

Biography: Writer and journalist Arno Jundze (1965) was born in the Latvian town of Jaunpiebalga. He graduated from the Faculty of Education and has a PhD in philology. He has worked in Latvian television for over 10 years, directing various programs dedicated to culture and literature. Arno Jundze is an editor of the cultural news section for one of the biggest newspapers in Latvia, and helps in shaping the country's most important art and literary forums and outlets. He was a member of the council at the State Culture Capital Foundation and chairman of the board of its literature department from 2010-2012. Jundze has received numerous prizes for both his literary work and his work in television. He has also published several children's books.

Synopsis: The story of a land of unusual creatures called Totland, where the aristocratic Shushnirk is unexpectedly left to care for a playful little kid whose parents have vanished unexpectedly in a tornado. Exhausted by the kid's antics, Shushnirk sets out with his ward on a journey full of adventure to find his parents.

Excerpt

Sniffsnuff, an upstanding and noble creature, woke up in a dreadful mood. During the night, he had been disturbed by nightmares of being pursued by his annoying housekeeper Minna, a robot-woman. She had chased after him with his elegantly soiled terry cloth socks stretched out to him in her mechanical hand, rambling crossly in her metallic voice, "*Sie sind schmutzig!*"

Goodness knows why he dreamt Minna was mumbling in indistinct German.

Sniffsnuff didn't understand a word of what she said but could sense it wasn't anything nice,

so he ran away from her as fast as he could. Even a fool could see that the socks she held in her mechanical hand were very dirty and holey. And what was more, they stank. The horrid smell stayed with him even after he woke up. He didn't have to look far to find where it was coming from – the stinky socks were lying on a porcelain plate on his bedside table. Once upon a time they had been white with green stripes.

'Right, I left them there myself yesterday. I was too lazy to get out of bed and drag myself off to that miserable bathroom to put them in the laundry basket!' Sniffsnuff gave a sigh of relief.

Then he scratched his nose and, full of self-reproach, concluded that he shouldn't really keep his dirty socks on a porcelain plate.

'And yet, seeing as I'm such a noble creature, I can afford to, can't I?' Sniffsnuff added out loud after a moment's silence.

'But is it worth it?' his inner voice, the one that used to stick its nose in at the most inappropriate moments, suddenly asked.

'Well, I'd need to give that some thought,' Sniffsnuff replied. He was in the habit of consulting with himself – he found conversing with someone so clever pleasantly soothing.

But he got no further as he was interrupted by the doorbell.

It was the village messenger and sportsman Pit-Pat, a multi-footed creature wearing trainers. The local residents had put his favourite pastime – jogging – to their advantage by getting him to be their courier and postman.

'Good morning, Sniffsnuff!' he said, sniffing. 'Fine morning for running. I've just repeated my personal best in the grove!'

'Morning ...,' Sniffsnuuff grunted. 'Is there a fire? You've interrupted me thinking important thoughts.'

'N-n-no f-fire!' stammered Pit-Pat, who always felt of no worth whatsoever in Sniffsnuuff's presence. 'Y-you have a letter from the Juvenile Court!'

'From the what?'

'From the Juvenile Court!'

'Have you gone mad?'

'I would like to think that I haven't!' Pit-Pat replied thoughtfully, since he couldn't really be sure of anything while talking to Sniffsnuuff. 'I run a lot. It's good for your health and runners don't usually fall to pieces and lose their marbles. Take a look for yourself! There's both your name and that of the sender's on the envelope. So good bye for now, I have some printed documents to deliver to Screw the inventor!'

'Whizz off happily, then!' Sniffsnuuff mumbled, closing the front door and heading for the kitchen to enjoy a hearty breakfast. There was no way that he could read any sort of letter before first doing that!

After a delicious meal, prepared as always by Minna the robot-woman, Sniffsnuuff settled comfortably into his old rocking chair to read that day's edition of the newspaper, "The Tiny Tots' Herald" after which he might have a look at the letter from the Juvenile Court. He did wonder what they might possibly be bothering him with, but opened his paper all the same. The news was all about terrible things: a space shuttle that had overturned in space and an orphan blown in by a hurricane, falling into one of the haystacks belonging to Mr Fullison, Master of the Occult Sciences. Sniffsuff hated bad news so turned his attention

