

# Juhana Rask



**Evolutionary stories**

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2nd edition 2025

First published in Finnish: *Evoluutiotarinoita* © Juhana Rask 2019, 2. edition 2025

English translation © Juhana Rask 2025

Publisher: BoD · Books on Demand, Mannerheimintie 12 B, 01000 Helsinki, [bod@bod.fi](mailto:bod@bod.fi)

Print: Libri Plureos GmbH, Friedensallee 273, 22763 Hamburg, Germany

ISBN: 978-952-80-9705-1

## The story of Buttercup

### I

*The children's book The Adventures of Buttercup begins with Buttercup, who is still a little girl, waking up and curling her toes. This is not the book in question.*

One particular morning on the planet Wheat, little Buttercup yawned in bed, curling her toes and brushing her blonde hair out of her eyes. As little Buttercup slowly awoke to the dawn on Wheat Planet, the harvest time began. Outside the cottage the tall wheat field waved beautifully in the warm breeze. The fields were as wide as the eye could see. Roads, small groves and swamps separated the wheat fields. The terrain was flat, but low hills could be seen here and there, and on such a hill was the village where Buttercup lived. She stood up and smiled to herself as she looked out of the window at the beautiful landscape.

The ears were heavy with grains that would soon be harvested. As the sun rose on the horizon, the villagers awoke to their morning chores, just as villagers do on all inhabited planets where the sun and climate support such activity. The sun of the planet Wheat is a familiar yellow, like the Earth's, and its climate is mild.

As the sun rose that morning, it slowly turned from red to orange, and eventually from orange to yellow, turning the reddish sky to blue.

However, in her cottage on the edge of the village, the morning was out of the ordinary. From under her bed, Buttercup pulled out an old, angular suitcase. She opened it and examined its contents. She took out some things she thought would be needed on her journey and stuffed them into her small black

rucksack. A large handwritten book took up almost all the space. It was hardback and looked old, even though it was brand new. Her grandfather, a book printer by trade, had been working on the book for several months and now it was finally finished and bound. The old man had often smiled mysteriously as he worked, telling Buttercup that the book would change the future of all mankind. Buttercup thought the book was important, so she stowed it in her rucksack with her most important belongings, and not in her towing bag. The rucksack was overflowing with stuff.

Buttercup had packed most of her other belongings in cardboard boxes, or taken them to the village rubbish station for disposal. The old suitcase quickly emptied into the backpack and the towing bag.

Finally, she carefully placed a small, slightly holey but soft teddy bear on top of her rucksack and put a matching cap on top of it.

She was about to set off on a long journey to find her father. Despite the protests of the villagers, she would travel alone, although she was only eleven years old. She felt a sense of responsibility for the task her grandfather had given her. The responsibility weighed heavily on her narrow shoulders.

"Goodbye Wheat Planet," she said to herself a little recklessly.

She staggered out of her cottage with her rucksack on her back and her bag dragging behind her. She looked around the dwelling for a moment, wistfully. It was an ordinary three-roomed cottage with a gable roof, a chimney, small windows and a door. The walls were painted red and the windows and doors were framed in blue. It was the only home Buttercup had ever lived in during her life.

"Just a typical country cottage," people would have said.

All the cottages in the village looked the same, although they were of different sizes, as farming villages often had large families living under the same roof for several generations. The cottages were similar for practical reasons. They were almost all built from prefabricated elements that the Global Trading Empire had transported from its warehouse on Earth to the

planet Wheat. The wood felled during the clearing on Wheat Planet was far too expensive to build the huts and had been immediately transported to Earth.

The girl was sad because her grandfather had died and been buried only a short time ago. They had lived together for many years, and suddenly she was all alone. She and her neighbours had been caring for the bedridden old man for a few weeks, but the doctor had told them early on that nothing could be done.

The old man, named Cadan, had been mentally alert to the end, and had not been visibly discouraged by his impending death.

On his deathbed, he had still given Buttercup instructions and a plan of action for the future: "Find the theatre director Makabee. He can help you find your father. I heard your father is rich and can help you. Take this locket with you. It also has your mother's photo in it. Don't lose it."

The old man handed her a small locket and coughed softly.

"Take all the currency out of my drawer and this cube with you. It contains instructions you both will need. Keep it safe. Also take earplugs, and some food. I'm sorry I can't come with you to help you. We were meant to travel together."

