

# Monster mash

Heavy metal dinosaurs rock the kiddie crowd in Finland

BY LAURA VINHA  
AFP, HAEMEENLINNA, FINLAND



Hevisaurus, a Finnish heavy metal band for children, performs on stage in Haemeenlinna on April 17.

PHOTOS: AFP



The usual heavy metal fan may not be a five-year-old girl in pigtails, but she is typical of hardcore following of Hevisaurus, a metal band that has hooked the kiddie crowd in Finland.

The group, which rocks on about homework and monsters, played its first gig, a charity event, only last September but its fan base of mainly five-to-seven-year-olds has grown rapidly.

The band was born when a flash of lightning and witches' spells revealed, cracked and brought to life five metal dinosaur eggs buried deep in a mountain 65 million years ago — around the time most other dinosaurs became extinct.

Or so goes the "official" creation story of the long-haired reptiles in spiked bracelets and black leather billed as the world's only Jurassic metal band.

In reality, the idea hatched in the mind of drummer Mirka Rantanen, 38, a veteran "headbanger" who has played with numerous bands including the Finnish power metal group Thunderstone.

"For years and years you seriously try, and then you toss up this one crazy idea, and everyone gets excited," said a bemused Rantanen in an interview.

It all started a few years ago when Rantanen attended a children's concert with his own kids, now 5 and 11.

"What if I started making music for kids?" he thought. "What if it was heavy metal, since that's what I've

been doing for 25 years?"

Rantanen began writing lyrics and, with some friends from the metalhead circuit, began composing and recording.

He also started envisioning the characters in the band.

"I'm a kind of 1980s relic. You could call me a dinosaur," said Rantanen, now better known as an Apatosaurus called Komppi Momppi.

"Long-haired dinosaurs playing heavy metal — it started to sound like a really good idea."

## 'WE BROUGHT IT TO CHILDREN'S ROOMS'

Sony Music agreed, and so have the Finnish children and parents who flock to sold-out concert halls and kept Hevisaurus' first album *Juravein Kuminkaat*, or "Kings of Jurassic Metal," on Finland's album chart for 10 weeks.

"It's the best because it's heavy," said five-year-old Rico, who attended a packed concert in the southern city of Haemeenlinna wearing a Hevisaurus sweater and hat, and waving a Hevisaurus flag made by his dad.

His six-year-old cousin Iina listens to Hevisaurus daily. Her favorite is the group's vocalist Mr Hevisaurus, a meat-chomping descendant of Tyrannosaurus Rex, who "sings so well."

The youngest fan at Haemeenlinna was a two-month-old baby who wore protective earmuffs and slept through the show which, like all of Hevisaurus' gigs, was played live at child-friendly decibel levels.

Part of Hevisaurus' appeal is the popularity of metal music in Finland. The niche genre has gone mainstream here — even played in churches — notably since the Nordic country collected its only Eurovision Song Contest win in 2006 with Lordi's monster heavy metal song *Hard Rock Hallelujah*.

"Lordi brought heavy metal to living rooms. We brought it to children's rooms," said Rantanen, asking "is it this bleakness that we live in, this darkness" that attracts Finns to heavy metal?

But Hevisaurus' lyrics are anything but bleak.

They focus on adventure and fun. When homework and school get tiring, it is time to find excitement by calling up the moon, flying on a dragon's back or laughing with the "Rupu-Rupu" monster, who "smells like an unwashed potty".

## BRANCHING OUT

No short-cuts were taken in creating the band. The five elaborate costumes, for example, were made of reindeer skin dyed green and treated to look scaly in a process that took four months and cost US\$24,000.

Hevisaurus' second album is due out in September or October, and before that the group is to star in a heavy metal musical at the Linnanmaeki amusement park in Helsinki.

The concept has sparked interest abroad and a group in Hungary is set to create a Hungarian-language album of the hard-rocking dinos, in a licensing deal with Hevisaurus.

Asked if any angry parents had accused him of corrupting their youngsters with "devil worship music" — a notion sometimes associated with heavy metal — Rantanen conceded he himself was surprised but "no."

Still, the band is not without opponents. Many teenagers — possessive of the rebellious, amplified brute force of music often associated with machismo — have been quick to say Rantanen has ruined heavy metal by bringing it to young children, accusing him of co-opting the genre to make money.

Rantanen brushes this off, saying he is touched by the genuine emotion of the tiny fans who sometimes take a while to build up the courage to approach the dinosaur rockers for autographs or a hug after concerts.

"This is a project from the heart," Rantanen said. "Now that I've seen what it's like to perform for kids, I wouldn't give it up for anything."

For a video of Hevisaurus, see its Web site: [www.hevisaurus.com](http://www.hevisaurus.com)

[ SOCIETY ]

## Americans with dwarfism find TV exposure aids acceptance

Reality TV shows such as 'Little People, Big World' and 'The Little Couple' have helped change attitudes by showing people with dwarfism leading normal lives

BY RICK WILKING  
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Athletes take part in the fifth World Dwarf Games at Mary Peters Track in South Belfast, Northern Ireland, in July last year.

