just crime fiction. It is hard not to draw some parallels here with *The Girl with Dragon Tattoo* since Thomson has now shown us a few times that similarly to Stieg Larsson he is also prepared to tackle some serious social issues that plague Scandinavian countries: substance abuse, nationalism, anti-immigrant attitudes and deeply ingrained criminal activities. Be forewarned that the whole series is not for faint hearted but if you are looking for intelligent crime fiction that will keep you reading till the middle of the night and will keep you thinking about it for a lot longer this is definitely a book to try.

#### **Kittling Books:**

If you savor complex, dark, gritty, beautifully written stories about a flawed man determined to be and to do good, I highly recommend James Thompson.

#### **Reviewing the Evidence:**

It may be possible to think of this book as a transitional piece between Vaaras

seemingly hopeless personal and professional situation and a more solid basis for his continued viability. As the book ends, we become aware of this potential and look forward to seeing it played out in Thompsons next Inspector Kari Vaara installment.

Czuk It:

The only reason I still have all my fingernails is that I read it in less than a day.