



House of Evidence

Viktor Arnar Ingólfsson , Andrew Cauthery (Translator) , Björg Árnadóttir (Translator)

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On a cold January morning in 1973, inside a stately old house in Reykjavik, blood pools around Jacob Kieler Junior from a fatal gunshot wound to his chest. Detective Jóhann Pálsson, an expert in the emerging field of forensics, is called to the scene and soon discovers something more unsettling than the murder itself: the deceased's father, Jacob Kieler Senior, a railroad engineer, was shot to death in the same living room nearly thirty years earlier. The case was officially closed as a botched robbery.

Pálsson soon uncovers diaries that portray Kieler Senior as an ambitious man dedicated to bringing the railroad to Iceland no matter the cost. Sensing a deeper and darker mystery afoot, the detective and his colleagues piece together through the elder Kieler's diaries a family history rich with deceit...

House of Evidence Details

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From Reader Review House of Evidence for online ebook

Greg at 2 Book Lovers Reviews says

House of Evidence starts off with a shocking murder. Reykjavik's detective division is called in to investigate. We soon find ourselves in the midst of not one, but two murder investigations; that of Jacob Kieler and also his father's murder, a cold case dating back more than twenty-five years ago.

Ingolfsson does a fantastic job with this whodunit, he keeps the mystery well shrouded until the very end. What I really loved was the parallel investigations, each chapter ended with detective Pálsson reading from the father's journal. Through this we get a fantastic insight into life during the first part of the twentieth century, and we discover the secrets leading up to the death of Jacob senior.

What I found a bit lacking in this story was the development and depth of the characters. I really didn't feel like I got to "know" any of them by the end of the story. It left me with the impression that the author was more focused on the crime and the investigation than on the characters investigating the crime.

The story was interesting, and if you like a good whodunit with a great twist at the end, then House of Evidence could be a great book for you.

3.5 Stars

Christian says

I'll be honest, I loved this, but in no way shape or form was I thinking this would get anywhere near 5 stars until near the end. Furthermore, this definitely isn't a book for everyone.

The story is very fascinating, a police procedural with a historical backdrop through diary entries lasting from 1910 until 1945. There are a lot of characters introduced and the style of writing was unique to me, though I imagine this is something akin to Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series. The story itself concerns a man being found shot in his house, however it turns out his father was also killed in the same room of the same house years earlier, by the same method. What unfolds then is the police trying to solve the mystery, interspersed with diary entries from 1910-1945.

As I say, this is not for everyone, and unlike "The Flatey Enigma" and "Daybreak", I would suggest trying to get a sample of this novel first to see if the style works for you.

Sean Endress says

Taken from my Amazon review

Disclaimer: I purchased this ebook for free during a sale.

Ingolfsson's "House of Evidence" consists of 399 absolutely packed pages - he has a true gift for giving a very full picture of a scene and using many different kinds of sensory input to place the reader within the pages of the book. It is clear that he has envisioned everything down to the very last detail, and he makes sure to convey all of these details to the reader - at times, it can actually be rather draining, a few smaller details here and there would not have been missed. His style is technical and clear overall, though as a result,

some of his more tender moments could have been more poignant.

However, technically speaking, this may or may not be due to his own work or the abilities of the translators. While I know nothing of the novel's mother language, I can say for certain that the translation is not only entirely comprehensible, it shows mastery of English, as opposed to utilization of a limited vocabulary, as some translated works tend to do.

The main cast in "House of Evidence" consists of the investigative team and those directly connected with strange twin murder cases, separated by decades. The characters were distinctly hit-or-miss: Some were very accessible and well developed, while others fell rather flat. However, character development picked up greatly in the second half, so while the novel starts somewhat slowly, readers are greatly rewarded for their patience. Indeed, one of the most compelling characters in the book is the elder Jacob Kieler, who is revealed only through his diary entries, of which there are several at the end of each chapter. While they tell a compelling tale, they are somewhat numerous, and could potentially have been reduced in number and length. Again, a bit too much extraneous detail.