The old man handed Buttercup a glass cube, apparently containing something important.

"Why the earplugs?" the girl wondered aloud, but immediately regretted her futile words. The old man was clearly no longer able to speak. He still opened his eyes, and seemed to smile a little.

"Don't be afraid, my child," he said in a hushed voice. "I have seen that your future is long and happy... remember that you are never alone, even if it seems that way," the old man continued, coughed again and closed his eyes. "Oh, yes. I almost forgot the most important thing. Remember to take the book with you. Besides finding your father, it is also the purpose of your journey. You will meet someone who will ask you about the cube and the book. Don't be afraid when it happens. Only They know about them."



After saying this, the old man fell asleep and never woke up again.

She knew that the old man had travelled a lot in his youth, mostly on Earth, but had then given up the nomadic life and moved to the planet Wheat to become a farmer. His daughter, Buttercup's mother, had only moved in much later, when she became pregnant. They had quarrelled over the pregnancy, and in anger she had not even told him the name of the child's father. Later, Buttercup's mother had fallen ill and had died of a lung disease common among farmers on the planet. The old man had found out who the father was, but he never informed him. He had cared for his daughter until her death and then took the two-year-old Buttercup into his care.

The villagers had buried the old man in the local cemetery. Several of them had been concerned about the girl and had offered her a new home with their family, but she had thanked them and said she was going to her father. She had told no one about not knowing for sure where to find her father, or if he was even alive.

"But, my dear girl, how could you travel alone when you are so little?" the hostess in the cottage next door had chattered away with her cheeks bulging as she had munched on her homemade cake at the funeral reception. "It's not even legal, is it? You could just come and live with us. Violet would be happy!"

"But..." Buttercup had attempted to say something, but had been interrupted.

"Yes, come and stay with us!" had said Violet, who was also a little girl and in the same class at school as her, agreeing with her mother.

"But I can't. Grandpa bought me a ticket in advance, and it can't be cancelled... besides, my father will be there to meet me." Buttercup had stammered little lies. She had hoped to get home soon to start packing. She was a well-behaved girl, and lying didn't feel good.

She looked at the cottage for a moment and then turned her back on it. She had lived there all her life, and now she would have to abandon it. She began to walk along the seemingly endless highway towards the towers of the Global Trading Empire's spaceport, which rose hundreds of metres into the distance. The towers gleamed massive and foreboding in the sun, as if waiting for her.

"I guess I'll never come back here again," she thought.

The journey was only just beginning, but she already felt an oppressive loneliness, missing the school and the other children in the village. Yet she felt no fear. After all, she was eleven, almost an adult, and her grandfather had left her plenty of money to cover the cost of the journey.

"Bye, then," she said aloud as she walked, waving to Violet who watched her departure from the window, as she passed her cottage. The glider bus stop was still a long way away.

She was completely oblivious to the fact that, under the cover of a tree across the road, a watchful eye was following her every step.

## II

The reason why Buttercup, who was a girl from Earth, lived on the planet Wheat was actually time, or more complicatedly, the theory of time. Time was once considered by humans to be relatively strange and difficult to explain. It was patiently observed for a while, until it was finally redefined for what it really was. According to this new definition, time is no longer going anywhere in its own time. It neither consumes itself nor consumes anything else. It is local and never occurs in many places at once.

Time can only be measured at close range, but not too close. To put it more precisely, the closer you measure time, the more accurately you can measure it, until it disappears altogether. Far away, it can no longer be measured at all, because sufficient accuracy can no longer be achieved. That is why we no longer know exactly when time was so finely redefined. From very far away, everything seems to happen at the same time, and not one after the other, as we might easily think.

After the redefinition of time, a lot of things happened at a breathtakingly fast pace. A new theory of time required a new theory of particles, and especially of massless particles. Theories also changed or were refined in terms of dark matter and energy, wormholes and the anti-gravity.

Suddenly, a new scientific breakthrough had completed itself. The new technology, which enabled longer journeys into space faster than ever before, was just waiting to be invented. The Global Trading Empire and its intelligence service's industrial espionage division were on the alert and stole the invention and all the patents associated with it just before they could be published. The inventor first went on the payroll of the Global Trading Empire with his patent assignment contracts, and soon afterwards disappeared completely. After that, space travel was closely regulated and controlled to ensure that

profits from it went to the right place, that is, the Global Trading Empire.

