

# **Jar City Study Guide**

**Jar City by Arnaldur Indridason**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Jar City Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1-5.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 6-13.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 14-20.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 21-28.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 29-37.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 38-45.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">39</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">45</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">48</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">50</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">55</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">57</a>



# Plot Summary

Jar City by Arnaldur Indridason is set in Iceland. The story follows Erlendur, a no-nonsense detective in the police department, as he and his team search to find the person who killed Holberg, a man with a dark and disturbing past. Their investigation focuses on finding Holberg's rape victims and travelling down the darkest roads of this man's past to uncover his killer.

The novel begins with Erlendur and his team investigating the place where Holberg was murdered, his own home. His home looks fairly normal except for a note left on the body that reads, "I AM HIM."

Erlendur receives a visit at his home from his daughter, Eva Lind, who is a drug addict. She begs him for money. Then, she tells him that his ex-wife asked him to look in to her friend's missing daughter, who ran away from her own wedding. Finally, she tells her father that she is pregnant.

Erlendur and Sigurdur Óli begin the investigation into Holberg's death. They speak with two women who were attacked by a man in an army jacket, leading Erlendur to wonder if their assailant might be Holberg's murderer.

The detectives speak with people who live in Holberg's apartment building and learn that he kept to himself most of the time, but had a particular interest in the stewardesses who flew with a pilot who lives in the building. He also had a strange smell coming from his apartment for years that he never fixed.

Erlendur also begins investigating the case of the runaway bride, Disa Rós, and discovers that she left a note that says, "HE'S A MONSTER. WHAT HAVE I DONE?" (p. 45).

Erlendur returns to Holberg's home to try to find more clues about their murderer or the intentions behind the murder. Erlendur finds a picture of a gravestone belonging to a young girl named Audur in a locked drawer of Holberg's desk. The team learns that the girl died of a brain tumor and that her mother committed suicide three years after.

Erlendur receives a call from his mentor in the police force, Marion Briem. Marion tells him that Holberg is believed to have raped Kolbrún, Audur's mother, in 1963, though he was never convicted of it, and that Audur may have been his child. This leads Erlendur to talk to Kolbrun's sister, Elín, who is reluctant to speak to the police because of the way her sister was treated during the rape investigation.

When Erlendur speaks with Rúnar, the investigating officer of the rape case, he learns that the rape case was mishandled because Rúnar did not believe her and that he destroyed the only evidence of the rape. Erlendur returns to Elín's house and convinces her that he is nothing like Rúnar, so she tells him about the rape.



Erlendur goes back to his flat and finds Eva Lind there. She tells him that she is going to keep the baby.

During the murder investigation, the detectives discover that someone had been calling Holberg frequently during his final days and Holberg was bothered by the calls. They also find a great deal of pornography on Holberg's computer.

Erlendur and Sigurdur Óli go to visit a man named Ellidi who was a friend of Holberg's. He tells them that Holberg raped another woman in Húsavík.

Erlendur travels to see Frank, Audur's doctor, who had assumed that Audur was dealing with headaches until he noticed other symptoms, but by then it was too late. There was talk of a genetic disease after the autopsy had been performed, but those ideas never made it into the autopsy report.

Erlendur and the team create a list of women who had a child shortly after the time frame they were given of when the rape in Húsavík occurred. While they are creating the list, Ellínborg tells them that Grétar, another friend of Holberg's, had suddenly disappeared years ago and has not been seen since.

Erlendur returns to Elín's house and asks about Kolbrún and Audur's relationship. He learns that Kolbrún thought the world of her daughter and was very protective of her. Erlendur informs her that they have to exhume Audur's corpse to prove that she was related to Holberg. While Audur's grave is exhumed, someone watches from a car and follows the body all the way to the morgue and then leaves.

Erlendur goes to see Grétar's elderly mother. She says that she has not seen Grétar since the national festival and that Grétar had a passion for photography.

The pathologist at the morgue tells Erlendur that Audur's brain is missing. Without it, he cannot give a full autopsy report or confirm that Holberg and Audur are related. Hearing this news, Erlendur goes back to Frank's to ask where the brain may have gone. Frank suggests that the brain may have been placed in Jar City, an organ storage room.

Meanwhile, Ellínborg retrieves Grétar's belongings from his sister's home. The only thing of value he owns is a camera. Forensics determines that Grétar's camera had taken the picture of Audur's grave.

Erlendur finds Eva Lind and the runaway bride in a drug den after talking to Eva Lind's drug dealer. Eva Lind tells her father that Disa Rós' father was the monster that her note referred to because he had been molesting her since she was a child.

Marion Briem calls Erlendur to tell him that Holberg's home had been built on marshland. This means that the ground has been slowly lowering over the years and has likely left a large gap in between the floor and the ground. Erlendur and the team take this lead and begin looking through the gap to see if Holberg hid Grétar's body in the gap.



While they are searching, Erlendur receives a call from Elín saying that a young Holberg was watching her house. Erlendur believes that this may be the child of Holberg's Húsavík rape victim.

Erlendur travels to the University of Iceland to meet with the head of the medicine department. According to the pathologist, this is where the files from Jar City went after it closed down. Erlendur learns that a doctor by the name of Eydal is the last known person to possess the brain.

Meanwhile, Elínborg finds the woman they have been looking for. Her name is Katrín and she is initially reluctant to talk to the police. She finally tells them about the rape, but is dishonest about when her third son was born.

Sigurður Óli calls Erlendur and tells him forensics has found what they believe to be Grétar's body in the foundation with rolls of film buried with him.

Ellínborg learns that Katrín's third son, Einar, works at the Genetic Research Centre, an organization that is compiling a data base of the genetics of everyone in Iceland.

Erlendur and Ellínborg return to Katrín's house to talk more about Einar. She tells them that he is Holberg's son and that Einar had found Holberg through the database after his daughter died of the same genetic disease that Audur died from.

Sigurður Óli and Erlendur search Einar's apartment. He has not been home in a few days and his home is cluttered with scientific books, magazines, and his walls are covered in the same phrase that was left at Holberg's apartment.

Erlendur receives a call that Audur's body and coffin are missing. Erlendur knows that Einar has taken them and heads to where Audur was buried. While in-route to the graveyard he gets a call from Sigurður Óli that they have found a sawed off barrel of a shotgun at Einar's house; they assume he has the rest of the shotgun.

Erlendur finds Einar at Audur's grave and Einar tells him what happened the night of Holberg's death while they bury Audur in her grave. Einar shoots himself near the end of the burial and Erlendur finishes up the job.

The book ends with Erlendur at home talking to Eva Lind about her baby. He recommends that she name it Audur.



# Chapters 1-5

## Summary

Jar City, by Arnaldur Idríðason, is a murder mystery of the police procedural variety in which an elderly man is murdered and Detective Erlendur must determine who killed him and why.

In Chapter 1, Erlendur arrives on a rainy night at the scene of the crime and finds a note lying on top of the body of a 69-year-old man who was murdered in his basement apartment. The murder weapon appears to be a large, glass ashtray. Erlendur checks the man's identification and discovers that his name was Holberg. He then evaluates the scene of the crime for clues and finds that there is no sign of forced entry. The door of the flat had been left wide open when the murderer left. There is no sign of robbery. The three-word message left on the man's body leads Erlendur to believe that the murderer had entered the flat intending to commit murder.

Erlendur's partner, Sigurdur Óli, arrives along with another co-worker, Elínborg. They discuss the crime and wonder who "HIM" written in all capital letters refers to. Elínborg suggests the murderer was crazy. Sigurdur Óli says the murderer must have been very cold to have sat down to write a note after killing an old man. Erlendur thinks the murderer may have a Messiah complex.

In Chapter 2, Erlendur returns to his own flat and continues to think about the crime and people who leave notes when they disappear. He thinks about his daughter Eva Lind and his son Sindri Snaer, both of whom have substance abuse issues.

In talking to the dead man's neighbors, Erlendur had discovered that the old man was a solitary person whose neighbors didn't know him. They all reported that they neither saw nor heard anything unusual on the day of the murder.

Erlendur himself is 50 and has been divorced for many years. He lost touch with his children when they were young. When his children became adults they sought him out, but he is disappointed by the way they have turned out.

Erlendur's tidy flat is small and filled with books. There are photographs of his relatives on his walls, but none of himself or his children.

Eva Lind stops by and Erlendur tries to determine just who Eva Lind will pretend to be tonight, since she is sometimes very sweet and sometimes very angry depending on her mood and whether or not she wants money. Eva Lind reports that she talked to her mother who asked her to ask Erlendur to look into a young woman who ran away from her own wedding.



The conversation devolves into an argument about money. Eva Lind reveals that she is pregnant and wants to give up drugs, but Erlendur is certain she wants money to buy more drugs. He refuses her the money and she runs from the flat.

Chapter 3 begins with Erlendur and Sigurdur Óli arriving at an apartment building. Theories about the murder were discussed at the morning police meeting. On the same day as Holberg's murder, a man in an army jacket had attacked two elderly women, so there is speculation that he is the murderer. The two detectives go to the apartment of the elderly women to interview them. They describe the man as young and high on something.

Erlendur and Sigurdur Óli then go to Holberg's flat and talk to his neighbors again. They talk to a pilot who lives on the top floor. He says he didn't know Holberg and that his own flat had been empty for a long time before he rented it. The pilot had talked to Holberg on a few occasions, mostly about the hostesses on the plane. He hasn't seen a man in an army jacket.

They also talk to the family who found the body. They indicate they'd talked to Holberg once in a while, but weren't close with him. They haven't seen a man in an army jacket, either. One of the boys says that Holberg's apartment smelled and the father says that there is rising damp in the basement and they talked to Holberg about it two years ago.

In Chapter 4, Erlendur talks to the parents of the girl who ran away from her wedding. He feels the investigation is a waste of time, but thinks he owes it to his ex-wife. The couple is well-to-do and they say the wedding was perfect. Their daughter ran away before the first dance at the reception. The car she took was found in Gardastræti, but the parents don't know why since she doesn't know anyone there. She apparently changed her clothes in the car.

Erlendur looks at the large pile of wedding presents and then sees a tree with heart-shaped cards on it. The parents describe it as a message tree. He accidentally knocks the tree over and as they pick up the cards, Erlendur finds one that is in the daughter's writing and reads, "HE'S A MONSTER WHAT HAVE I DONE?" (p. 45)

At the beginning of Chapter 5, Erlendur returns to work and asks Sigurdur Óli if Eva Lind has tried to contact him. He says she has not. Erlendur asks if there is any new information on Holberg. Sigurdur Óli reports that they know he was a lorry driver and still worked once in a while. Holberg had no family, but they are still working on gathering information. The pathologist's report confirms that Holberg died from a strike to the head. There are matching finger prints on the ashtray and on the pencil used to write the note.

It is still raining and the detectives return to the scene of the crime. Aside from the blood drying on the carpet, there is no evidence of the crime left. Erlendur looks at the books on the shelves and sees a copy of *Lolita* by Nabokov.

Holberg's desk drawers are locked. Erlendur locates the key and finds a photograph album. He then finds a photograph under the bottom drawer of the desk. It's a picture of



a grave in a cemetery. The name on the headstone is Audur and the dates indicate the child died at the age of four.

## Analysis

Jar City is a police procedural mystery novel. This means that it follows the police as they solve the murder and portrays a realistic depiction of what such a case would look like if the police were to handle it. Police procedurals often have multiple cases in one story; one will be the primary plotline, while the others are subplots that may or may not connect to the primary plot. Like many police procedurals, Jar City shows multiple aspects of solving crimes (autopsies, forensics, information gathering, etc.). However, unlike a typical police procedural, the reader does not have an idea of who the criminal is. Unlike most traditional mystery novels, police procedurals often show the crime to the audience so they are better able to piece together who the criminal is. Jar City gives its readers no insight into the crime before the police arrive on the scene, so readers are learning new information as the police do.

The first section of this novel primarily serves to introduce the victim (Holberg) and the protagonist, Erlendur. The author also introduces the plot and subplots.