As to the plot, it follows a fairly standard whodunnit format, though it is enhanced by the revolving point of view between the detectives and police force. It is plodding, however, and due to the occasional flat character, I sometimes just needed a break from reading. Again, the end is worth the wait - it does get quite dark, but the secrets revealed are beyond anything that could have been guessed at.

One key thing to note that irked me however, was the awkward treatment of a transgendered individual - the narrative force assigning pronouns stuck to one, while the character openly acknowledged the other. This disparity was slightly grating, though the fact that it existed at all was a progressive note for a novel written in 1998 and set in the early 70s. Also included was a rather derogatory comment regarding a homosexual, but again, given the setting of the novel, it is accurate to the time and place, if an unfortunate reminder.

Bottom line: Slow moving, but, much like a train, once it picks up speed, nothing can stop it. A worthy read. Appropriate for: Mystery fans, adult demographic.

Trigger warnings: (**SOME SPOILERS AHEAD**)

Recollections of torture, mutilation

Katy says

Book Info: Genre: Murder Mystery/Police Procedural

Reading Level: Adult

Recommended for: people fascinated by trains, obsessions

Trigger Warnings: murder; anti-gay sentiments; violence toward "others", especially GLBTQ folk, women and hippies, as well as Nazi violence in general during "past" times

My Thoughts: I mostly took this book because it is set in Iceland, a country in which I am very interested, and it features forensic science, in which I'm interested. Overall it lived up to the expectations I had for it, but there were a few places, like when Hrefna is leaving to view the murder and we have a lot of superfluous descriptions of the building in which she lives. This didn't seem to have anything to do with the story, and I'm not sure why it was deemed important enough to be in there.

The diary entries, while interesting, were not well separated from the rest of the text in this ARC. Hopefully the final copy will be better formatted, as it was sometimes confusing to abruptly move into the diary entries.

The main thing I liked about this book was the sensitive treatment of GLBTQ folk of all sort. When talking about a transgendered woman who survived Nazi Germany, a character thought:

“A woman who might have been a good mother and a good grandmother, had not a quirk of nature put her in the wrong body many years ago....

What an ordeal, to have to conduct one's life in such deception, just to be able to live in peace with someone you love. Perhaps things will change on day, and people will be able to live the way they were created.”

Yeah, we're still waiting on that one...

The ending will probably be unsatisfying for some, but I felt it sort of fit the whole story, which was rather unconnected and rambling at times. Not a bad book, but not one I'd necessarily heartily endorse either. If you're interested, check it out.

Disclosure: I received a paperback ARC from Amazon Vine in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are my own.

Synopsis: On a cold January morning in 1973, inside a stately old house in Reykjavik, blood pools around Jacob Kieler, Junior from a fatal gunshot wound to his chest. Detective Jóhann Pálsson, an expert in the emerging field of forensics, is called to the scene and soon discovers something more unsettling than the murder itself: the deceased's father, Jacob Kieler Senior, a railroad engineer, was shot to death in the same living room nearly thirty years earlier. The case was officially closed as a botched robbery.

Pálsson soon uncovers diaries that portray Kieler Senior as an ambitious man dedicated to bringing the railroad to Iceland no matter the cost. Sensing a deeper and darker mystery afoot, the detective and his colleagues piece together through the elder Kieler's diaries a family history rich with deceit...

Ken Fredette says

This is the first book I've read of Viktor Arnar Ingólfsson. Was a lot of back reading. But it came out in the end with Jóhann and Hrefna hooking up.

Olivermagnus says

Set in Iceland in 1973, the book begins with the discovery of Jacob Kieler, Junior, who has been found shot in his museum-like home. To add to the mystery we are told that his father, Jacob Kieler, Senior, was also found shot in the same room thirty years earlier. So who is the killer and why have these two men been targeted?

The story is told in alternating chapters from the perspective of the various police officers involved in the investigation, and Jacob Senior's diaries over his lifetime. Jacob Senior spent his life trying to bring a railroad to Iceland and spent many years in Germany studying and planning. Jacob Junior spent his life trying to maintain his father's legacy and turn the family estate into a museum.

