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Revontuli

by Andrew Eddy

“Eddy’s vivid, detailed descriptions of war, and of life in a reindeer-farming community, give depth and flavor to the story ... Heartbreaking WWII Romance.”

—Kirkus Reviews



In a land marked by the rhythm of migrating reindeer and the rituals of an ancient religion, a way of life is drawing to a close. War is coming to the Finnmark, and brings with it unsuspected inhumanity. **REVONTULI** tells the coming of age of a Sami girl during World War II, a time of trial that leaves Marit and the village of Karasjok forever changed. Already torn between the heritage of her Norwegian father and her mother’s indigenous Sami culture, Marit discovers a bigger world through Hans, the German officer billeted in their home. Their forbidden love will challenge Marit’s beliefs and allegiances. Set in the forests above the Arctic Circle, where Norway meets Finland, **REVONTULI** is inspired by true stories.

About Andrew Eddy



Andrew was born in Vancouver, Canada. He grew up in Western Quebec and in the Gulf Islands, where he developed an appreciation for nature and became hooked on a rural lifestyle. He has also lived in Paris, Burgundy, Montreal, Knowlton, and Leiden. In 2010 he found a home with his family in Simiane-la-Rotonde, in the hills of Provence, where he farms an ancient grain called einkorn, indulges his passion for history and prepares his next travels.

Andrew is married and has five children. *Revontuli* is his first novel.

Read more about Andrew at www.andreweddyauthor.com and on his blog, *Serendipity*.

About Booktrope

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Ordering Information

REVONTULI

By Andrew Eddy

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An Interview with Andrew Eddy, Author of *Revontuli*

Q: What inspired you to write *Revontuli*?

A: A few years ago, I met by chance someone whose family lived in Karasjok during the war, and whose grandparents had lived a love story like the one in the book. I was fascinated by this unsung story of WWII, especially given the dramatic events that unfold as the war evolves. After this meeting, I researched the history of relationships between German soldiers and Norwegian girls and discovered that there may be as many as 12,000 children born of these relationships. The topic remains to a great extent taboo in Norway today, and I felt someone should tell the human side of these stories.

Q: Why do you think the story of WWII in the Finnmark is so little known?

A: The Finnmark is a long way from where most things that people talk about happen. There was also no Anglo-Saxon interest that far North after the failed British Norway campaign of 1940, and many WWII history books were written by Americans and Brits. It is better known in Russia, and to some extent in Germany, but few works are translated. I hope through this fictionalized but accurate account of the events, the story becomes more widely known.

Q: You travelled to Karasjok in order to research the landscape and culture of the area, and have written travel journals documenting your experiences. How much of *Revontuli* is factually accurate?

A: I strongly believe that historical fiction needs to be historically accurate. Ideally, someone intimately familiar with the period and place should be able to read the book and not know the events did not take place. Fiction picks up where the known reality stops. In *Revontuli* for example, I read several accounts of the war in Karasjok and wove real events into the story. There really was a prisoner camp with Serbian partisans. There really were three escape attempts. And there was really a woman who hung sausages in trees for the prisoners to find. The Old Church in Karasjok survived the burning of the Finnmark, as did the smithy – the only two buildings to do so. Nobody knows exactly how the Church survived, which is where the fiction picks up the story. I explain how the Church might have been saved. When I went to Tromsø and met the director of the local WWII museum there, he took me out to the site of the sinking of the Tirpitz. He described in painstaking detail how it occurred and noted the timeframe would work for inclusion in the book. So I invented a picnic where Marit would watch the sinking.

Q: Marit, the female protagonist, is half-Norwegian and half-Sami. A lot of Sami culture is presented in the book, including Marit's Sami relatives visiting Karasjok once a year with a herd of reindeer in tow. How do Sami people live today?

A: Reindeer remain a central part of Sami culture, and about 10% of Sami people are connected in some way to reindeer herding. That said, the nomadic lifestyle is nearly gone. Before the war already, international borders made it increasingly difficult to migrate the herds. Now, fences and private lands have added to the challenge. As to the Sami cultural heritage, while many Sami strive to maintain a balance between the traditional and modern world, the war had a devastating impact on the Sami

culture and most of the concrete symbols of Sami heritage were destroyed. This is another reason I felt compelled to portray life in Karasjok in a realistic fashion. I was encouraged by the directors of the museums I visited during my research to show a true account of life before the war. This history is now only memories from survivors, and they are getting older.

Q: Tell us the most interesting or surprising story from your research trip.

A: I think without a doubt, the most interesting event during the research was an encounter with a dog that did not exist. It sounds a little crazy, but it really happened. I tell the story in detail at my blog *Serendipity*, which can be found at www.andreweddyauthor.com. The story is called The Ghost Dog of Karaskjok. You can find other stories about the Sami and about my research at the same site.

Q: Marit is a very strong-willed, independent girl, but by the end of the novel she has gone through a transformation. Without spoiling the ending, what did you want readers to take away from *Revontuli*? Is there a message in your novel that you want readers to grasp?