Holberg is introduced as a thin, tidy old man. While his description matches that of a typical person, there are a few hints that there may be more than meets the eye. One example is when one of Holberg's neighbors, a pilot, mentions that Holberg asked about the hostesses' physical appearances and actions quite frequently. This interaction hints that there is more to Holberg than what Erlendur learned during the initial investigation of Holberg's home. While the detectives talk to the people who live in Holberg's building, the author reveals that Holberg's house has had a peculiar smell of damp for over two years. It seems strange that a man who has been described as orderly would allow his house to smell like this for two years, especially after he said that he was going to have it looked at. This dialogue foreshadows a later revelation that the police have in the Holberg case and hints that the murder victim is not quite as he seems. Holberg's well weathered copy of *Lolita* subtly foreshadows Holberg's perverted nature. While owning a copy of a famous author's novel is no reason to suspect anything, *Lolita* is a book about a man who becomes attracted to a 12-year-old girl who later becomes his stepdaughter. The fact that the book has obviously been read multiple times indicates that Holberg may have an obsession with the subject matter of the novel. Finally, the picture that Erlendur finds in Holberg's desk raises questions. Besides further casting doubts on who Holberg was before he died, this picture serves as an important plot point for the majority of the story. Without this key bit of evidence, Erlendur would have been unable to find Holberg's actual killer and would have likely begun to look for a man in a green army jacket.

Idridason uses the first two chapters to emphasize Erlendur's level-headed superior attitude. During the initial investigating of Holberg's apartment, Erlendur tells Elínborg, his coworker, to remember to put on her gloves in order to preserve the evidence "as if talking to a child" (p.24). While Erlendur is likely more experienced due to the many





years he has spent with the police force, to talk to his colleague as if she were a child is condescending and shows that he believes himself to be superior.

While Chapter 2 informs the reader of Erlendur's relationship with his family, it primarily serves to establish the relationship he has with this daughter Eva. Despite his daughter making several attempts to make him uncomfortable and convince him to give her money to feed her drug addiction, Erlendur never raises his voice and only briefly shows any signs of discomfort when she suggests that he is sexually interested in her. Erlendur's ability to never raise his voice at his daughter, despite her growing anger and agitation, and his ability to rebound so quickly from a comment that would be unthinkable to most people, shows that he can keep a level head even in the most difficult of circumstances.

The novel's sub-plot, the case of the runaway bride, has been constructed to appear deceptively simple at first glance. The girl's parents are portrayed as wealthy and vain people who enjoy showing off their wealth. An example of this is the two new and well-kept cars parked in front of the garage where they are easily visible, rather than inside the garage and out of sight. Furthermore, the fact that they felt the need to hire a popular vicar to oversee their daughter's marriage is another example of them showing off their wealth. The father's dissatisfaction with the vicar also shows vanity because he feels that they are important enough to have this popular vicar stay for a long period of time and deliver a heartfelt and personal service even though there is no evidence that he had had any interaction with the family before they paid him.

Even the way that the parents describe their daughter shows a desire for everyone to know how wonderful they are. From the description of their daughter, Erlendur had pictured "a child with curly golden locks" (p.41). These people have described their daughter in a way that sounds more like an innocent young child than the young woman she is. Such a description makes them appear to be perfect parents with a perfect child living in a perfect house rather than normal people. Despite how much they seem to idolize "their little girl" (p. 41) the parents seem more concerned that the wedding is ruined than they are that their daughter is missing. During Erlendur's interaction with the parents they only mention being worried by their daughter's absence once (p.43). However, they state their distress over their girl abandoning her own wedding three times (p.41-42) and even mourn the ruined wedding right after saying they are worried that their daughter is missing. This shows that they are more concerned with the failed party and how it will reflect on their perfect family than they are about their child's location or why she decided to leave in the first place. Idrisason includes a red herring at the end of this chapter with the message, "He's a monster what have I done" (p.45). The message was written by the bride and hung upon the message tree. While never specifically saying it, the author suggests that the bride was writing about her groom, even though it is later revealed that the groom is not the "He" the message is referring to. This is to make the reveal of the real "He" more shocking for the reader because they have been suspecting the husband.

Idrisason also includes a red herring in the Holberg murder. The man in the green army jacket has no connection to the case, but the author makes it appear that he could be a



likely suspect in order to throw readers off the scent of the actual murderer, as it does for Sigurdur Óli and Elínborg. The twins' contrasting opinions on their assailant serve to mimic some of the issues regarding the morality of Einar's actions later in the book. While Einar did murder Holberg, it is up for debate whether his actions were the product of circumstance and Holberg's own actions or if he should be blamed for what happened.

Throughout the first section Idridason has described the weather as dark and rainy. This sets the tone for the story and establishes the bleakness of the case. This pattern of the weather matching the condition of the case will continue on through the entirety of the book.

During the original search of Holberg's apartment, both Sigurdur Óli and Erlendur comment that this was likely a typical Icelandic murder, squalid, pointless, and pathetic. This dialogue will prove to be ironic since this murder is anything but typical, squalid, pointless, and pathetic.

## Discussion Question 1

How would you describe Holberg? What details does the author include to indicate that Holberg may not be the quiet old man his neighbors believed him to be?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the author included the argument between the twins?

## Discussion Question 3

What is Erlendur like? What does his relationship with his daughter reveal about him? How do his coworkers perceive him?

## Vocabulary

forensic, corduroy, percolator, preamble, squalid, ascertain, ornate, avaricious, bouffant, monologue, damp, smart (referring to clothing), plane, parcels, cellophane, provisional, epitaph



# Chapters 6-13

## Summary

In Chapter 6, the police locate and search Holberg's lorry for clues. They find nothing but a number of pornographic magazines. Meanwhile, the forensics team examines the photograph of the grave and finds that it is printed on a type of paper commonly used in the 1960s and appears to have been developed by an amateur. The epitaph is difficult to read, but is being analyzed by the team.

Erlendur looks into the death certificate and finds that Audur's mother's name was Kolbrún and that Audur died from a brain tumor. Her mother committed suicide three years later.

In Chapter 7, Erlendur goes to visit Viggó, the groom whose bride ran away. Viggó says that he knows everyone thinks it's his fault she left, but that he didn't do anything. Viggó is unaware of the message left on the message tree until Erlendur tells him about it. He has no idea who the bride was talking about in the message.

Erlendur returns to his office and takes a phone call from Marion Briem, an old colleague. Marion Briem tells Erlendur that Holberg was accused of raping a woman named Kolbrún in 1963. Erlendur deduces that Holberg may have been Audur's father. The rape case was dropped due to insufficient evidence, but Marion Briem doesn't believe that Kolbrún made up the rape. They discuss whether or not Holberg may have taken the photo of the grave or if Kolbrún sent it to him.

Chapter 8 picks up the next morning and it's still raining. Erlendur is on his way to Keflavik to see Kolbrún's sister after attempting to speak with her on the telephone. She had hung up on him.

Erlendur slept badly the night before as he was worrying about Eva Lind and had nightmares.

Erlendur reflects on the facts surrounding Kolbrún and the rape charges. Holberg had accompanied Kolbrún home from a party. Audur was born nine months later. Erlendur's reflection plays out like a movie with his mind filling in the details of how the night may have gone.

He arrives at Elin's house, and Elin asks him to leave her alone. She tries to walk away. Erlendur calls after her that he wants to talk about Audur. Elin is furious and indicates the police were responsible for harming Kolbrún in some way. As Erlendur drives away, he feels a pain in his chest.

The forensics team calls and tells Erlendur the epitaph is from Psalm 64 of the Bible. They found Holberg's fingerprints on the picture and a set of old, blurred prints. The camera used was a low-quality one.



In Chapter 9, Sigurdur Óli meets with Holberg's boss at the transport yard where Holberg was a driver. The foreman describes Holberg as reliable, but secretive. The foreman directs Sigurdur Óli to a man named Hilmar who knew Holberg well since he used to stay at Holberg's flat from time to time. Sigurdur Óli tries to talk to the man, but Hilmar can't hear him.

In Chapter 10, Erlendur visits Rúnar, who was in charge of the investigation of Kolbrún's rape case. Erlendur asks Rúnar what he did to Kolbrún. Erlendur tells Rúnar he knows about his spotty record with the police force and that he was dismissed for sexual harassment. Rúnar says that Kolbrún was a whore and she lied about the rape. Erlendur imagines how difficult it must have been for Kolbrún to try to tell this man about the incident. Again, the scene plays out in his mind. Erlendur tells Rúnar he knows that Kolbrún gave him her panties as evidence. He wonders how God could let someone like Rúnar live and take the life of a 4-year-old girl.

Erlendur goes to the library to look up Psalm 64. The Psalm is a plea to the Lord.

Chapter 11 begins with Erlendur returning to Elin's house. He is on his eighth cigarette of the day despite trying to quit. He slides the photo of Audur's grave through a crack in the door and Elin lets him in. Elin has never seen the picture before. She tells Erlendur that Holberg did not deny having sex with Kolbrún, only that it was rape. Kolbrún did not care about proving Holberg was the father of her child, only that she'd been raped so there was no paternity test. She confirms that Kolbrún gave Rúnar her ripped panties. Holberg says the panties were never found.

Elin says that Kolbrún loved Audur and that Holberg knew Audur was his child, but he denied it. She does not believe Kolbrún would have sent Holberg the photo. Elin shows Erlendur pictures of Audur. She says that Audur died quickly and that Kolbrún had not wanted an autopsy. One was performed anyway. The autopsy confirmed the brain tumor. Kolbrún became depressed and eventually slit her wrists.

Elin says she has no idea who murdered Holberg and that she had no part in it. Erlendur mentions the epitaph on Audur's grave and Elin says Kolbrún chose it. She then shows him a note that Kolbrún had left on the table when she died. It is the first five words of Psalm 64.

In Chapter 12, Erlendur goes back to his flat and finds Eva Lind passed out at his door. He lays her on his sofa and falls asleep in the chair beside her. When he wakes up, Eva Lind is in the kitchen, clean and making coffee. She says she's decided to have the baby and asks if she can stay with Erlendur. He tells her she can. They talk about the missing bride.

Sigurdur Óli calls and tells Erlendur about his conversation with Hilmar. Hilmar had told him that he stayed with Holberg shortly before his death and that Holberg hadn't been himself. Holberg had mentioned a man who was bothering him and had seemed afraid to answer his phone. Sigurdur Óli says he's having Holberg's phone records examined. He also says that most of Holberg's calls were to an Internet server.



Sigurður Óli and Erlendur go to Holberg's flat when the technicians are checking out the computer. The drive is full of pornographic videos. Elínborg calls and tells Erlendur she has information about the men who went with Holberg to the party on the night Kolbrún was raped. One man, Gretar, disappeared years ago and the other is in prison.

In Chapter 13, Erlendur and Sigurður Óli go to the prison to see Holberg's old friend. The man, Ellidi, is in solitary confinement for assaulting another inmate. Ellidi has a long criminal record and is known for being violent. Ellidi shows no interest in Erlendur until he mentions that Holberg was murdered. Ellidi refuses to talk until he's left alone with Erlendur and Sigurður Óli. He says that Holberg did rape Kolbrún and that he liked bragging about it. Ellidi tells Erlendur that he knows who Erlendur is because he knows Eva Lind. Erlendur tells him not to talk about Eva Lind. Ellidi tells him that while Holberg was raping Kolbrún, he told her about another woman he'd raped.

## Analysis

The author begins to examine the theme of everyone not being what they seem to be. This section begins to delve into the personal lives of several of the characters and reveals to the reader that people can be different from how they appear.

The most obvious example of this is the victim Holberg. From the initial search of his home, Holberg appears to be a tidy older bachelor. His neighbors said that he was an okay neighbor, even if no one really knew him all that well and his boss described him as a hardworking, reliable man, even if he was a bit secretive. However, as the team digs into Holberg's past, the author shows that Holberg was far from the normal citizen the reader would expect. Marion Briem, Erlendur's mentor, informs Erlendur that Holberg was accused of rape decades before and that Marion believes he was guilty, even if he wasn't convicted. Furthermore, the vast amounts of pornography on his computer are far from what one would expect from the man Holberg's boss and coworkers described him to be.

Erlendur is another example of someone who is not quite what he seems. Erlendur is so insistent that his daughter work through her addiction to drugs, yet Erlendur has a substance problem that he cannot shake. Erlendur is addicted to tobacco and smokes heavily. While talking with Elín, Erlendur pulls out and begins to smoke his ninth cigarette of the day despite his concerns about the pain in his chest. Considering his concern at his daughter's lifestyle, it is unexpected that Erlendur is struggling with the same issue that she is.

Comparing Holberg and Erlendur further proves that looks can be deceiving. Both of these men are long term bachelors, both of them are described as being good at their jobs, and both of them keep to themselves at work and at home. At first glance one might expect that these men would be somewhat similar. However, as can be seen from the book so far, this is far from the truth.