I've long been a fan of crime stories set in Iceland but I have to admit this wasn't my favorite. I enjoyed the

forensics part of the investigation but I grew weary of all the details on railroads and Jacob Senior's obsession with them. As always, the Icelandic names can be difficult to remember and I would have preferred the author use a different name for one of the characters. The story covers a lot of ground and sometimes features unnecessary details. However, I enjoyed it for the most part and then ending came as a real surprise to me. It was written a number of years ago and I would consider reading one of the author's current books.

Carolyn says

What a relief to return to a thoroughly well-written and imaginative novel after some of the formulaic twaddle I've been reading lately. Viktor Arnar's prose is smooth without being trite, elegant without being superfluous.

He set the investigative strand of the novel in 1973, reflecting authentic cultural attitudes for those times. For instance, we have one police officer whose aggressive attitudes would not be tolerated now (Egill seems to have similar attitudes to his namesake from the Sagas, but minus the facility for poetry!) There is also lingering antipathy towards homosexuals, but on the other hand, the detective who was a single mother didn't appear to suffer any prejudice, even though Egill seemed to have problems with having a 'girl' on the staff. The two stories interwove seamlessly, and the dramatic tension was sustained throughout. The characters were well drawn and in many cases, elicited our sympathy. The drama unfolded through the evolution of the characters and the revelation of their past, rather than with the insertion of random acts of violence or other extraneous plot contortions.

I also enjoyed Viktor's 'The Flatey Enigma', and look forward to reading more of this Icelandic author's works.

Christoph Fischer says

"House of Evidence" by Viktor Arnar Ingolfsson is an enjoyable thriller with a historical component. Set in Iceland and through diary entries in some other countries it tells in two narratives the investigation of a murder in Iceland in 1973 and also the family history of the murdered man.

The diary from 1913 - 1945 serves as an interesting excerpt of Icelandic and European history through the eyes of a young Icelandic man and they make the book alone worth reading. There are some great sub plots and turns in the story to surprise you, although at times I the investigation in 1973 could have gathered speed for my liking.

A good read.

Cleo Bannister says

When the police turn up at a house in Iceland they find the body of Jacob Kieler Junior on the floor having been shot. The only thing that appears to be out of place is a single chair. Detective Jóhann Pálsson soon discovers that Jacob Kieler the father of the deceased was found in remarkably similar circumstances in 1946 nearly 30 years previously. The police try desperately to work out the link between the two deaths with the help of Jacob's (the father) diaries which span from 1910 to 1946.

I love stories with diaries and this one is well managed, the reader often knows what to look out for in the

brief diary entries following revelations in the present (well 1973 but present as far as the book is concerned.) Jacob trains to be an engineer and has a life goal to build a railway in Iceland. This may sound a bit dry, but despite not being a train-spotter of any description, the explanations of various problems with the railway were easy to follow and quite informative without overpowering the mystery of who shot the two men.

The policemen although leading the search aren't particularly strong character-wise apart from the female detective Hrefna, although there is also an incompetent one Egill, who has a penchant for dealing roughly with his suspects. It is the mystery that carries this story along especially the bit that spans World War II with interesting political opinions from an Icelandic perspective. An interesting book that had me intrigued throughout it's 460 pages.

I received a copy of this book from Amazon Vine - see more on <http://cleopatalovesbooks.wordpress....>

Barbara says

This was another 3 1/2 star book for me. There was an interesting family story about a now-deceased ancestor obsessed with building a railroad in Iceland. This family and a current and past murder are at the center of the story. Monarchists and Nazis figure into the story, as well as family secrets.

Lora says

"That family will stick in our minds for some time, I imagine," concluded one of the detectives in the book, and I'm inclined to agree! Both the family history and the mystery itself are interesting and memorable.

The story includes characters from both the past and the present. The family history is intertwined with developments in Europe (WW1 through WW2) and is gradually revealed in the form of diary entries at the end of each chapter and through police work. Some of the history is moving, but of course I don't want to share any spoilers.