A: *Revontuli* is a book about hope. I would like people to come away from what is essentially a sad story feeling that life, even in hardship, is beautiful and touching. The book opens with Marit seeking closure from the memory of events that took place almost seventy years earlier. I want readers to understand that the power to find that closure lies not in places or other people, but within ourselves.

Q: *Revontuli* depicts some very dark, evil circumstances, and alludes to how fear and self-interest can corrupt people's morals. Characters are put in impossible situations where they can either do nothing in the face of evil and save themselves, or risk their lives to help the victims of the evil. Yet, despite terrifying evil happening all around, your writing and story have a warmth to it. Was this intentional? How did you strike the balance between the book's ever-present darkness and its glimpses of warmth?

A: I hope the warmth comes in more than glimpses! You're right, there is a continuous tension throughout the book between the surrounding darkness and the warmth and love within the characters. I think much of the war was in fact like that. Many people find their most beautiful memories come from times where struggle was ever present. People ask me whether *Revontuli* is a sad story. I always chuckle a little, because, objectively, of course it is. And yet... I always felt I was writing a beautiful love story.

Q: You used to work for the Canadian Space Agency, and afterwards started your own company that uses satellites to solve environmental problems. You also farm an ancient grain from your sixteenth century home in Provence, France. How does this interesting, eclectic background affect your writing? Why write about history when you're immersed in so many other subjects?

A: I'm passionate about history. My next book, *The Miller's Curse*, is also set partly today and partly in the past, in this case, late 19th century rural Provence. You can be sure that the farming experience came in handy in the research on that book. I don't see a disconnect between working in the high-technology sector and writing about completely different things. In *Revontuli*, for example, the setting is absolutely crucial. The setting is itself a character. This sensitivity to the environment is something space taught

me. Satellites have a lot to tell us about life here on Earth. And I don't rule out one day writing a sci-fi thriller!

Q: Was there a significant moment that made you decide to start writing and follow your dream of becoming an author?

A: I think it would be better put to say there was a moment I decided I could not run away from it anymore. I've been writing stories since I was a child, and I've always been passionate about it. After university, I decided I did not want the uncertainty involved with being a writer; I felt I needed a profession, and I went back to school to study law. Sometimes people ask me, how do I know if I should be a writer. My answer is always the same. Writing is a difficult job and a very lonely job. Do anything else you can. When you find there is nothing else you want to do as much, and you are only happy when you are also writing, then you will know you are a writer.

Q: Do you expect to explore other unknown historical events in your later books?

A: Absolutely. I think there are entire periods that deserve to be more written about, like Ancient Sumer. Closer to my home, I'd love to write about 12th century Provence, but I haven't decided yet whether these books would be in English or in French.

Suggested Reading Group Guide

Note: These questions reveal plot details and spoilers from *Revontuli*.

1. The book opens with Marit “finding” Hans. Why does she shed tears of joy on his grave? If she has found him in the graveyard, what else does she seek to find by staying in Traundorf?
2. The third chapter of the book introduces the river to the reader. How is the Karasjokka important? Are there other passages in the book where the river is important? What role does the landscape and setting in general play in the book?
3. Early in the book, Marit becomes friends with some of the prisoners. How does their death change Marit?
4. Marit’s best friend is Milly, yet she cannot tell her about the horse she received from the prisoners. Why not? How is Marit’s relationship to Arnfrid different from her friendship with Milly? Is Marit still friends with Milly at the end of the book?
5. Hans is portrayed as a pleasant, friendly, caring character, yet he carries a secret throughout the entire story. How does Marit react to the discovery of the secret, initially and then after some time? If Hans had kept the secret from you, could you forgive him?
6. Tomas doesn’t like Hans very much. What reasons does Tomas have to dislike Hans? Margret and Tomas hide the letters Hans sends from Marit. Are they right to do so? Why or why not?
7. At the end of the book, Jan offers to marry Marit, even though she is pregnant with Hans’ child. Should she have accepted? How would her life have been different? Knowing she cannot be with Hans, why does she say no?
8. Marit is the heir to her grandmother’s gift of vision and prophecy. What is Marit’s relation to the ancient religion and how does she accept her role as noiade?
9. *Revontuli* is told from Marit’s point of view. How would the book be different if it was told from both Marit’s and Hans’ points of view? When Marit reads one of Hans’ letters, we have a hint of his view, and how it would be different from hers. Would the book work told from several points of view?
10. Marit lives most of her life in love with a man she only knew for a few years. Can you truly be in love without seeing someone for so many years, or is this only the memory of love?
11. The book is set to the war in Norway, and offers a vivid portrayal of the burning of the Finnmark. Why is this chapter of WWII relatively unknown? What is the impact of the burning of the Finnmark on the Sami people? How is their future different today than it would otherwise have been? The Nazi destruction of Sami culture was strategic rather than ideological. Does that make it any less reprehensible? Can the destruction of the Sami homeland be justified as an act of war, or is it a crime against humanity?
12. What other books would you compare this book to and why? How is it similar to or different from other novels you’ve read in this genre?