Humanity on Earth moved out of its pre-galactic stage of development and, with the help of new technology allegedly developed by the Global Trading Empire, set about conquering the terrestrial or near-terrestrial planets it had discovered in space. The aim was to provide enough food and raw materials for the Earth's far too abundant population. Within a few hundred years, a number of planets were found where people could be settled and put to work after a short or long terraforming project. Often, changes to the atmosphere alone were enough, but sometimes the planet's vegetation and micro-organisms also had to be adapted. Here and there, entire ecosystems were even destroyed to ensure safety.

The Wheat Planet is one of the colonies that the Global Trading Empire mapped and identified as terrestrial. After careful calculations, it was colonised first by permanent scientists and later by settlers who farmed it.

The Wheat Planet, a long way from Earth, was named after the crop best suited to its fertile soil. It was renamed by the explorer and exotic plant scientist Caius Ghini, a pioneer of computer-assisted botany.

As automated research robots scoured the planet's soils and waterways, Ghini's botanical reference work was expanded to include several hundred thousand new plant species. Most of them disappeared without a trace shortly after the order arrived from Earth to colonise the planet and start clearing. The process was tried and tested elsewhere and the preservation of old growth was not seen as important as ensuring the food supply for the Earth's population, or the stock market prices of the Global Trading Empire. Indeed, Ghini's work was much used by the Palaeontology Department of the Global Trading Em-

pire's Business University, where extinct plants were catalogued.

After studying the planet, scientists from the Global Trading Empire's Agriculture Department informed headquarters that the expected yield per unit area would be many times that of the Earth, and that there were no geographical obstacles preventing the cultivation of crops across almost the entire planet. Temperate climates and small seasonal variations would provide many harvest seasons per year, and even the coldest regions could be partially cultivated with climate-adapted crops. Local large herbivores would not cause problems and serious natural disasters would be unlikely.

The next expedition brought with it a large amount of equipment suitable for the situation. Field clearing and village construction began immediately. Swamps were dried. Forests were felled. Fields were cleared and drained. Rivers were dammed and diverted into new channels to improve irrigation. The planet's original wildlife was displaced in favour of agriculture. Insects suitable for pollinating plants were brought from the Earth to the new environment, with other species of animals to provide an ecological balance. Some species were genetically manipulated to make them better adapted to planetary conditions. Within a few decades, the entire Wheat Planet was just like any other large farm on Earth, feeding billions of people on other planets for the Global Trading Empire.

There was a queue of eager settler candidates on the planet, even among city dwellers who knew nothing about farming. The popularity of the Wheat Planet grew even more when people realised that there was hardly any famine or poverty. Feeding the 10 billion people on Earth and more on other inhabited planets was such a good business and the planet's harvest so plentiful that even the Global Trading Empire saw no justifiable reason to treat the planet's inhabitants any worse than was necessary to maximise profits. Automated farming methods meant that the ratio of population to tonnes of wheat was small, so the impact of human labour on prices was also

small. A rare situation arose where it was cheaper and more productive to leave people alone than to oppress them, because that would have also required some investment.

The discovery of the planet Wheat was indeed a lucky coincidence for both the Global Trading Empire and the entire population of Earth.

Anyway, this story is not about the Wheat Planet, but about Buttercup, who left it at the beginning of the story.

### III

Summer was at its most gorgeous on Mineral Planet 3. The sun was shining high up, almost at its zenith. The second sun, slightly dimmer than the first, shone in its own place just far enough above the horizon not to turn red. Their gentle, soft yellowish light illuminated the surroundings in a bright and serene way. The blue sky was almost cloudless, with only the occasional thin white veil fluttering in the warm breeze. In the meadows between the small groves, beautiful and colourful flowers grew. But the birds, usually chirping happily, were silent.

At the edge of a copse next to the ruined village, Virgin watched in horror as, amid the still smouldering and smoking ruins, members of the storm-troopers of the military wing of the Divine and Merciful Holy Men Church's Servants (DMHMCS) searched for survivors with plasma rifles in hand, firing whenever they found one. After hearing from their scouts that the Global Trading Empire's troops were elsewhere, they attacked the village with the intention of destroying it completely and killing all its inhabitants, especially Virgin who, according to the scriptures, was a danger to the Church and its servants. Unfortunately, they did not have enough information about the varied characteristics of the inhabitants of Mineral Planet 3, so they only managed to kill the inhabitants who were caught by surprise at the start and some others who, out of gullibility, tried to be hospitable. The rest mysteriously and quickly disappeared from sight, leaving the faith warriors to vent their frustration by destroying buildings and some of the few domestic animals left around to glare at the guests.