The mystery itself is also engaging. There are a lot of false leads, so the detectives (and the readers) are kept guessing. Btw, when you finish the book, be sure to read the author's note, which explains a comment in the last chapter.

The translation is fine, but I noticed a couple small inconsistencies (calling school results both "grades" and "marks" on the same page, likewise née/born). The diary entries include a few scattered words in German or Nordic languages. The diarist would of course understand what he wrote in the languages of the countries he visited, but readers who are not language-savvy might not enjoy this.

R.E. Conary says

HOUSE OF EVIDENCE is in a class by itself -- a Cozy Police Procedural.

Snow quietly blankets Reykjavik. A man quietly dies in his home of a gunshot wound. Police detectives quietly rise and go to work. Like that soft blanket of snow, HOUSE OF EVIDENCE quietly reveals its

mystery; but also, like the island nation itself, magma smolders below the surface ready to create a new volcano in this Icelandic tale of intrigue and obsession.

The investigating Detective Division team soon discovers that the victim's father was killed similarly--a crime never solved--in the same room with the same gun nearly 30 years earlier suggesting the same killer and possibly the same motive. It becomes necessary to solve one in order to solve the other.

The author plays fair. As one detective finds a bit of data and wonders how it fits the puzzle, another finds a corresponding piece. So by following each detective, the reader sees connections and can thereby deduce clues, put two-and-two together, or formulate probable outcomes often before the detectives can share their info. And there are clues aplenty within the main investigation, the father's diaries, as well as the detectives' attitudes, biases and prejudices. Which, for me, made for a delightfully entertaining read.

As I said, this is a quiet tale. There are no angst driven mavericks like Henning Mankell's Kurt Wallander or Jo Nesbo's Harry Hole or Lee Child's Jack Reacher; no renegade cops like those in David Peace's "Red Quartet" (NINETEEN SEVENTY-FOUR. . .) or Ken Bruen's Detective Sergeant Tom Brant series (A WHITE ARREST . . .). These are work-a-day detectives, the plodders who show up each day, slog it out, doing the monotonous legwork needed to solve a crime like Ed McBain's 87th Precinct crew, Dell Shannon's LAPD Homicide detectives, Georges Simenon's Inspector Maigret, or Frederic Forsyth's Inspector Claude Lebel (THE DAY OF THE JACKAL).

Naomi says

I am a huge fan of Nordic Noir, but this book was slow as molasses! It took me forever to get through it due to the storyline moving so slowly. Now, in reading other reviews, comments were made as to issues with translation and I don't know if that was reasoning behind the issues, but based on this book, I don't know if I will be reading the author's other work.

Lukasz Pruski says

Victor Arnar Ingolfsson's "House of Evidence" is a very European book; it is about not being able to realize one's lifelong dream. Had someone told me a few days ago that I would be engrossed in a book where one of the main plot threads is a story about attempts to build a railroad line in Iceland, a book where an engineer's diaries from the early 1900s account for almost a third of its volume, I would not have believed. Yet I found the novel very interesting, and I had a lot of fun reading it - mainly, I think, because of good writing and apparently flawless translation.

It is 1973. Jacob Kieler, the middle-aged son of a prominent Icelandic engineer, is murdered in his family house, full of museum-quality items dating back to the beginnings of the 20th century. The main thread of the plot follows the Reykjavik police's investigation of the murder. The investigation thread is interwoven with the diaries of the victim's father. The diaries cover the years 1910-1945 and follow the elder Jacob during 10 years of his studies and engineering jobs in various countries of Europe and the United States. Of course, the investigation soon connects to the past.

The investigation thread of the plot is well constructed and skillful characterizations of several police officers make them believable. I like detective Hrefna's lack of pretense and her quiet wisdom. The diaries part of the plot is also quite interesting. In fact, I even learned a little about European politics in the 1930s, even though

I grew up and spent most of my young adulthood in Europe. The ending is quite a bit too dramatic for my taste, but readers who like surprises in mystery novels may enjoy several big ones here. There even is a sweet happy ending amidst a very sad and bitter ending. Great title and a neat last sentence. Read the book to understand my cryptic remarks.