to the crossword. But this appeared to have been compiled by some unbearable, heartless being as our noble creature made no progress with it at all. Besides, after his plentiful breakfast, Sniffsuff was feeling pleasantly drowsy. Unable to guess the name of a small animal with seven letters - the first letter being H and the last two being E-R, as the only word he could come up with was HAMMER and that had six letters - Sniffsuff soon started snoring in his rocking chair, making the whole sitting room tremble. Quietly buzzing, Minna picked up the newspaper and the letter that had fallen to the floor and went out into the garden. The robot-woman loved growing vegetables. She didn't particularly enjoy cleaning up after Sniffsuff but it was her duty to do that, too. Scientists have differing opinions on how long Sniffsuff dozed. Some claim he slept for an hour and forty minutes. Others are of the opinion that it was for precisely two hours and three minutes. What is known for certain is that the noble creature was woken by the doorbell. It was Pit-Pat again!

'Well, Sniffsuff?' he exclaimed, breathless from running. 'Did you read the letter? What should I say to His Honourable Justice of the Juvenile Court? He is waiting for an answer.'

Sniffsuff refused to be put off his stride by Pit-Pat's unexpected question.

'You can tell that chubby man: Fine!' Sniffsuff said abruptly before slamming the door in Pit-Pat's face and returning to his snooze.

An hour went by. Then, the doorbell went again.

'Good gracious! What is this, the private dwelling of a noble creature or the office of some benevolent society for the needy?' Muttering angrily, Sniffsuff went to open the door.

A small, bespectacled creature stood on the doorstep, looking very sly.

'G.... day!' he said.

'Well, if it's a g...day, then g...day! Who are you?' Sniffsuff grumbled. He was never completely sure how to treat small creatures.

'I'm the little orphan. My parents have gone missing and I was blown here by the hurricane. I got swirled up into the air then dropped down into a haystack. Oops! It was all a lot of fun,' the creature said. 'Thank you for agreeing to be my guardian until my parents are found.'

'I didn't agree to do any such thing!'

'What do you mean, you didn't? You did receive a letter this morning, did you not?'

At midday, that lanky layabout in trainers came panting back to the Juvenile Court and grunted that Sniffsnuff had said, "Fine!" His Honourable Justice of the Juvenile Court was delighted. He called the pub to order himself some lunch and told me to come here. So here I am. You are Sniffsnuff, aren't you?'

'Yes, of course I am!' mumbled a confused Sniffsuff, realizing that he had never got round to reading that letter. 'Fine. Come inside, we'll soon get this all sorted out.'

Leading the poor little thing into his sitting room, the noble creature finally opened the envelope.

To His Most Honourable and Noble Von Sniffsnuff, The Juvenile Court expresses its great admiration for your fine life style, excellent upbringing and aristocratic poise, in addition to the fact that all your housekeeping is undertaken by Minna the robot-woman.

'Oho!' Sniffsnuuff smiled. 'That's a good introduction! How finely he writes! He's clearly a follower of mine!'

However, Sniffsnuuff did not find the rest of the letter in the least to his liking.

In view of the above, you are requested to take in, as your ward, the little one blown in by the hurricane, until such time as his parents are found. It is believed that, at this difficult time, we must do our best by him and I am convinced that you are the most suitable person in all the country for this honourable task.

Respectfully yours,

Justice of the Juvenile Court

'So, you are that Child?' Sniffsnuuff coughed, quite bewildered.

'Are you going to take me in and bring me up?' The Child quickly shot back with another question.

It was only then that Sniffsnuuff realized how much trouble he had got himself into. A creature as noble as he could never refuse the Honourable Justice of the Juvenile Court, especially as shortly before he had absentmindedly given his consent. He couldn't go back on his word! Noblesse oblige! Still, Sniffsnuuff didn't know anything about children and he had no wish to bring any up.

'Well. I suppose ... I suppose ... you will have to stay here, seeing as I've given my word,' he muttered, at something of a loss. 'But let's get one thing straight. You'll have to bring yourself up. I'll simply watch over the process, as the rights of a noble guardian dictate. Perhaps, to start with, you can tell me your name?'

'I don't know!' The Child happily smiled. 'Mother and Father couldn't decide. They quarrelled and quarrelled until at last they decided that my name would come all by itself. For now I am just known as the Child.'

'Well then, the Child it is for now,' Sniffsnuff remarked with the sort of refined, unique irony that only a noble creature such as he could understand. 'One certainly couldn't call you the Big Man.'

'None of that matters! Now that we've made each other's acquaintance, couldn't we just go beserk for a while?' the Child suggested, his eyes gleaming behind his glasses.