Rúnar is another person who is not what he appears to be. No one would guess that the “bony” “wrinkled and runny nosed” (p.70) old man Erlendur sees in chapter ten would be capable of doing as much damage as he did while on the force, yet this man was dismissed from the police for repeated sexual harassment. Furthermore, the purpose of the police is to protect the people and stop the criminals, yet we see Rúnar persecuting Kolbrún and protecting her assailant. Rúnar severely damaged any chance for justice to be served by hiding evidence of the rape and verbally abusing Kolbrún in order to keep her from pressing charges.

Sigurdur Óli is another person who is not quite what he seems to be. Sigurdur Óli is described as being modern, organized, wearing a new suit, and graduating from an American university with a degree in criminology. At first glance he would appear to be a serious person. However, Sigurdur Óli often serves as the comic relief in the story. For example, chapter nine ends with Sigurdur Óli attempting to ask one of Holberg’s coworkers about whether or not he had stayed at Holberg’s home. What he ends up shouting for the entire warehouse to hear is “DID YOU SLEEP WITH HOLBERG” (p.68). Another example is in chapter 5 when Sigurdur Óli suddenly blurts out a comment about Erlendur being single for a long time. Most people wouldn’t expect such things from someone who walks around in a suit and tie, but the juxtaposition is part of what gives these instances their humor.

Finally, Viggó is not what he appears to be due to the red herrings the author has given. The message on the message tree seems to indicate that Disa, the bride, believes her husband is a monster. Furthermore, Erlendur seems convinced that Viggó is somehow responsible for the bride’s disappearance. However, Viggó is not the reason that Disa disappeared and even goes to confront the monster she refers to after she returns home.

The author also begins to delve into another of the book’s major themes, which is the how the sins of the father affect the son. Rúnar is an example of this theme. While he may not be a literal father, Rúnar is one of Erlendur’s predecessors in the Holberg cases, and might be seen as an ancestor of sorts. His hiding of evidence and poor treatment of Kolbrún have complicated Holberg’s investigation. By hiding the evidence, Rúnar made the case difficult to investigate due to a lack of evidence, so Erlendur lacks information on what really happened that night. In addition, Rúnar’s treatment of Kolbrún makes it difficult for Erlendur to get information from her sister Elín due to Elín’s distrust of the police.

During Erlendur’s conversation with Elín, Elín says that her sister blamed herself for the rape and that she expects that such a reaction is common in rape victims. This statement will be true in every rape and sexual assault victim within this story. Holberg’s second victim will blame herself for the rape saying that she led him on and will blame herself for her husband’s anger. Furthermore, as is evident in the note she left, Disa blames herself for the sexual assault that she underwent.

The author infuses the story with religious references as a motif that indicate the mindset of some of the characters. In Kolbrún’s case, her references to Psalm 64



emphasize her feelings of helplessness and also serves as foreshadowing. The psalmist is asking God to protect them from those who attack the blameless with their words thinking that they will not be blamed for their crimes, but the psalmist states that God will eventually come for them. Kolbrún is the blameless that the evildoers (Holberg and Rúnar) have attacked with words and actions. Both of these men also face judgement long after their crimes have been committed. The reader will later learn that Holberg has been killed as a result of the rapes he committed in his life and Rúnar was fired from the police for repeated sexual harassment. In the end, Kolbrún's prayer is answered and the crimes of her attackers are discovered and judged.

In this section, the author introduces the character of Ellidi. Besides serving as a way to continue the plot and inject a highly dramatic scene, Ellidi's main purpose is to further characterize Holberg. You can tell a lot about a person by who they associate with, and seeing how crass and cruel Ellidi is further contradicts the first impression the reader had of Holberg. Ellidi also relays to Erlendur just how depraved Holberg was by telling some of the things that he whispered to Kolbrún as he was raping her. The fact that Ellidi believes that Holberg was even crazier than he is also gives the reader a picture of just how disturbed Holberg really was.

Another theme the author explores is the idea that everyone in Iceland is connected. Ellidi's knowledge of Eva Lind emphasizes that connection. Having Eva Lind and Ellidi know each other is a coincidence that the reader was likely not expecting, and even takes Erlendur by surprise. This also means that Erlendur has a stronger connection to Ellidi than just having escorted him to jail once. It also means that Eva Lind is connected to Holberg and Grétar, albeit loosely.

Erlendur has also had a connection to this case for years, even if he didn't know it. Erlendur and Rúnar had met several times while Rúnar was still on the force. This gives Erlendur a connection to Holberg and this case that spans many years.

Erlendur's connection to the bride and her family is another example of everyone in Iceland being connected. Having people as wealthy as the bride's parents know someone like Erlendur, even if it is through his ex-wife, is a coincidence most people would consider surprising. After all, Erlendur tends to stay in his apartment and lives on microwaveable meals; he is hardly the type of person that is socializing with people like the parents who care so much about their appearance and wealth, yet somehow these people are connected to each other.

## Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the characters of Holberg and Erlendur. What similarities do they share? How are they different?



## Discussion Question 2

What connections does the author make between characters in the book? How is Eva Lind connected to the Holberg case? How is Erlendur connected to the parents of the bride? What might the author be suggesting by these connections?

## Discussion Question 3

What purpose does the scene involving Ellidi serve? What reaction might it invoke in readers? What information about the case is revealed?

## Vocabulary

lorry, domiciled, pottering, bollocks (as in nonsense), decrepit, mustering, wrangling, corrugated, geriatric





# Chapters 14-20

## Summary

As Chapter 14 starts, Erlendur and Sigurdur Óli are still with Ellidi. Ellidi attacks the men, and the guards grab him. Erlendur asks about the other rape victim, but Ellidi does not respond. The guards take Ellidi away. As they leave the prison, a guard runs out to tell them that Ellidi wants to speak with them and that he will give them the information they want if he can talk to Erlendur alone.

Ellidi tells Erlendur about Kolbrún's rape. He is unaware of Audur's existence. He says he will tell Erlendur about the time and place of the other rape if Erlendur can get him out of solitary. Erlendur says he will try. Ellidi tells him the rape took place in Húsavík in the early 60's.

Erlendur tells Sigurdur Óli about the conversation as they leave the prison. Erlendur also says that Ellidi told him about Holber's sister who died young. He's now wondering about the exact cause of Audur's death.

In Chapter 15, Erlendur visits Frank, a doctor who treated Audur. Erlendur briefly considers asking about the pain in his chest. He tells Frank that he believes Holberg was Audur's father. The doctor admits he had his license revoked for drinking, but it had nothing to do with Audur; however, he says he wasn't in good shape at the time he treated her. He had prescribed medicine for Audur when her headaches began and then stronger medication when they got worse. It was too late by the time she went to the hospital. He mentions a café au lait mark on her skin, which indicated an oncogenic disease. After the autopsy, there was mention of a genetic disease.

In Chapter 16, Erlendur returns home to find stew cooking in the kitchen, but Eva Lind isn't there. She returns a moment later saying she went out to get more vegetables. Erlendur mentions that Ellidi talked about her and Eva Lind says she met him once, but doesn't really know him.

After dinner, Erlendur falls asleep and dreams about Eva Lind. In the dream, she is surrounded by light and hands him the photograph of Audur's grave. Then, he's in the photo and looking into Audur's coffin. When he wakes, Eva Lind is gone.

Erlendur and Sigurdur Óli compile a list of women who might have been victims of Holberg's other rape. They decide to narrow the list down to women who had a child shortly after the time of the rape. Sigurdur Óli is working on finding out what Holberg's sister died from. Elínborg has discovered that Gretar disappeared suddenly. They go over the facts of the case again.

Chapter 17 starts with Erlendur again visiting Rúnar. He asks if Kolbrun talked about another rape when she reported her own rape. Rúnar says she did not. Erlendur asks if



Rúnar talked to Grétar or Ellidi during the investigation. He says he didn't and that Marion Briem handled the investigation in Reykjavik.

Erlendur goes to Elin's house again. He smokes a cigarette and thinks about the pain in his chest while he waits for her to return. When she does, she invites him in. While she is in the kitchen, Sigrurdur Óli calls and says they are ready. Erlendur tells him not to do a thing until he gets there. Erlendur asks Elin if Kolbrún mentioned the other rape to her. She says that Kolbrún did not, but that Kolbrún never talked about the rape much. She believes that Kolbrún may not have told the police about the other woman out of a desire to protect her. She also tells him that Kolbrún and Audur were very close and that Kolbrún was extremely protective of her daughter, even beyond death.

Erlendur tells Elin that he needs to have Audur exhumed to perform another autopsy. He explains his thought of her death being due to a hereditary disease and that knowing more could help solve the case. She becomes angry and says that Erlendur is just like Rúnar and they still do not believe Kolbrún.

In Chapter 18, Audur's body is exhumed. Erlendur is bothered by the destruction of the grave site. He has a sensation of having dreamed this scene. Elin arrives and shouts at the group assembled at the exhumation. Erlendur instructs an officer to hold her back. Erlendur tells Elin about the message left with Holberg's body and tries to explain again why the second autopsy is needed. He says the note suggests a relationship between the murderer and Holberg and that information about Audur's death could help them find the link.

A car drives away from the cemetery unnoticed and follows the van with Audur's body to the morgue. When the driver sees everyone leave the morgue after delivering the body, he drives away.

Chapter 19 begins with Erlendur visiting Marion Briem. Marion tells him that there was a confrontation set up between Holberg and Kolbrún to see Kolbrún's reaction in order to determine if she was telling the truth about the rape. Kolbrún became hysterical, so Marion knows she didn't lie. Erlendur asks if Marion knows anything of the other rape, but Marion does not.

Erlendur asks if Marion knows where Ellidi and Holberg were at the time of Grétar's disappearance. Marion says they both claim to have been at the festival. Erlendur says he isn't looking for Grétar because he was a wimp and probably had nothing to do with the murder. As Erlendur goes to leave, Marion tells him not to let anything he finds out about Holberg affect him. As they part, Marion tells Erlendur that Grétar once burgled a photographic shop and took pictures.

Erlendur goes home and two men knock on his door looking for Eva Lind. They are very threatening and Erlendur slams the door on them, breaking one man's knee.

In Chapter 20, Sigrurdur Óli struggles with approaching the women on the list to ask about the rape. Erlendur suggests he use psychology to do so, but Sigrurdur Óli does not know how to use psychology. This makes him think of his relationship with his



partner and the way she had given him boots after he bought her a very expensive watch.

Elinborg has better luck with her inquiries. She encounters a woman who gives her the name of two of her friends from Húsavík who never miss anything.

Erlendur goes into work with a cut on his forehead from fighting with the men who came for Eva Lind. The man whose knee was broken told him that they were there to collect money that Eva Lind owed. Erlendur doesn't explain the plaster on his forehead to his coworkers and no one asks.

Erlendur decides to go see Grétar's 90-year-old mother, Theodora. She is blind, but her hearing is good and her mind is sharp. She says the last time she saw Grétar was in the summer of the national festival. Erlendur asks about the photographs Grétar took. Theodora tells him that Grétar believed the photos "were the mirrors of time" (p. 147). She says that her daughter might know what became of Grétar's belongings after he disappeared

## Analysis

In this section, the author provides the reader with insight into Erlendur's subconscious through his dream. Erlendur's dream emphasizes his fear that his work is overtaking his home life. Eva Lind's appearance in the dream symbolizes the perfect family that Erlendur has never had. Erlendur wants Eva Lind to overcome her addiction and turn her life around, so Eva Lind's angelic appearance is Erlendur's mind picturing a perfect version of his family. When Erlendur tries to hug his daughter, it is a symbol of him trying to make his perfect family a reality. His inability to hug her shows that Erlendur cannot have his dream of the ideal family. Eva Lind then hands Erlendur the picture of Audur's grave and disappears. This is a symbol of Erlendur's family and personal life giving way to his work.

The author introduces the theme of nothing truly being private in this section. Audur's autopsy is an example of this theme. When Audur died, Kolbrún did not want her daughter to go through an autopsy. However, the doctors ignored her wishes and proceeded to perform an autopsy. Performing this procedure on Audur shows that not even the organs in a person's body are private and that they can be observed and taken, in the same manner as Audur's brain.

This lack of privacy is not just a thing of the past, as digging up Audur's grave shows. Despite Elín's protests, Erlendur and his team dig up Audur's grave in order to determine for certain that Audur and Holberg are father and daughter. This shows that even decades after one has died they still don't have any privacy. Even the actual exhumation of the grave was not done in privacy. Several people are on hand to witness the event, including some whose identity is not revealed. In order to build suspense, the author mentions that someone is watching Erlendur's team dig up the body and then



follows the corpse to the morgue. However, the reader does not know who that person is.