Three and a half stars.

Doreen says

In Reykjavík in 1973, police investigate the death of Jacob Kieler Jr. who was found dead in his home. His father, a prominent engineer obsessed with building a national railroad, had been killed in the same way in the same spot almost 30 years earlier. The story focuses on the police investigation, giving the perspectives of various members of the investigative team, and Jacob Sr.'s diaries written between 1910 – 1945. The police set out to find the connection between the two deaths.

The book is very slow-paced. Not only does the investigation proceed slowly, but the diary entries included at the end of each chapter slow things down even further. The diary entries reveal Jacob Sr.'s fixation with trains and give historical information about Iceland in the first half of the 20th century, but do little to advance the plot. The constant rambling on and on about trains becomes tedious.

Is there anything less interesting than journal entries that read like this: “There are two locomotives: Pionér, built by Arnold Jung in Germany in 1892; and Minør, built by Jungenthal in Bei Kirchen in Germany the same year. The gauge is 90 cm . . .” and “the professor shows us calculations on energy efficiency for railway trains powered by steam. Apparently only 6% efficiency is achieved. I am looking forward to learning about locomotives powered by electricity. The professor says that such a train was first demonstrated here in the city in 1879, and the first extensive electric railroad, between Bitterfeld and Dessau, was open in 1911 (15 kV, 16.7 Hz). An engine that Rudolf Diesel had completed before his death last year is also thought to be very promising.” and “Mauretania is 31,932 tons, 232 meters in length, and achieves a maximum speed of 25 knots, one of the fastest ships now sailing the Atlantic Ocean.” and “Plotted the Threngsli gradient survey onto graph paper. Weighed myself, I am 73 kilos . . .” and “The cross ties (1.60 x 0.22 x 0.11 m) will be made of impregnated pinewood mounted with 12-cm-wide baseplates. The price, 6.00 kr. per item, is a little high, but is based on the present high price of timber and the cost of creosote being 150 kr./ton.” My eyes glazed over several times!

There is a lot of unnecessary information given outside the journal entries as well. The author feels he has to explain the technology used by the investigators. For example, “he did have equipment back at the lab for doing a so-called paraffin test, where warm paraffin wax was applied to the hands to see if they revealed nitrates left by a gunshot, but recent research had shown this method to be very inaccurate.” Then there's this explanation: “Fingerprint powder works by sticking to traces of grease left behind when a finger touches an object; the grease carries the same pattern as the finger itself, and the powder therefore displays an accurate copy of it. The trick was to use the right powder for the circumstances. It must not cling to the surface bearing the fingerprint, and it must be the correct color: black powder was used on light surfaces, gray powder on dark ones. Different methods were applied depending on whether the fingerprints were old or recent. This powder was designed to show up on only recent prints, those containing grease and moisture, and not old prints, which consist mainly of salts.” Such extraneous details just slow down the pace even further. This is a novel, not a technical manual on forensic methodology.

There is little character development. Egill, incompetent and aggressive, is a stereotypical bad cop. Hrefna,

the only woman on the police team, has the most potential as a round character but there is insufficient focus on her. Why include the death of a very minor character instead of developing the main characters?

The ending is very dramatic with several major surprises. The solution to the mystery surrounding the deaths of father and son is a bit far-fetched; it made me think of something one would find in a Sherlock Holmes mystery.

The storyline has potential, but was clumsily executed. A good editor would have tightened the plot and insisted on more character development. Thematic development could also be improved so obvious statements like “Perhaps things will change one day, and people will be able to live the way they were created” and “Many a man might have gained wisdom had he not considered himself wise already” would be unnecessary.

Though I tend to like Icelandic mysteries, this one was a disappointment.

Please check out my reader's blog (<https://schatjesshelves.blogspot.ca/>) and follow me on Twitter (@DCYakabuski).
