

# The Lahti File

## Aims

- To introduce students to the Finnish background to the story.
- To whet students' appetites by talking about the spy thriller genre and presenting the opening incident.

1 Ask students to work in pairs and come up with as much information as they can about Finland in five minutes. When time is up, call back answers from the whole class and list them on the board.

**Possible answers:** capital – Helsinki; climate – long winters as northern part in the Arctic circle; famous for telecommunications – Nokia; architect – Alvar Aalto; people good at winter sports; land of trees and lakes; composer – Sibelius; vodka; part of EU and eurozone.

2 Tell students that this story takes place in the Finnish town of Lahti. Ask them to read the Newspaper Reports and find out what links them.

**Answer:** Three different disasters have occurred in the Lahti area, all involving death and the environment, and perhaps a poison.

3 Ask students to look at the Characters list and work in pairs to decide what sort of story it is, and what part the different characters play. Call back answers from the whole class, and open up a discussion. Having established that it is a spy thriller, ask them to think about books they have read or films they have seen in this genre and ask them what are the typical characteristics of this genre.

**Possible answers:** resourceful heroes, often smooth-operating spies; powerful villains; dangerous situations; exotic settings, beautiful women; fast cars and car chases; guns and violence; death; rescue missions; passing information; secret communications; technical gadgets; following people.

Using their knowledge of the genre, the list of characters provided and information given in the newspaper reports, ask students to get into groups of four to write an exciting 'blurb' for *The Lahti File*. Ask one member of each group to read out his/her 'blurb' for the class to see how similar/different they are. Which one do they think is the best and why? If you have a copy of the book, you can then read the actual blurb to them.

4 Ask students to read Extract 1 and find out what Munro has to do. Call back answers from the whole class.

**Answers:** fly to Helsinki; meet Virolainen in Lahti and get information from him; wait for Naylor's orders.

Given what they found out about Virolainen from the list of characters, and what they read in the newspaper reports, ask students what kind of information he might have for Munro.

5 Ask students to use their knowledge of the spy thriller genre gained in Activity 3 to think about what might happen when Munro goes to meet Virolainen. Call back suggestions from the whole class. Now ask them to read Extract 2 to compare what actually happens when Munro goes to his meeting in Lahti with their earlier suggestions.

**Answer:** Virolainen gets shot.

Ask them why they think Virolainen got shot and who by. What do they think Munro did next?

6 Ask students to read Extract 2 again carefully and decide how the author builds up the tension in the first paragraph while Munro waits. Note their observations on the board.

**Possible answers:** the author builds tension, which by frequent references to time registers Munro's impatience; by focusing on what Munro does and thinks as he surveys the scene; by emphasising the peacefulness of the scene (streets empty, few signs of life), and only a few very ordinary everyday events, such as an old woman walking her dog and a cat crossing the road, which contrast with Munro's 'unusual' behaviour; by using a direct question about the whereabouts of Virolainen, which signals Munro's increasing concern; by registering the fact that he's in a 'dangerous' situation.

Ask them to then look at the language the author uses in the final three paragraphs and tell you how it differs from that in the first paragraph. If necessary help them by asking them to list the kinds of verbs and adverbs and adjectives used.

**Possible points:** introduction of sounds (running feet; loud noise of car's engine, screaming wheels, gun shots); speeding up of movement (running feet, chasing, speeding car); the sentences are shorter to highlight the change of pace and heightened drama of the action; appearance of other people: a 'worried'-looking man and four men in speeding Mercedes clearly on a mission.

7 Now ask the students to work in pairs and choose one of the paragraphs in Extract 2 (paragraphs 2 and 3 are shorter so should be treated as one). Ask them to write some more into it to 'improve' it; you might suggest they add more details to emphasise the undramatic everyday scene in the first paragraph (e.g. in the complete text, we learn that the art gallery is 'closed'; that the cat sits down and carefully washes itself) or to highlight Munro's tense mental state; they could increase the fast pace and drama of the following paragraphs by introducing an extra event or different verbs, adverbs and adjectives. Ask them to read their adaptations out for comment from others.