The author continues to explore the theme of people not being what they appear to be. The well-dressed professional Sigurdur Óli is unable to question women on whether they have been raped. Sigurdur Óli states that he doesn't know how to use psychology and had to flee a woman's house after bluntly asking a woman if she has ever been raped. This is unexpected due to his professional appearance and the background information we have on his education.

The author again uses symbolism when he includes a background story about Sigurdur Óli and his significant other exchanging gifts. The watch and wellington boots that Sigurdur Óli and his significant other exchange are a symbol of their feelings for each other. Sigurdur Óli spent a large amount of money and a week searching the town to find a watch for his significant other while Ergthóra simply bought him a pair of wellington boots. This shows that Sigurdur Óli is more invested in their relationship than his significant other.

The theme of everyone being connected is further examined through the national festival. Erlendur has a connection to Elín and Grétar because they were all at the national festival at Thingvellir. Despite these people all coming from different backgrounds and parts of Iceland, these people who hardly know each other and would never have known each other were it not for this case all share the common experience of having been in the same town for a national festival. This shows that everyone is in some way connected to each other, no matter what walk of life they come from.

Marion Briem also shows how everyone is connected. Coincidentally, Erlendur's mentor happens to be the detective that worked both Kolbrún's rape case and Grétar's disappearance. Not only that, Marion has encountered Holberg, Ellidi, and Grétar and can tell Erlendur more about them. Marion also knows Rúnar already from prior experience. The chances that Marion would know of and encounter all of these people would seem incredibly slim, but it proves that everyone is connected.

One interesting fact about Marion Briem is that the author never uses any gendered pronouns when referring to Marion. This lack of knowledge on Marion's gender was a purposeful choice on the author's part given the fact that Marion's last name is gender neutral. Since most Icelandic surnames give the gender of the bearer, giving Marion a gender neutral surname makes the bearer's gender impossible to determine by surname alone. The first name Marion is also a gender neutral name, so it is impossible to determine Marion's gender based on the name. By not revealing Marion's gender, the author has increased the air of mystery behind Marion Briem. The lack of gender also characterizes Erlendur as well. By not mentioning Marion's gender, Erlendur is portrayed as someone who cares about the kind of person someone is rather than their gender. This distinction contrasts Rúnar and Erlendur as law enforcement officers. Rúnar was fired from his job due to repeated sexual harassment while Erlendur shows a lack of interest in a person's gender.



Marion Briem is also an example the theme of how the sins of the father rest upon the son or daughter. Marion was Erlendur's mentor for years and still serves as an advisor and source of information. Marion was also the lead detective in both Kolbrún's rape case and Grétar's disappearance. Marion failed to solve either of these cases and now Marion's student must finish the work that Marion started. Furthermore, Marion may have contributed to Elín's distaste for the police during Kolbrún's case. Marion admits to making a mistake when Marion decided to bring Kolbrún and Holberg together. This caused Kolbrún to go into hysterics that required a doctor's attention. This would have helped solidify the belief that the police are terrible people in Elín's mind.

Theodóra, Grétar's mother, tells Erlendur that her son once said that "photos were the mirrors of time" (p. 147). This line not only helps to elaborate on Grétar's love of photography, it also states one of the themes of the book. Pictures allow people like Grétar to capture a moment in time and preserve it for decades. Since Holberg's rape cases occurred decades ago, Erlendur and his team have had to acquire their data from old fingerprints, interviews, and pictures. For example, the picture of Audur's grave is what puts Erlendur on the right track to finding Holberg's killer and has allowed him to connect with Elín. If this moment in time had not been captured, the team would still be looking for a common burglar. Pictures have also managed to capture the image and the memory of the dead. In Theodóra's room there is a picture of John F. Kennedy. When Erlendur asks about it she says that she really liked J.F.K. when he was alive. This photo has captured a moment in time when J.F.K. was still alive and has allowed his image and his memory to live on long after his death.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the author does not reveal Marion Briem's gender? What does Erlendur's relationship with Marion reveal about Erlendur?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you think an autopsy should have been performed on Audur against her mother's wishes? Do you think Erlendur should have exhumed Audur's body against her family's will? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

What part do old photographs play in this novel? Why do you think the author included Erlendur and Theodóra's brief exchange about the picture on her wall?

## Vocabulary

recourse, sprightly, withered, hypothesis, serviette, anorak, indecipherable, inscrutable, hydraulic, resignation, vestibule, pedantic, stringent, insufferable, stevedore, morosely, layabout, patronize



# Chapters 21-28

## Summary

In Chapter 21, Erlendur is in the Barónsstigur morgue with a pathologist. The pathologist gives Erlendur an in-depth description of how Holberg died. The pathologist says that Holberg received a serious blow to the head and he believes the attacker was right-handed. The pathologist also notes that a small benign tumor was found on Holberg's brain and he has café au lait stains in various places on his skin.

Since Audur was described as having similar symptoms, Erlendur presses the pathologist for more information to determine if he was the one from whom Audur inherited her genetic disease. After the pathologist tells Erlendur the story of how a man named Thomas Harvey took Einstein's brain after the autopsy for his own personal collection, he informs Erlendur that Audur's brain is not where it should be.

Chapter 22 begins with the pathologist explaining that Audur's brain was most likely taken for research without her mother's permission. He goes on to say that it takes time to study because "brains take a while to fix" (a process that makes it easier for researchers to cut into a brain) (p.156). However, without her brain it is impossible for the pathologist to determine what killed Audur.

Erlendur returns to Frank's home for information on where the brain may have gone. While Frank does not know for certain where the brain was taken, he suspects that it may have been taken to Jar City. Frank explains to Erlendur that Jar City is a nickname for a room where organs are stored so they can later be used for teaching purposes. While Jar City is no longer in operation, there is a chance that Audur's brain is still intact somewhere.

Chapter 23 focuses on Elínborg's meeting with Klara, Grétar's sister. Klara is aware that the police contacted her mother and says that Theodora could tell that he was not feeling well. After briefly talking about her family, Klara informs Elinborg that Grétar is her half-brother. Klara then invites Elinborg to look through Grétar's old stuff that she found in his flat. She describes her brother's home as having been a mess with garbage and old food scattered around. Despite these conditions, she did manage to find a camera in good condition among her brother's belongings.

Elinborg and Klara head down to the basement storeroom to look at Grétar's belongings where they find his camera is a pocket-sized Kodak Instamatic. Klara mentions that there were no pictures in his flat despite his love of photography. Elinborg decides that the camera could be of use in the investigation and asks to take the supplies with her.

Erlendur begins digging to find the two women that Kolbrún was with on the night she was raped. One of the women, Agnes, currently lives in Stykkishólmur. She describes Kolbrún as respectable and honest, but also sickly and reserved. Agnes had left the



party before Kolbrún that night, so she is unaware of exactly what happened. After that night, Kolbrún didn't come into work and didn't answer Agnes' calls. Agnes never saw Kolbrún after that.

Chapter 24 opens in Erlendur's office with Sigurdur Óli and Elinborg voicing doubt about how the case is going so far. Elinborg feels that they are no longer looking for Holberg's murderer and she doesn't know what they are trying to accomplish in their investigation. She feels that the murderer was most likely someone that Holberg did not know who was attempting to steal from him. Sigurdur Óli suggests that it may have been a prostitute that Holberg had paid for given the evidence that they found on his computer. Erlendur is beginning to question whether his judgement has been compromised due to his concern about his daughter's absence for the last few days.

Erlendur receives a call from forensics saying that Grétar's camera was the one that took the picture of Audur's grave. This news renews Erlendur's confidence in his judgement, and he begins to withdraw into himself questioning what Grétar's reasons for taking the picture could be.

Later that day, Erlendur tracks down Eddi, the drug dealer who sent the debt collectors to find Eva Lind. After Erlendur pays off Eva Lind's debt Eddi tells him where he can find his daughter. Erlendur finds Eva Lind passed out in a drug den and carries her out. Eva Lind informs him that the bride he had been looking for is also in the house somewhere.

Chapter 25 begins with Erlendur waking up in his home the next morning. Sigurdur Óli calls his home to tell him that that the fingerprints on the photograph are Grétar's, but they are still unsure if Holberg's fingerprints are also on the photograph. After the call ends Eva Lind enters into the restroom and begins retching profusely.

Eva Lind exits the bathroom they begin to discuss her condition and what it means for the baby. Erlendur becomes angry at his daughter because he feels that she is throwing her life away while people like Audur never got to live theirs. Eva Lind is in tears over her father's outburst and Erlendur immediately regrets his actions. He begins to think he isn't any better than his daughter and goes to comfort her.

Once Eva Lind tells her father that the bride's dad is the monster in the note she left. The father had been sexually abusing his daughter for years and had begun groping her at her own wedding. Eva believes that the mother knew about this, but did not say anything to keep from upsetting her wealthy husband.

Marion Briem calls shortly after to inquire about the smell in Holberg's apartment, which Erlendur describes as smelling like horses. Marion Briem informs Erlendur that Holberg's home was built on marshland.

Chapter 26 begins with Sigurdur Óli asking the women on the list if they had been raped. This time he is invited into the woman's home and it appears as if she has been expecting him. Sigurdur Óli learns that everyone from Húsavik has been talking about this case and that everyone knows about it by now. The woman does not know anything of use to the investigation and begins pressing for details on the crime. Part way





through the woman's inquiries Erlendur calls Sigurdur Óli on his cell phone and tells him to come to Holberg's flat.

At Holberg's house, Erlendur describes to Elinborg and Sigurdur Óli how buildings built on marshes can develop broken sewage pipes due to the subsiding of the marsh. This subsiding also creates a hollow pocket underneath the home. The only way to fix this issue is to break up the floor and go into the foundation to fix the pipe.

Marion located the plumber that Holberg had hired to fix the broken pipe underneath his flat. According to the plumber he was thrown out of the home before he could seal the floor because Holberg said he would do it himself.

Chapter 27 begins with the forensics team preparing to investigate the foundation of the building under Holberg's flat. During the investigation, Erlendur's superintendent arrives and tells him that a woman has been trying to reach him. The woman in question is Elín and she is calling in a panic because she believes that a young Holberg is staring at her from outside her house.

In Chapter 28, Erlendur rushes to Elín's home and finds that the man has left the scene. Elín says that he looked like Holberg when he was forty years old. Elín goes on to tell Erlendur that she had encountered Holberg once when Marion Briem had brought Holberg and Kolbrún together during the case; a meeting that ended with Kolbrún in hysterics while Holberg laughed.

Erlendur theorizes that this man may actually be Holberg's son from the Húsavik rape case and he may have come to Elín's home to see the aunt of his sister, though he is unsure how he knows her.

## Analysis

Sigurdur Óli's attempt to interview women in this section plays into the themes that nothing is private and that everyone is connected. The reason that Sigurdur Óli is allowed into the woman's house to talk about the case is that the people from Húsavik are talking to each other about the case and the detectives that are coming to interview women. This investigation has been kept relatively secret up until this point with very few people being told anything about this case. However, one woman tells Sigurdur Óli, "I'm sure everyone knows you're looking for that woman" (p.181). Now everyone from Húsavik knows about Holberg and that someone from their town was raped decades ago. A private investigation has been revealed and a secret that someone has been trying to keep private has been revealed to the public and is now the gossip of the town. In order for this news to leak so quickly the people of Húsavik have to be well connected with each other. Gossip and rumors can only spread quickly if those spreading the news are well connected. For the entire town of Húsavik to be informed about a case going on on the other side of the country, the townspeople have to be well connected with each other.



Marion's ability to contact plumbers also shows how everyone is connected. In Chapter 25 Marion states, "I've talked to a lot of plumbers" (p.178). The fact that Marion just so happens to know a person who can tell him about how plumbing in a place like Nordurmýri works and help him find the plumber that did Holberg's plumbing on the year of the national festival seems like an unlikely coincidence. However, by having Marion be this connected, it shows how everyone is connected in some way.