Virgin watched all this in shock and crept quietly back into the depths of the dense forest. She tore the long hem of her plain purple dress a little shorter, and quickly tied her long

brown hair to a ponytail with a strip of string she had loosened from the hem.

"Virgin, come quickly," he whispered behind her, pulling her deeper into the woods. "Let's go to the mine spaceport. Maybe we can find a spaceship to escape in before they find you."

As they moved away from the ruins of the village, unmanned assault gliders from the Global Trading Empire's air force arrived, bombing the entire village to ashes once and for all. A deafening explosions filled the forest. The fireballs from the explosions rose tens of metres into the air. A hot breath was felt on their backs as they ran away. To be on the safe side, the gliders poisoned the village to prevent any member of the group, which had been identified as a terrorist organisation, from escaping alive. This, of course, rendered the area uninhabitable for several months, but all the inhabitants had already died or fled. The ashes of the storm-troopers from the military wing of the DMHMCS, who died in the village, were mixed with the ashes from the houses in the village. Hours later, there were only smouldering cremated remains, large piles of ash and, of course, human bones.

Virgin's companion took her to the spaceport, slipped her secretly through the wire fence and left her near the cargo spacecraft in the maintenance hangar. Because of the round-the-clock transport of minerals, the airport hangar was the size of a small town and was constantly full of spaceships arriving and departing, so finding one woman would be almost impossible. He hoped that any search would focus on the passenger terminals and customs areas. Then, dodging the guards, he walked to a nearby restaurant for the crew and other staff to look for a desperate and hopefully drunk enough freighter captain who would agree to discreetly transfer Virgin elsewhere so that the Global Trading Empire's space customs staff wouldn't ask awkward questions.

"Good afternoon, Miss," said Seth Milotisverkos, using at the same time a tool to poke external control vanes needed at



the planet atmosphere. He was surprised to see a tired and somewhat dusty but beautiful young woman standing beside the spaceship. She was wearing a thin, almost transparent purple dress and sandals. She had a graceful body, but it was her peculiar eyes that attracted the most attention. They were hazel and hypnotically piercing, and did not seem to blink at all.

"I guess this isn't exactly legal," Seth said to her thoughtfully. Normally, only the spaceships' crews had access to the hangar, and even then only through security and customs checks. However, the young man was easy-going by nature, and didn't want to disturb the spaceport police and the captain of the spaceship with a frivolous affair. As he was sociable and had an eye for feminine beauty, he decided to start his lunch hour immediately and began to enjoy his sandwiches. She smiled seductively at Seth fluttering her eyelashes and soon they were both munching on sandwiches with tasty fillings.

Meanwhile, the captain of the spaceship that Seth was repairing, Bill Polttomoottori, was sitting at the bar of the spaceport's entertainment centre, anxiously counting his money. How much more would he dare to drink? His transport company was on the verge of bankruptcy. He reflected a little frustratedly on his life, and once again came to the conclusion that the last ten years, five of them with Seth, as captain and sole shareholder of his own freighter, had been wasted. The Global Trading Empire had a monopoly on almost all business, so they also set freight rates, accommodation rates and fuel prices so that the charterers were constantly dependent on them for additional funding and could not become too self-sufficient on their own capital. Apart from his fully paid cargo spacecraft, Bill was as poor as when he started out years ago. It took him a full five years to pay for the ship, even though there were orders for transport all the time. Only his strong thirst for freedom and stubbornness prevented him from selling the vessel and going to work for the transport division of the Global Trading Empire. On the other hand, he was mentally lazy and somewhat

Evolutionary Stories is a fictional science fiction novel consisting of five separate stories.

The stories are linked to each other with evolution as their common theme. However, the novel cannot be accused of being too serious.

By focusing on evolution, the novel inadvertently answers questions that interest us all.

How seriously should we take extraterrestrial intelligence, given the level of intelligence on our own planet? Where do we come from, and are we actually going anywhere?

What time is it really?

Where did the chickens go?

All these questions deserve to be taken as seriously as they should be.