8 Ask students to imagine that Munro telephones Naylor after Virolainen's death. Ask them to work with a partner to invent the dialogue between them, thinking through the information Munro gives, and the instructions he gets from Naylor. They should write it down and then perform it for others.

# The Lahti File

## Newspaper Reports

### FISH DEATHS IN FINLAND

Finnish police and health workers were yesterday trying to explain the deaths of hundreds of fish in Lake Vesijärvi. The fish were found at the side of the lake, near the town of Lahti, early on Saturday morning. *UPI News – September 3rd*

### DEADLY GAS ESCAPE KILLS TWO

A Finnish couple was found dead yesterday in the Rouriniemi area of the town of Lahti in southern Finland. It is believed that there was an escape of deadly gas from a factory close to the area. Health workers have so far been unable to find out where the gas came from.

*Herald – December 21st*

### BIRD NUMBERS DOWN IN FINNISH TOWN

The Finnish town of Lahti, just north of the capital, Helsinki, has become an almost birdless area. In the spring large numbers of birds usually return to Lahti. This year, however, has been very different. Finnish scientists say that there are already 85% fewer birds than last year in Lahti.

*United News Agency – April 14th*

## Characters

**Ian Munro:** a British spy working for British Intelligence

**Naylor:** Ian Munro's boss

**Pentti Virolainen:** a laboratory worker in Lahti, Finland

**Sirpa Virolainen:** Pentti's sister

**Jorma Lappalainen:** a businessman and politician

**Riitta Kovisto:** an office worker for a bioengineering company

## Extract 1

Naylor continued, 'You're on the 12.35 plane to Helsinki, Finland. Your tickets are ready downstairs in the travel office. You've got a meeting in Lahti at six o'clock this evening on the steps of the church in Kirkkokatu.'

'Who am I meeting?' asked Munro.

'A man called Pentti Virolainen. He has some information for us about these stories. Find out what he knows and then wait for my orders.'

## Extract 2

Munro turned into the bottom of Mariankatu and started walking up the short hill towards the church. The street was empty. He looked at his watch again. 17.55. There was no-one on the church steps . . . A woman was walking her dog, about a hundred metres away to the right. There was an art gallery on the left-hand side of the street . . . Munro crossed the road and stood in the doorway . . . He could see the church steps, but it would be difficult to see him . . . 18.00. Munro seemed to be looking at the paintings in the window of the art gallery . . . Actually he was checking the streets in all directions and looking up at the church steps again. Where was Virolainen? Minutes passed. The old lady turned left along Kikkokatu . . . A cat crossed the road quickly in the other direction . . . 18.10. Still no Virolainen. Five more minutes, then he would go back to the hotel. It would be dangerous to wait any longer . . .

Just then he heard a noise. The sound of running feet. Munro stepped further back into the doorway. People ran when they were late, but they also ran to get away from danger. A man appeared suddenly from the right-hand side of the church. He stopped at the top of the steps and looked all around him. He looked worried, as if someone was chasing him, but he did not know where they were going to come from next. Munro stayed where he was . . .

Munro heard a noise at the bottom of Mariankatu. A car was coming up the hill. The noise seemed loud. Too loud, in fact. Munro looked quickly to his right. Too late he realised what was happening.

The car was a black Mercedes. When Munro saw that there were two men in the front and two in the back, he knew they were not out sightseeing. He got right down onto the ground in the doorway, making himself as small as possible. By the time the car reached the top of the street it was travelling very fast, the engine very loud. As it turned the corner into Kitkkokatu, the wheels screamed a little on the road and there were four short sounds. Gun shots . . . Across the street Virolainen had not been so lucky. He was lying on his back on the church steps, blood on the front of his shirt . . . Virolainen was clearly beyond help . . . It was time for Munro to leave.