Audur's missing brain is an example of the themes of how sins of the past haunt the present and how nothing is private. The doctors who performed Audur's autopsy decided to take her brain for teaching and research without the consent of her mother or even any documentation of the event. The actions of these doctors have made Erlendur's investigation even more difficult than it was before since he now has to search for some records of where the brain may be found and if it's still intact. Without the brain it will be impossible for Erlendur to prove that Audur and Holberg are related, so the actions of these doctors may have doomed his case. Taking the girl's brain shows that there is no privacy because they have ignored the will of her mother and taken the most important and private organ in the human body. Kolbrún had specifically said that she did not want an autopsy done on her daughter and was ignored. Now it is revealed that they not only ignored the mother's wishes, they went so far as to take a part of her daughter from her without even telling her what had been done. They have also taken Audur's privacy by removing the core of her being from her body. The brain is what makes a person who they are, it is where the personality, memories, and beliefs are stored. These doctors have taken the organ that holds all of these things from Audur's body so they may study it in-depth. There is no greater invasion of privacy than taking the thing that makes someone who they are so it can be dissected and studied.

The revealing of who the bride's monster really is supports the theme that not everyone is who they appear to be. While the understanding earlier chapters gave of the father showed that he was no saint, he never appeared to be capable of performing such depraved acts as sexually molesting his own daughter from such a young age. The fact that someone so obsessed with appearance would partake in something that could damage his reputation so severely is unthinkable, as is the fact that the mother knew and kept quiet for so long. The revealing of this information also shows that the groom was not what he appeared either. Based on the prior evidence and Erlendur's opinions, it appeared that the groom was the monster that the bride mentioned. However, the groom was actually the only innocent party besides the bride herself. This is a positive example of how not everyone is what they appear to be.

Erlendur's meeting with Eddi supports the theme that everyone is connected. These two men would only have met if Erlendur was on a case involving Eddi, but here they are discussing something they have in common, Eva Lind. These two men on opposite sides of the law have a connection that allows them to meet without Eddi being arrested.

Eddi also happens to be connected to the bride. This is far from what would be expected given the bride's family, so it also supports the theme that not everyone is what they seem. Disa Rós's parents describe her more as a young child than they do a



college-aged woman, so it is surprising that the innocent child Erlendur was told about would be connected to drug dealers like Eddi or Eva Lind.

Einar's visit to Elín's house is another example that supports the theme that everyone is connected. Einar and Elín are connected through Audur even though these people have never met before. Even though these two come from families that were on opposite sides of the country, they still share a common relative through Audur.

Einar and Elín's encounter also shows how the sins of the past haunt the present based on Einar's appearance. Elín mistakenly believes that a younger Holberg is outside her house watching her. Holberg's rape in Húsavík is haunting Elín decades later with the fear that he has returned. This rape also haunts Einar because he is easily recognizable as Holberg's son, so he and anyone who knows Holberg will be reminded of him whenever they see Einar's face.

After talking to one of Kolbrún's friends, Erlendur begins to recall the story of a man name Sveinn. This story is meant to draw comparison to Holberg and his lack of compassion for others, but it applies to Disa Rós's father and Rúnar as well. All of these men are uncaring about what happens to the people around them as long as they are happy. Like Sveinn, both of these men hurt those around them in order to keep themselves safe and happy. Holberg abandoned Ellidi and is responsible for Grétar's disappearance to keep himself safe while Disa Rós's father molested her to make himself happy. Not only that, like Sveinn, Holberg and Rúnar take pleasure in the misfortune being brought to others. Holberg enjoys telling his victims about all of the other people he has raped and takes pleasure in causing Kolbrún to go into hysterics when Marion Briem brings them together. Rúnar seemed to take pleasure in harassing Kolbrún when she came to the police. Elín said that he seemed to take pleasure when she yelled at him in the street about what he had done to Kolbrún.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does the author include the story of Sveinn the Soulless? What might this story symbolize?

## Discussion Question 2

What connections does the author draw between characters in this section? What purpose does connecting characters serve?

## Discussion Question 3

How does the author show a lack of privacy for those involved in the murder case, both in the present day and in the past?

## Vocabulary

stench, fluorescent, fathom, instantaneously, protruding, torrential, classified, visualize, gravelly, cajole, charmer, boutique, distorted, alternative, vacant, pathetic, berserk, drizzle, spacious, divulge



# Chapters 29-37

## Summary

Chapter 29 opens at Holberg's house where the team finds out that there is a rat infestation in the foundation and that they will be unable to continue until an exterminator has cleared the house.

Erlendur talks with his daughter about both the Holberg case and the runaway bride case. Eva Lind informs him that the bride left to talk to her fiancée and was unsure if she wanted to tell him the truth about her father. Eva Lind has convinced her she shouldn't cover up for her father. Erlendur shares the details of the Holberg case with Eva and how it has been affecting their interactions. Erlendur opens up to his daughter about how he is feeling and how stressful the job is to him and the two share an intimate bonding moment.

Chapter 30 begins after the exterminator has cleared the foundation of rats. The forensics team decides to search the area by drilling holes to put cameras in so they can see what's under the foundation without damaging the house. Erlendur, Elinborg, and Sigurdur Óli watch the investigation for a time, then head out to discuss the man that Elín saw outside her home. No one is sure of how he could have known about Elín or Kolbrún without being told by Holberg or Grétar, which leads them to question if Grétar is still alive.

In Chapter 31, Erlendur meets with the pathologist again and learns that he may be able to find documents on where Audur's brain is at the University of Iceland. The head of university's medicine department finds the documents after a tense discussion with Erlendur about how organs are procured. The brain has been taken by a doctor named Eydal for his own collection.

In Chapter 32, Elínborg finally finds the woman from Húsavík. The woman refuses to allow Elínborg in to her home and will not talk to her even though she seems to have expected Elínborg's arrival. The woman's name is Katrín. Elínborg rings the doorbell again and explains that if she doesn't tell her about the case, Erlendur will arrive and will be far less agreeable. Erlendur arrives at Katrín's home after receiving a call from Elínborg.

Katrin tells him that her husband Albert was away on business and she was out dancing with friends when she met Holberg and a man with a camera. Katrín, her friends, and Holberg all went back to one of Katrín's friend's houses. Katrín stated that she was leaving and Holberg offered to walk her home; she refused. Katrín made it to her home and had opened the door when Holberg appeared behind her and pushed her into the home. Katrín goes into detail about what Holberg did to her, and says that he threatened that if she went to the police he would lie about the rape and then kill her.



Katrín blames herself for what happened because she feels that she led Holberg on by dancing with him at the dance.

When asked about her sons, she says that her third son was born two years after the rape, but Erlendur knows she is lying to them.

Chapter 33 begins as Elínborg and Erlendur are leaving Katrín's house. Elínborg asks why Erlendur decided to end the interview. Erlendur informs her that the interview was becoming too much for Katrin and she had begun to lie to them. Erlendur has Karín's phone tapped and some officers posted to watch her movements. The two meet up with Sigurdur Óli who has acquired a list of calls Holberg received the weekend before he died. There were two calls from his work place and three calls from public telephones.

The forensics team calls the group down to Holberg's home for important news. The forensics team has found what looks to be a hand with a ring on it in the foundation. Erlendur instructs them to open up the floor. The body is wrapped in plastic and is brought up to the team. Sigurdur Óli notices what appears to be rolls of film buried in the plastic with the body

Chapter 34 opens the next day with an account of what information the police have gained about Katrín and her family. Katrín has not left the house nor has anyone come to visit her. Albert returned from his business trip that afternoon. The police have located the two oldest sons, but the youngest son is still unaccounted for.

Erlendur meets with the same pathologist who examined Holberg and Audur to investigate the body in Hoberg's home. The pathologist notes that the body has had its innards removed in order to preserve the body and reduce the smell. He asks Erlendur to return later so he can have some time to investigate the body in greater depth.

Erlendur returns to his office to find Sigurdur Óli waiting for him. Sigurdur Óli informs him that the forensics team has developed and enlarged several of the pictures found with the body, but only one is usable. The photograph showed a man taking a picture of himself in the mirror in a dark room. Erlendur notices what looks to be a face in the darkness of the photograph and Ragnar scans the picture so he can sharpen the face in question. Ragnar informs the two that both Holberg and Grétar's fingerprints were found on the photograph. After the image is enhanced Erlendur and Óli make out the face of Holberg and a girl in the background.

After this discovery is made, Erlendur gets a call on his cell phone. Elínborg has learned that Katrín's youngest son works at the Genetic Research Center.

Chapter 35 takes place in Erlendur's home. Erlendur is contemplating the case and how everyone in Iceland seems to be connected to each other. Eva Lind returns and tells Erlendur that she went with the bride to her parent's house to tell her mother that she will be pressing charges against her father. They then went to her fiancée's to tell him what had happened. The husband took the news well and left to talk to the father. Erlendur is unsure how the case is going to turn out due to its difficult nature.



Chapter 36 takes place in Eydal's home. Hanna told Eydal that Erlendur would be coming, so he is prepared for him. After a discussion on the morality of collecting organs, the discussion focuses on Audur's brain. The doctor informs Erlendur that if the brain had been buried with the body it would not be possible to study it now. Furthermore, the doctor has already determined what killed Audur, a genetic disease called neurofibromatosis that is only found in a few families in Iceland. If Holberg is a carrier of this disease, his children would either be carriers like him or would suffer from the disease like Audur. Eydal tells Erlendur that the Genetic Research Centre would be able to tell him about genetic diseases.

Erlendur receives Audur's brain from Eydal and return it to the rest of Audur's body.

Chapter 37 opens with a description of what has happened in Katrín's home. Albert has angrily left the house and a few police officers have been sent to watch his movements.

Erlendur and Elínborg arrive the next morning to gather more information on her youngest son. Katrín had told Albert about the rape for the first time and he was angry that she had kept it from him for all these years. Erlendur inquires whether she told her husband the truth about her youngest son, Einar. Katrín bursts into tears and tells them that Einar was the result of the rape. Katrín hasn't seen her son in several days and has learned who Holberg was through the database.

## Analysis

In Chapter 29 it's discovered that Erlendur's dream in Chapter 16 was not prophetic. Erlendur admits to having dreams that occur with eerie accuracy, and the dream in Chapter 16 hinted that Erlendur's work, and specifically this case, would drive his daughter away from him. However, in chapter 29 we see Erlendur and his daughter bonding over the Holberg case and Erlendur's work in general.

Chapter 31 has yet another coincidental connection that supports the theme that everyone in Iceland is connected. The pathologist that Erlendur is working this case with just so happens to have a connection with the head of an Icelandic university that is storing the Jar City records. The chances of someone knowing just the person they need would be slim in most countries, but in Iceland it seems like everyone is connected in some way. This helps give the impression that Iceland is a small, isolated community, a trait that genetic researchers would find invaluable in their research.

The pictures found on the dead body under Holberg's house prove that the body is Grétar's and serve as a window into the past. This moment between Grétar, Holberg, and an unknown woman occurred decades ago, yet it is preserved on this small piece of paper for everyone to see even after Holberg and Grétar have passed. The image is so startlingly clear that Erlendur finds himself wanting to shout out to the woman to get out of there even though he knows that it is just a picture. Through this photo Holberg has been trapped by his past even after his own death.



Chapter 36 raises an interesting moral conundrum to Erlendur and the reader. While the doctors may have taken Audur's brain without the permission of her family, their actions have not only preserved the brain in question, but have also provided a wealth of knowledge about the disease to the world that may help combat or even cure the disease. Taking organs at the time seems to have been common practice for doctors in order to research and teach. So, the author is raising the moral question of whether the benefits outweigh the cost. On the one hand, taking the organs is a major breach of privacy for both the deceased and their family. On the other hand, taking these organs has allowed doctors to teach the next generation of medical professionals how to do their jobs, which will save countless people, and provide valuable knowledge about diseases that may lead to better care or even a cure. For example, the doctor who currently possesses Audur's brain has used it to research her disease and has published several articles about his findings in medical journals. Before they had Audur's brain, scientists didn't know anything about this disease and had difficulty even diagnosing it. Therefore, taking Audur's brain has helped everyone who does suffer from this disease.

The revelation of Einar's heritage ties into the theme of not everyone is who they appear to be. Einar's entire life has proven to be a lie. He is not the man he thought he was. Einar's life has been turned upside down during his investigation into his daughter's death because he has learned that everything he thought he knew was a lie. He is not his father's son and his brothers are only his half-brothers. Einar is not who he appears to be, even to himself. Ironically though, Einar is exactly who he appears to be, Holberg's son. This supports the theme of the sins of the past affecting the present because Einar is now forced to carry the burden for his father's sins, not only because they share an uncanny resemblance to one another, but because Einar is a carrier for the disease Holberg passed on to Audur. This is what caused the death of Einar's daughter. The son has already paid a grievous price for the sins of the father.