PHOTO: EPA

Chris Kotzian is a police dispatcher and his wife Barb is a graphic designer.

With two young children, a dog and a house in a suburb of Denver, Colorado, the Kotzians are much the same as any other busy, working family except for one thing. Both Chris and Barb have dwarfism and stand less than 1.2m tall.

Like many people with dwarfism, the Kotzians have worked hard to overcome social and physical barriers to lead full and normal lives, which includes working with non-profit group, Little People of America (LPA), to stop people treating them like a circus act.

In recent years reality TV shows, such as *Little People, Big World* and *The Little Couple*, that have shown people with dwarfism leading normal lives, have helped change attitudes but there is still a long way to go.

"I have gone to many elementary schools, which have little people in them, and talked to them about how I get along in this wonderful world, and how we are all the same inside and we all have differences outside," said Barb Kotzian, who is the vice-president of their local chapter of the LPA.

"Some people wear glasses and some people have red hair, no one is the same, but we must remember we all have feelings and we must be kind to each other.

The Little People of America, which supports people of short stature caused by more than 200 medical conditions known as dwarfism, actively campaigns against people with dwarfism being portrayed in the media as no better than side show attractions.

The group ([www.lpaonline.org](http://www.lpaonline.org)), with more than 6,000 members, also opposes the use of such language as "midget" which is considered highly offensive.

It was at the group's annual conference in 1999 in Portland, Oregon, that Chris and Barb first met. After dating long-distance for almost a year, Chris proposed and Barb moved to join him in Denver and they married in 2001.

"It's very common for little people to meet their mate and have long-distance relationships," Barb Kotzian said.

This year the group is holding its annual general meeting in Nashville in July after last year passing a resolution officially condemning the "M" word.

"For decades we've been trying to raise awareness around the

world and prevent use of this word but this was the first time we took official action," LPA spokesman Gary Arnold said.

"Slowly change is happening as there are a lot of programs now on TV including people of short stature and through that programming the message is sent about language and that people of short stature are just regular people who have dwarfism."

"But it is still mostly on reality TV and it would be good to see more prime time dramas or sitcoms integrate people of short stature as regular characters or into the storyline."

### MODIFICATIONS AT HOME, SCHOOL AND IN CARS

The LPA has campaigned for years about the media portraying

people with dwarfism in a bad light, with TV using them for stunt shows or as the brunt of jokes.

The Kotzians, who fully support the increased exposure that little people are now getting on TV, say they are fairly typical of the estimated 30,000 people with dwarfism in the US although they have a better life than many.

Studies have shown people with dwarfism are less likely to find work, earn less and struggle with low self-esteem.

Their height does, of course, mean certain adaptations are needed in their home and cars.

Chris has to stand inside his refrigerator to reach the top shelf. Barb goes from stool to stool to prepare a meal in her kitchen. They use special extenders on the brake and gas pedals of their car

and most of their clothes need to be altered.

They dream of someday being able to improve their home with lowered sinks and light switches but such changes are costly and with a four-year-old daughter and six-year-old son they already have plenty of other bills to pay.

Both Chris and Barb have a genetic disorder called achondroplasia, the most common form of dwarfism responsible for 70 percent of dwarfism cases, for which there is no treatment.

They were both born from parents of average size. A new mutation of the gene responsible for their condition has been associated with increasing paternal age. Studies show that 80 percent of people with

achondroplasia have parents of average size and it happens in about one of every 20,000 births. But it does not mean their children will also have dwarfism.

### GREATER ATTEMPTS AT INCLUSION

A person with achondroplasia has one dwarfism gene and one "average-size" gene. If both parents have achondroplasia, there is a 25 percent chance their child will inherit the non-dwarfism gene from each parent and be average size. There is a 50 percent chance the child will inherit one dwarfism gene and one non-dwarfism gene and have achondroplasia.

But there is also a 25 percent chance the child will inherit both dwarfism genes, a condition known as a double-dominant syndrome, which invariably ends in death at birth or shortly thereafter.

Chris and Barb's son Adam is achondroplastic but their daughter, Avery, is average size.

"I call Avery my little, big girl, for she was so petite and tiny with being 5 pounds 4 ounces [2.4kg], but she was so long at 21 inches [53cm] long. Avery is now 4 years old, and has passed her brother in height," said Barb who also dreams of setting up her own home business.

"She is his best pal though, and loves to help him, and idolizes his authority ... When they were the same height people thought they were twins. We are lucky though. Adam has a good communication value, and he stood up for himself and let people know he was the older brother."

Barb and Chris have worked with the children's school to ensure that Adam had the modifications needed, such as a stool by all drinking fountains, sinks and toilets, a special chair so that his legs do not dangle and fall asleep, and a door pull on classroom doors as he cannot reach the handles.

Arnold said the needs of children with dwarfism were being met more as awareness rose.

"There are far greater attempts at inclusion now than there were in the past," said 39-year-old Arnold.

"During my early years in school in the 1970s I had leg surgery and needed to be in a wheelchair for three to four months and although my school was physically accessible I was sent to another school with more kids with disabilities."

"Slowly people are starting to realize that disability does not change who we are. We should not be treated differently."