

DISASTER IN POTATO VALLEY
BETTY ROYTBURD & FILIP OLSZEWSKI

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CO-HOSTED BY TOPOS BOOKSTORE

The Moomin characters were created by Tove Jansson, a Finnish painter and writer, during the bombardment of Finland at the time of World War II. While Soviet Powers threatened the Finnish borders, Tove came head to head with the pro German politics of her father, and the Moomin valley was an idyllic place of escapism.

The archetypes and personalities of the creatures inhabiting Moominvalley were originally based on the people in Jansson's life. Though she was initially wary of the Moomins' astounding popularity relative to her other endeavors, for Jansson the Moomins were always a labor of love.

On May 9th 2015, The Night Wolves, a notorious Russian biker gang with far right politics, was denied entry into Poland and the European Union. On that day, they planned a motorcycle march across the EU to commemorate Russia's victory in the fight against Germany. In reference to the EU's closing its doors to the bikers, Russia referred to the decision as "an insult to the memory of those who fell fighting against Nazism," in its official position.

The Night Wolves began as a group of motorcycle enthusiasts in 1989, during Perestroika. They have since gained military power and significant numbers – there are an estimated 5,000 known members across the former Soviet Union. Since 1989, their leader has been Alexander Zaldostanov, who commonly goes by the name "Surgeon" - a reference to his license to practice surgery. The Night Wolves hold a close friendship with Vladimir Putin, and are supported by the Kremlin. They have been outspoken in their support of Joseph Stalin, as well as their anti-gay and radical-nationalist sentiments. More recently, members of the Night Wolves have been directly involved in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, sending unmarked soldiers to patrol its

cities. They also played an instrumental role in the Russian annexation of Crimea.

In the 1990s Russia released documents detailing the events of the Katyn massacre, in which, by order of Joseph Stalin, a mass execution of Polish nationals and intellectuals took place in the spring of 1940. Mass graves of around 22,000 bodies were discovered in what has become known as the Katyn Forest, outside the city of Smolensk in central Russia. To this day, Russia has never fully acknowledged its culpability in the murders. The Soviet Union had blamed the massacre on German troops, though they are not known to have reached the area before 1941.

In 2010, a plane carrying 96 members of the Polish elite set off for Russia to take part in a memorial service at the Katyn site. The plane crashed outside Smolensk, killing everyone on board, including the President of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, and the entire army command. To this day, a majority of people in Poland believes Vladimir Putin to be directly responsible for this event.

Efforts are currently underway to examine evidence from the plane crash. Support for the investigation comes perhaps most strongly from Polish nationalist Jaroslaw Kaczynski, whose twin brother Lech Kaczynski died in the crash. Jaroslaw's political party "Law and Justice" has capitalized heavily on conspiracy theories regarding Russia's involvement in the matter. Since coming to power late last year Kaczynski has steered Polish politics sharply rightward. To much of the world, Law and Justice looks like just another European Putin-ite faction, but to many in Poland, the two could not be further apart.

Meanwhile, the Night wolves have been brewing their own conspiracies. They frequently organize massive music festivals, as well as stage musical plays for adults and children alike, often

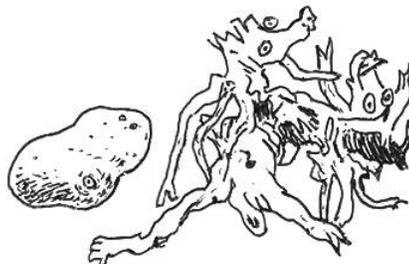
incorporating pyrotechnics and celebrity appearances.

Regarding the annexation of Crimea, Zaldostanov, said "For the first time we showed resistance to the global Satanism, the growing savagery of Western Europe, the rush to consumerism that denies all spirituality, the destruction of traditional values, all this homosexual talk, this American democracy." [1]

The earth has not forgotten the horrors of its world wars. Battles continue to rage to redraw European borders as the information war turns Europe once again into a unified stage for propaganda, rebirthing popular themes and familiar characters.

"A theatre is the most important sort of house in the world, because that's where people are shown what they could be if they wanted, and what they'd like to be if they dared to and what they really are."

- *Moominsummer Madness*



Betty Roytburd was born in Odessa, Ukraine in 1989. She moved to America in 2000. She loves traveling to Ukraine to visit her family.

Filip Olszewski was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1984. His family moved to America in 1989 under mysterious circumstances.

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Night_Wolves#cite_note-Teleg150317-13