This information is also a shock for Albert, Elín's husband, because his son is not who he thought he was. Elín says that Einar is Albert's favorite son. So to find out that his favorite son isn't actually his son at all would have been just as large of a shock as Einar finding out that his father is not actually his father. Again, people are not always what they appear to be.

While Katrín is telling Erlendur and Elínborg about the confrontation she had with her husband, Katrín says, "Maybe I didn't tell him about it in the right way" (p.249). She is the third and final victim of sexual assault in this novel and there appears to be a pattern to all of these women. Every victim has showed concern that they brought the crimes upon themselves and they all seem to be extremely passive. Kolbrún was described as a quiet and meek person by everyone that knew her. The bride wasn't sure if she wanted to tell the truth about her abuse until Eva Lind convinced her to do so. Now, Katrín is not only blaming herself for the rape, she is blaming herself for her husband's anger. This supports Elín's theory in Chapter 11 that victims blaming themselves is a common reaction among victims of sexual assault.





The placement of police outside of Katrín's home is another example of a lack of privacy. Due to the fact that she is a victim of a rape committed by a murdered man, she is being watched by the police at all times in order to see if she is in any way connected to these crimes. Every move Katrín makes is being watched, and any guests she has in her home are being recorded. Even her phone calls are being listened to by the police. The unfortunate circumstances of her past have come back to haunt her in the present.

## Discussion Question 1

How do you feel about Audur's brain having been taken? Do the ends justify the means in this case? In other words, do the medical advancements justify the theft of Audur's brain?

## Discussion Question 2

What has changed in the relationship between Erlendur and Eva Lind? What causes the change?

## Discussion Question 3

How has Einar's life been affected by the past actions of his parents? Was his mother right to keep her secret?

## Vocabulary

pneumatic, discernable, exterminated, burrows, absence, digressions, conceivably, mortality, kin, mantelpiece, predetermined, conservatively, systematically, contrary, concealing, gauze, presumably, runt, hallucination



# Chapters 38-45

## Summary

In Chapter 38, the discussion with Katrin continues. Einar has confronted his mother about who his real father is. Einar has been researching genetic diseases and knows that Albert isn't his father and is questioning who he really is. Katrín explains what happened that night with Holberg. When Katrín explains that she kept it a secret so Einar wouldn't have to suffer for Holberg's actions he responds, "I've already suffered for it, mum...Endless torment" (p. 258). Katrín explains to Erlendur that Einar's daughter had died for no apparent reason and he was conducting his research to see how this could have been possible.

Chapter 39 continues the conversation with Katrín. With the information that his mother gave him, Einar was able to find Holberg in the database. Einar also discovered that his daughter died of neurofibromatosis, the same disease Audur died from.

Chapter 40 begins with Erlendur traveling to Einar's home. While in route, Erlendur calls Sigurdur Óli to have him give the media a picture of Einar. Erlendur and Sigurdur Óli meet at Einar's apartment and gather information from his neighbors. The landlord tells them that he hasn't seen Einar for a few days, perhaps a week. He gives Erlendur and Sigurdur Óli permission to check the room. Einar's walls are covered in the words "I am HIM". His apartment is filled with newspapers, magazines, scientific textbooks, and photo albums.

Erlendur recalls that the Genetic Research Centre has been gathering medical data of Icelanders, both alive and dead, into a database that is linked to Iceland's genealogy database in order to map hereditary illnesses.

While searching Einar's apartment, Elín calls Erlendur to tell him that Einar had been in her house. Einar told her everything that had happened and that "it was over" (p.267). He also said that he was returning to Reykjavík, but he never said why.

In chapter 41, Einar's picture has been posted around Reykjavík and surrounding towns and an announcement has been sent to the media stating that if he is found they are to not engage him and to contact Erlendur immediately.

Erlendur travels to the Genetic Research Centre. He speaks to the director of the company to discuss Einar breaking into the database and procuring information on Holberg. The director tells Erlendur that they were aware that someone was accessing the database without authorization, but their suspect, Einar, had disappeared before they could question him. They did not inform the police of this because they did not want the information that the database could be broken into to get out to the public. Einar had created a research project without authorization and forged the necessary



signatures to appear authentic. He then tricked both the data privacy committee and the scientific ethics committee into allowing him access to the database.

Sigurður Óli calls Erlendur during the meeting to tell him that they found a sawed-off shotgun barrel in Einar's flat.

Chapter 42 takes place in Erlendur's apartment. Erlendur and Eva Lind have an argument about his chest pains. Eva Lind wins the argument and convinces Erlendur to have his chest pain looked at.

Erlendur gets a call from Sigurður Óli. There has been a break-in at the morgue. Erlendur meets Sigurður Óli at the morgue. Audur's body and coffin are missing.

In Chapter 43, Erlendur drives to the cemetery that Audur was buried in as fast as he can. Erlendur finds Einar by Audur's grave with the coffin. Einar tells Erlendur that he is burying Audur in her grave. Erlendur gives Einar Audur's brain to bury with the body. Einar explains that the database fueled his desire to find how Audur could have died from this disease and how he could link Holberg and Audur through it.

In Chapter 44, Einar recounts the meeting with Holberg and how he killed him. Holberg continued to deny that he had raped anyone. Holberg attacked Einar first.

Although Erlendur tries to stop Einar, he shoots himself through the heart with his shotgun.

In Chapter 45, Einar is dead and Erlendur finishes burying Audur by himself. As he is finishing up people begin to congregate at the cemetery. Katrín begins to weep and throws herself over her son's body. The rain appears to be letting up.

Erlendur goes to the doctor and has his chest looked at. He has a bruised costal cartilage which was likely caused by sleeping on a bad mattress.

The book ends with Erlendur recommending that his daughter names her child Audur.

## Analysis

The author continues to explore the theme of nothing being private in this section. Einar's ability to track down Holberg with the Genetic Research Centre's data shows just how little privacy there is. The fact that Einar could know every person who has neuro-fibromatosis in Iceland shows that it is impossible to keep one's health a secret. No matter what someone does, there is always a group of people that knows every genetic disease they have and every genetic disease they might carry. Furthermore, Einar was able to trick everyone in the Genetic Research Centre into giving him access to the data. The head of the Genetic Research Centre said that she didn't want it known that the data they had could be accessed without proper authorization, and for good reason. The people of Iceland would be indignant if they knew that something as personal as the information in their DNA could be accessed by the wrong person. Not



only could Einar access Holberg's medical information, he was able to find out where Holberg lived and what his phone number was without even meeting him. The fact that a random person could have access to medical records, addresses, and phone numbers of anyone is a disturbing thought to most people because it is a major invasion of privacy.

The author uses the Genetic Research Centre to pose an open ended question of the ethics of having such an organization in place. As Einar's unauthorized research shows, having all of that information on people in one place can be dangerous no matter what precautions are taken. With a database like this in place, everyone in Iceland has as much privacy as Audur's corpse had on the autopsy slab. Their information can be obtained, processed, and recorded without them ever knowing. The Genetic Research Centre is the modern day Jar City, but instead of collecting organs to study they are collecting genetic information. However, like Audur, the lack of privacy may benefit a great number of people. As the director says, Iceland is an ideal place to study genetics since there is little immigration or emigration. This allows them to track genetic diseases generations back through the family lines. The data gained from this research could help scientists understand genetic diseases and how to better diagnose and cure them. While Erlendur may be skeptical about this organization, the author does not demonize the organization but rather allows the character of the director of the Genetic Research Centre to give a logical and well thought out response to Erlendur's thoughts and concerns.

Einar's meeting with Holberg fulfills the foreshadow in Kolbrún's prayer and shows that the past comes back to haunt the present. Einar is a representation of Holberg's past because he is a product of Holberg's crimes decades ago and because Einar is so similar to Holberg in appearance. Einar is a reminder of who Holberg was when he was younger, a ghost of Holberg's past. Einar and Holberg's dispute fulfills Kolbrún's prayer by punishing Holberg for his crimes. The second half of Psalm 64 states that God will strike those down that attack the blameless. Einar and Holberg's scuffle punishes Holberg for his actions by killing him through the very fruits of his crimes, his own son.

Despite Einar's appearance, he proves to be nothing like his biological father. Einar's life supports the idea that people aren't what they seem along with the belief that nurture is stronger than nature in determining who a person becomes. When Erlendur and Ellínborg are preparing to leave Katrín's home, Erlendur asks whether she could see the resemblance between Einar and Holberg. Katrín responds, "Children can take after anyone in the family. I could never see Holberg in my boy" (p.262). Given Einar's uncanny resemblance to his father, one would expect the two to bear some similar personality traits. However, Einar proves that this is not the case when Erlendur finally gets the chance to meet him and talk to him face to face. If anything, Einar appears to be the opposite of his father in the sense that while his father took pleasure in bringing others pain and misery, Einar wants to help those that are suffering. This is evident in the way that he comforts his mother after she tells him the truth of his birth and the fact that he has decided that his last act on earth would be to bury his dead sister in her grave again. Einar also tries to end what Holberg began by killing both Holberg and himself in order to end Holberg's family line and the disease that goes with it. The



difference in personality between the father and son shows that a person's genes aren't what determine who they become, but rather the people who raised them.

Throughout the book it has been raining constantly, but in the last two chapters the rain finally begins to let up. This not only lightens the mood for the end of the book, but symbolizes the condition of the case. The rain had been growing worse as the book went on to symbolize how deep and difficult this case was with all of its twists and turns. However, in these final chapters when everything has been resolved, the rain finally begins to let up.

The message tree mentioned throughout the story is a symbol of secrets within the family. The purpose of the message tree is to pass on notes to a bride and groom without them knowing who wrote the message. This secretiveness is also present in the Genetic Research Centre and Einar's message that he left at the scene of the crime. All of these scenes are passing secret information about families to another party. Disa Rós' message on the message tree was a message about what her father had been doing to her for years, Einar's note told the reader about his relation to Holberg and the internal struggle he faced with being related to a rapist, and the Genetic Research Centre sends encrypted messages about people's family trees to researchers so they can study the family's history of genetic diseases. All of these messages are secretive, they cannot be correctly interpreted until the reader has acquired a certain piece of information. In order to interpret Disa Rós' note, Erlendur had to know about her relationship with her father. In order to understand Einar's note, Erlendur had to know that he was related to Holberg, and in order for a researcher to use the data they have been given, they need to be able to decrypt the data they have been given.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Einar differ from Holberg? What might the author be suggesting by making the son so different from his father?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does the author continuously mention the rain throughout the book? What has changed about the weather as the book comes to a close? What does this change reflect?

## Discussion Question 3

Why did Einar kill himself?

## Vocabulary

database, postnatal, heaved, urge, genealogy, deviation, consolation, steadfast, indecipherable, hereditary, impressive, encryption, decodes, palpable, hurl, resemblance, peculiar



# Characters

## Erlendur

Erlendur is the protagonist of the novel. He is the lead detective in the case and is a middle aged man in Iceland. Erlendur is a seasoned professional with the police force and is known for being a hard man who always gets his way in the department, a reputation that he greatly enjoys for the freedom it gives him. Despite his reputation of being a stubborn person, Erlendur is skilled at keeping a cool head under stressful situations. Erlendur is able to act calm even while he is interviewing Ellidi, a hardened and violent criminal. Erlendur is very blunt and direct when he talks to people and will not mince his words in order to save people's feelings. While at work, Erlendur rarely talks about his home life and his coworkers know very little about him. His neighbors also know very little about him since he never interacts with them

Erlendur is very well read and his home is filled with books. He often eats microwavable meals at home and contemplates the case he is working on. During this book, Erlendur spends most of his time at home talking to his daughter about her addiction, her baby, and the cases he is working on. His relationship to his daughter is strained due to his rocky divorce and the lack of custody he had over his children. By the time Erlendur was able to reunite with his daughter, she was already in rough shape and he feels responsible for her current condition.

As the pain in his chest shows, Erlendur does not live a healthy lifestyle himself. He is a heavy smoker who can smoke more than eight cigarettes a day if he feels stressed. His diet is poor at best since he only eats take out or microwavable meals. Furthermore, Erlendur does not exercise and drives everywhere rather than walk. All of these factors have made him and his daughter worry that the pain in his chest may be a dire medical condition. However, Erlendur does not want it looked at in case the results confirm his fear. He believes that if he goes to the doctor to have his pain looked at, they will tell him that he is dying and he will be trapped in a hospital being treated until the end. If he doesn't say anything, then he can continue living his life until his final moments.

Among Erlendur's skills is the ability to have eerily accurate dreams. Erlendur has a dream about digging up Audur's grave, which proves to be incredibly accurate to the point where he himself is uncomfortable. The narrator also points out that this is not the first time Erlendur has had these accurate dreams before, a rather peculiar trait in this otherwise realistic police procedural

## Holberg

Holberg is the murder victim in the story. Upon inspecting his home, the police find nothing unique about this man. His home is neat and nothing seems out of place. However, as they dig further, they find that Holberg had a large collection of



pornography on his computer and a very well read copy of Lolita. In reality, Holberg was far from a typical elderly man. He was a rapist. Holberg raped at least two women in his lifetime. His friend Ellidi says that he was insane. Holberg enjoyed torturing his victims by spewing depravities into their ear while he raped them and making lewd gestures at Kolbrún in front of the police when they were reunited. He was also very charismatic, and people tended to trust him. Holberg charmed women into letting him into their homes before raping them.

## Kolbrún

Kolbrún was one of Holberg's rape victims and the first victim that the police discovered. She was a very quiet girl according to one of her coworkers. She had to be convinced to go to the party where Holberg met her. Though timid, Kolbrún was not weak willed. She is determined to raise and love the child who was conceived as a result of the rape. She blames herself for the rape because she believes that she must have done something to provoke Holberg.

Kolbrún loves her daughter, Audur, more than anything in the world and she becomes severely depressed after Audur dies. Kolbrún commits suicide a few years after her daughter's death because the only thing worth living for had been taken from her

## Eva Lind

Eva Lind is Erlendur's daughter. Eva Lind lived with her mother for most of her life. She did not seek out her father until she was an adult. She is a drug addict with a criminal record for dealing drugs to minors. While once beautiful, she has grown incredibly skinny and has lost two of her teeth due to her addiction. She can be quite manipulative when she wants something.

Early on in the book, Eva Lind tells her father that she is pregnant. Most of her story revolves around her struggling with her addiction and trying to end it so she does not harm her child. This plan does not always work, and Erlendur must retrieve her from a drug den at one point.

Eva Lind is the one who tells Erlendur about the missing bride case and also manages to stumble across the bride in the drug den. Eva Lind becomes the spokesperson for the missing bride case and informs Erlendur of its developments as the book progresses.

## Elín

Elín is Kolbrún's sister and the police's primary source of information about Kolbrún's life. Elín is an older woman living alone. She is very defensive of her sister and her memory because she saw the pain her sister went through after the rape. She shows a strong distrust for the police after everything that happened to her sister because she





believes that the police did not believe her sister's claims and that they defended Holberg. Over time she grows to trust Erlendur and reveals information about Kolbrún and Audur. However, that trust is quick to break once the police dig up Audur's corpse.

## Sigurdur Óli

Sigurdur Óli is one of Erlendur's partners in the police force. He is a very professional looking man who wears suits and ties and has his phone in a holder on his belt. He graduated from an American university with a criminology degree. Despite his education and appearance, Sigurdur Óli serves more often as comic relief than as a person who pushes the plot forward. Sigurdur Óli often finds himself in embarrassing situations like yelling at one of Holberg's coworkers about whether or not they were sleeping together (i.e., if the man had stayed at Holberg's before he was murdered) and having to rush off of a woman's doorstep after bluntly asking if she recalls ever being raped.

He is in a relationship with a girl, but it may be in trouble due to different levels of dedication. Sigurdur Óli is willing to spend a week searching through all of the stores in town to find a specific kind of watch for his girlfriend. Meanwhile, she buys him a pair of boots that can be found most anywhere.

## Einar

Einar is Holberg's son and murderer. He is the child of Holberg's Húsavík rape. Katrin had been hiding his origin from him for years, so he was confused that his daughter died of a rare genetic disease. After his daughter dies, Einar is intent on finding the reason for her death. This morphs into an obsession with finding his real father. This sets him on a path that leads to him finding and killing his father.

Einar's apartment is cluttered with medical journals and magazines, and his walls are covered in the same message that he left at his father's home. Despite these drastic actions, Einar is a reasonable and ordinary man. Besides being an expert in genetic illnesses, there is nothing special about him. He has a loving wife and child until his daughter's death, and he shows no similarities to his biological father other than his physical appearance.

## Katrin

Katrin is Einar's mother and the woman whom Holberg raped in Húsavík. Katrin is a very timid and submissive woman who blames herself for the rape. She also blames herself for her husband's anger after he learns about the rape. She is very loving towards Einar and the rest of her family. She had kept the rape a secret for all of these years so no one would be troubled by it or see Einar differently.



## Disa Rós

Disa Rós is the runaway bride for whom Erlendur is searching. Her parents describe her as if they were describing a young child, even though she is a college student. Eva Lind finds Disa Rós in a drug den. Disa Rós blames herself for her father's continuous sexual abuse and only agrees to press charges after Eva Lind convinces her to do so.

## Ellidi

Ellidi is one of Holberg's friends. Ellidi is in prison for a list of crimes and has been in and out of jail for years. Ellidi is a violent sociopath who will do or say anything to get what he wants. He has no tact and will say whatever derogatory thing comes to his mind to put people off when they are talking to him. In a desperate attempt to reduce his time in solitary, Ellidi agrees to tell Erlendur about the Húsavík rape. Without Ellidi, no one would have known about the other rape or where to begin looking for the victim, whose son turns out to be the murderer.

## Grétar

Grétar was another one of Holberg's friends. He mysteriously went missing decades ago and has not been found. He is described as the coward in the group, neither strong nor smart like his friends. He loved photography with a burning passion. He is found dead in the foundation of Holberg's home by the police force along with rolls of film. He was likely killed for trying to blackmail Holberg with the rolls of film.

## Marion Briem

Marion Briem is Erlendur's mentor and a retired police detective. Marion Briem is a well-connected person with contacts in a vast amount of social circles. Marion has an astounding memory and can remember most anything with intense clarity. Kolbrún's rape case was one of Marion's cases while on the force, and Marion regrets being less than successful with this case. Marion is the one who provides the information needed to find Grétar's body in Holberg's foundation. The author never reveals Marion's gender.

## Elínborg

Elínborg is one of Erlendur's coworkers. She is an expert in polite conversation and goes to many of the houses of the women on the list of possible Húsavík women to gather information about leads to the rape victim. She attempts to teach her tricks to Sigurdur Óli, but with little success.



## **The Father**

The author does not give Disa Rós' father a name. He is a wealthy man who cares more for his reputation and money than his daughter. He is the monster in her note. He has been sexually abusing his daughter since she was a child.

## **The Mother**

The author does not give Disa Rós' mother a name. While she cares about her reputation and money like her husband does, she also shows genuine concern for her missing daughter. Despite this concern, she has known about her husband's actions for years and has done nothing to protect her daughter for fear of what it would mean for their reputation and wealth.

## **The Pathologist**

The pathologist is the person who is in charge of the police autopsies of Holberg, Audur, and Grétar. He introduces the question of whether it is moral to disturb the dead.

## **Eydal**

Eydal is the doctor who is in possession of Audur's brain. He studies genetic diseases in his spare time and has contributed a wealth of knowledge as to how Audur's disease works. He furthers the question of the morality of disturbing the dead when he and Erlendur discuss his private collection of organs.

## **Hanna**

Hanna is the head of the University of Iceland's medical department. She finds the record of where Audur's brain went after Jar City was closed down.

## **Eddi**

Eddi is a drug dealer who occasionally sells Eva Lind drugs. He tells Erlendur where to find her after she goes missing.

## **Hilmar**

Hilmar is one of Holberg's coworkers who occasionally stayed at his house. Hilmar says that Holberg seemed agitated last time he was there and that someone kept calling him.



## Fjóla and Birna

Fjóla and Birna are the twins who were attacked by the man in the green jacket. These two characters introduce the main red herring in the Holberg case with the possibility that Holberg was attacked by a common thief who became violent. The two women have distinctly different views on their attacker and represent the two main ways people view criminals; as victims of unfortunate circumstances or as people whose choices led them down this path.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Watch and Wellington Boots

The watch and boots are symbolic of the love between Sigurdur Óli and his significant other and for their dedication to their relationship. Sigurdur Óli spent a week searching the town's stores and talking with the shop owners to find the exact watch he wanted to give his significant other. This shows that he is very dedicated to his girlfriend and their relationship. His girlfriend bought him a pair of boots. While it does show that she thinks of him and cares about him and their relationship, it is nowhere near the love and dedication he has for her.

## Rain

The rain in this book reflects the Holberg case. When the book begins the rain has started, but it is nothing out of the ordinary. However, as the book progresses the rain seems to worsen to the point that it is close to breaking Iceland's record. This is the point when the Holberg case has become complicated by the search for Grétar's body and the search for Audur's brain is underway. The heavy rainfall in this section symbolizes the difficulty and status of the case. When Erlendur finds Einar at Audur's grave, the rain seems to lighten up. This is symbolic of the case coming to an end. The suffering that characters like Einar and Katrin have endured is also ending.

## Message Tree

The message tree is a symbol of cryptic messages sent to someone. The message tree's purpose is for people to send anonymous messages to a newly married couple. Disa Rós uses the message tree to leave a note about someone being a monster. This message was cryptic. Since it was unsigned, her mother had to confirm that it was her handwriting. Also, she never revealed or hinted at the identity of the monster.

Erlendur also references the message tree after the director of the Genetic Research Centre explains how they transmit data to their researchers. The company sends encrypted data to their researchers along with a code so they can decipher the data they have been given. That way no one could hack into the data bank and take people's information.

## Jar City

References to Jar City symbolize an invasion of privacy. Erlendur is disturbed by the existence of Jar City because it houses organs that are taken from autopsy subjects without the family's knowledge or permission. Erlendur references Jar City when talking



with the director of the Genetic Research Centre because he feels that storing the genetic records of the nation is a major invasion of privacy for the people of Iceland.

## Erlendur's Chest Pain

The pain in Erlendur's chest symbolizes his unhealthy lifestyle and reluctance to change. Erlendur's chest pain is a symptom of his lack of exercise, unhealthy eating habits, and heavy smoking. He is unwilling to go and have his pain checked because he would have to change how he lives his life. This shows the hypocrisy of his chastising Eva Lind for the way that she lives her life. While he ignores his own unhealthy habits, he is more than willing to tell his daughter that she needs to do.

## The Festival

The festival is a symbol of everyone's connection to each other. Everyone who is old enough attends the same festival, no matter where they are from or their position in life. Grétar was believed to have been at the festival, and Elín remembers being at the festival, Erlendur says he was at the festival, and Marion Briem clearly remembers the festival. This proves that everyone in Iceland is connected in one or more ways.

## Erlendur's Dream

Erlendur's dream is a symbol of how his work has shut out the potential for the ideal family that he dreams of. In his dream, Erlendur pictures Eva Lind as a divine being clothed all in white and seemingly floating above the ground. This is the ideal family that Erlendur wants, his daughter living a good and healthy life. However, this image of his daughter fades after she hands him a picture of Audur's grave. This means that Erlendur's work is overtaking that family that Erlendur wants to make it an unrealized dream.

## Audur

Audur serves as a symbol of people who die young. Several times throughout the book Erlendur wonders how a girl like Audur can die when she is four years old, while people like his daughter get to grow up and throw their lives away on drugs. Also, terrible people like Holberg and Rúnar get to grow old. Young and innocent people can die for no reason, while others throw their lives away. People who deserve punishment get to live out their lives in peace.

## Photographs

Photographs serve as symbols for the past. Pictures allow the characters to step into the past in order to gather information about the case. They are also capable of fooling



the brain into thinking they are happening now. An example of this is when the forensics team is working with the picture found on Grétar's body. When the picture is enhanced to allow the team to see what it is, Erlendur has to fight back the urge to shout to tell the girl to get out of there.

## Sveinn

Sveinn is a symbol of the cruel and heartless. Sveinn is a person who goes skating after leaving his friends to freeze to death. Sveinn lacks remorse and compassion for those around him and only cares about his own pleasure. This image brings to mind people like Holberg, Rúnar, and Disa Rós' father. All of those people hurt others around them for their own pleasure.



# Settings

## Iceland

The primary setting of this novel is the country of Iceland, the author's native country. From the novel, the reader gets a picture of Iceland as being fairly small since the characters all seem to be connected. It also appears to be isolated from the rest of the world, and perhaps a little slow and sleepy, as is evidenced by Erlendur's initial opinion that Holberg's murder will proved to be another typical crime that will be easily solved. Nothing of any great intrigue ever seems to occur in Iceland.

The weather of Iceland seems to be extremely dismal, with rain being a constant presence throughout the novel. This makes the setting very dreary and with little cheer. The author emphasizes the rainy weather of Iceland to use it as a symbol for the state of the criminal investigation. The rain is heaviest during the darkest, most difficult part of the case. Then, skies lighten up as the case comes to a close.

## Holberg's Home

Holberg's home is the first setting in the book and the scene of the murder. The apartment is clean and tidy with nothing conspicuous on first inspection. However, when a team looks through Holberg's belongings and computer files at his home, they discover information on who Holberg was as a person. Erlendur finds a picture of Audur's grave. Holberg's home contains the body of Grétar in the foundation, along with rolls of film that contain incriminating evidence.

## Erlendur's Flat

Erlendur's flat is where most of the interactions between Erlendur and Eva Lind occur. Erlendur often uses the time in his flat to reflect on the status of the case and talk to his daughter about her life and how the case is going. Erlendur's apartment is filled with books.

## Graveyard

The graveyard is the place where Audur's body is buried. Erlendur and the team dig up Audur's grave to study her body and determine that she is Holberg's daughter. The team must restrain Elín while they are doing so because she is infuriated that they are disturbing the dead. Erlendur returns here at the end of the book to find Einar reburying his half-sister. Einar also commits suicide here.





## **Elín's Home**

Elín's home is where Erlendur learns the details of Kolbrún and her rape case. Elín tells Erlendur about Rúnar and Kolbrún's attempt to go to the police. Einar finds Elín and her address. She stands outside and stares at her home for a time while Elín calls the police to report Holberg being outside her home. Einar later returns and explains the situation to Elín in her home.

## **Genetic Research Centre**

The Genetic Research Center is the place where Einar works and gathers his information on who Holberg was. The research center has information on the genetics, address, phone number, and ancestry of everyone in Iceland. The Genetic Research Centre did not want to go to the police about Einar's data breach for fear of what the people would think if they knew that someone had managed to sneak into the database and gather information on people.



# Themes and Motifs

## The Sins of the Past Haunt the Present

A common theme throughout this book is that the mistakes made in the past still affect people in the present. Holberg's crimes and Einar's existence are strong examples of this. Holberg raped Katrin, and now his son is paying the price. Einar lost his only daughter and his marriage because of the genetic disease that Holberg passed down to him to carry. Einar has also had to grapple with the fact that everything he knew was a lie. After Einar learned the truth about his father, his entire life was turned upside down. The man he called "Dad" was not his father, and his brothers were only his half-brothers. Finally, Einar bears a striking resemblance to Holberg. Whenever he looks in the mirror, he will forever see his biological father looking back at him and remember what Holberg did to his family.

Rúnar and Marion Briem's crimes and mistakes have also complicated the present by making it difficult for Erlendur to gain Elín's trust. Rúnar humiliated and damaged Kolbrún with how he treated her when she came to report the rape and disposed of her evidence. This caused Elín to distrust the police because they did not believe her sister and abused her. Marion Briem's mistake further proved this belief in Elín's mind when Marion brought Kolbrún and Holberg together, an encounter that ended with Kolbrún in hysterics and requiring a doctor. Erlendur must now fight against the preconceived notions Elín has of the police in order to learn the truth and find Holberg's murderer.

Audur's doctors have also complicated the case by taking the brain without records of where it went. The doctors that performed Audur's autopsy left no records of where the brain went after they took it, so Erlendur must now search for information on where the brain is in order to solve this case.

Photographs are another way in which the past haunts the present. Photographs preserve moments in time for decades. These allow the past to linger throughout time. The photograph found with Grétar's body has such an effect. This photo preserved a moment of Holberg talking to a woman at a party. This picture was so clear that Erlendur had to fight back the urge to scream at the woman to get out of there before Holberg raped her. This moment in time has come back to haunt those who would have never known about this moment were it not for this photograph.

## Biblical Motif

The author uses Biblical passages and imagery throughout the book. For example, Kolbrún put a line of Psalm 64 on Audur's grave and left another section of the psalm on a note when she committed suicide. The psalm the author has chosen to include mirrors Kolbrún's situation. The psalm talks about how the wicked strike down the innocent in an ambush and say to themselves that no one can see them or their crimes. Holberg



and Rúnar are the wicked who ambushed Kolbrún. Holberg tricked Kolbrún into letting him into her house where he could do whatever he wanted to her in private. Holberg was also under the belief that he could get away with his crime. When Marion Briem reunited the two, Holberg smiled at Kolbrún and made an obscene gesture at her that sent her into a fit. Holberg was confident enough that he tortured this girl in front of a police investigator. Rúnar used Kolbrún's claim of rape to attack her verbally with inappropriate questions about the rape, telling her that she was faking the entire case, and disposing of the evidence she brought in to support her claim. Rúnar was also confident that these crimes would not bring him harm. Elín says that she yelled at him once when he was passing by and he smiled as she did so.

However, the second half of psalm 64 says that God would judge those evildoers. Both of these men did eventually face punishment for their crimes. Holberg died by the work of his own crimes when his son killed him in his flat and Rúnar was eventually kicked off the police force for multiple cases of sexual harassment. Psalm 64 serves as an outline for the story of Kolbrún and her attackers.

The author also uses Biblical imagery in Erlendur's dream when it depicts Eva Lind dressed in white and appearing like an angel. This emphasizes the idea that this Eva Lind is pure and wholesome rather than the broken drug addicted one that is reality. It also shows that this is Erlendur's ideal family. By using angelic imagery, this Eva Lind is associated with a beautiful and perfect creature. This shows the reader that Erlendur desires this family.

## Nothing is Private

The people of Húsavík, Jar City, Audur's autopsy, and the Genetic Research Centre are examples of how nothing is private in Iceland.

As the search for the rape victim from Húsavík continues, the people of Húsavík become more and more interested in the state of the case. They begin gossiping and talking about who this person could be and questioning the police to gather information to gossip about. This was supposed to be a fairly private investigation, and now everyone in Húsavík knows about it. Suddenly this woman and her story have become the center of the town gossip after spending decades doing everything she could to keep it private. She never even told her husband about the rape in order to keep it private, and now her story is being shared and everyone is trying to find out who she is. All of her privacy has been lost. After the police find her, Katrin's phone is tapped. A police car is watching her home and recording who comes in and out. In a matter of days, all of Katrin's privacy has been taken from her.

Jar City and Audur's autopsy shows how even the organs in one's body are not private. The doctors performed an autopsy on Audur's body even though Kolbrún forbade them from doing so. This shows a lack of privacy for the parent because their children can be opened up if the doctors feel that it is necessary. Furthermore, the doctors took Audur's brain without even telling her mother what they were doing. The brain is where a



person's knowledge and personality are stored. By taking Audur's brain from her body, the doctors have removed Audur from her body. Jar City is where organs like Audur's brain are stored for study and teaching. This building is filled with organs that have been taken from people's bodies. Parts of the human body that remain hidden and private for a person's entire life are now on display in a room for anyone to see.

The Genetic Research Centre is the Jar City of the 21st century. It stores the genetic information of everyone in Iceland and their ancestor's genetic information in order to study genetic diseases. This organization has the information that creates a person for any researcher to observe and study. This company also has the phone numbers and addresses of everyone in Iceland. People like Einar can find anyone they want if they can manage to gain access to the database. Even a person's genes are no longer private.

## **Not Everyone is Who They Appear to Be**

Many of the characters in this book are not who they appear to be when they are first introduced. Holberg is the most obvious example. In Chapter 1, Holberg appears to be a typical single man. His home is nothing spectacular. It is fairly neat and tidy. There is no reason to expect anything strange about this recently departed person. However, as the story progresses and more information is gathered on Holberg, he strays further and further from the normal man he appeared to be. He becomes a depraved monster in the mind of the reader. Up to this point, there was no reason to think that this seemingly normal man would be a criminal, especially given that he is the victim in this story.

Disa Rós' father is another character who is not what he appears to be. While he may come across as more concerned about money and his reputation than his daughter, there is no indication that he is the monster that his daughter mentions in her note. No one expects a wealthy, successful father to sexually abuse his own daughter. Yet, that is exactly what happened.

Also, Rúnar is not who he appears to be. The police are supposed to protect the innocent and hunt down criminals. However, when Kolbrún came into his office to report the rape, Rúnar refused to believe that she was raped. He embarrassed her, humiliated her, and disposed of the evidence that she brought in as proof. Even decades later he was still persecuting Kolbrún when he defended his actions by calling her a whore. This man, a police officer, humiliated the innocent and protected the criminal.

While some of these people are worse than they appear to be at a glance, that is not the case for all of the novel's characters. For example, Sigurdur Óli is more humorous than he first appears to be. Sigurdur Óli comes across as a very serious man who walks around in a suit and tie with his mobile in a harness at his waist for efficiency. However, Sigurdur Óli is the comic relief for this book. Sigurdur Óli often has a quip to give when the scene is getting intense in order to break the tension and often finds himself in awkward situations when left alone, like when he is loudly asking one of Holberg's coworkers if he was sleeping with Holberg or his inability to sensitively inquire about



whether someone was raped. This very serious looking person is actually very different from his appearance.

Erlendur is also not what one would expect at first glance. This gruff and grumpy man is far more knowledgeable than he appears to be. It's unexpected when the author describes how Erlendur's home is filled with books because he does not come across as the bookish type. Erlendur is very well read and references several pieces of Icelandic literature throughout the book. Erlendur is also less in control of his life than he appears to be. Given the criticism he gives his daughter about how she lives her life, one would expect that he lives a fairly healthy lifestyle. In reality, he is in bad shape physically because of a lack of exercise, poor eating habits, and a severe addiction to smoking.

Finally, Einar is the most extreme case of a person who is not what he appears to be. The entire pretense of Einar's life has been a lie. His dad is not his father; his brothers are only his half-brothers; and, he is the result of a rape. Einar is also nothing like his father. He detests who his father is and what he has done. Given their relationship and the eerie similarity in their appearance, one would expect Einar to have some similarities to his father. However, their physical appearance and their status as carriers for their genetic disease are the only things they share. Einar is different from what even he expected himself to be.

## Everyone is Connected

Everyone in this novel is connected in some way. Despite the fact that Katrín and Kolbrún are on opposite sides of Iceland, the two women are connected through Holberg. They underwent a similar traumatic experience, and their children are half-siblings. Both are connected to Ellidi and Grétar since these men were with Holberg when he met the women.

Marion Briem is also connected to a large number of people. Marion is connected to Kolbrún, Elín, and Holberg because Marion was the detective in charge of the Kolbrún case. Marion Briem is also connected to Holberg's friends due to their various run-ins with the law. Marion Briem is connected to Rúnar to the point that Rúnar threatened Marion's life. Marion is also able to find the exact plumber who worked on Holberg's house by using his contacts in the plumbing community. Marion Briem seems to be connected to almost everyone in Iceland.

Erlendur is connected to Marion Briem since Marion is his mentor. This means that he has shared a connection with these people for years without even knowing it. Furthermore, Erlendur is connected to Ellidi and Eddi through his daughter. As a member of law enforcement, it would seem unlikely that Erlendur would have any connection to a violent sociopath and a drug dealer other than through arrests, yet Erlendur has a connection that allows him talk to Eddi peacefully without the need for arrest and share a common factor in both Erlendur and Eddi's life. Erlendur is also

connected to members of the upper class through his ex-wife. Erlendur is connected to all parts of society, from criminals to the upper class.

The festival also serves as a symbol of the close connections in Iceland. For anyone old enough, the festival is a shared experience for everyone despite where they come from and what walk of life they are from. Erlendur, Elín, and Grétar were all there and Marion Briem clearly remembers the festival. These four people are from different parts of Iceland and are part of very different circles, yet they all share this festival in common.

This feeling of connection helps emphasize the feeling that Iceland is small and isolated and makes the reason for the Genetic Research Centre's existence in Iceland more logical to the audience. Showing how everyone is connected creates a feeling that Iceland is very small and that everyone knows everyone. If the research center needed a space where the subjects could easily be observed and genetics could be traced back generations, what better place than the place that is so small and secluded and everyone is connected?



# Styles

## Point of View

The novel is written from the third person limited point of view, primarily following Erlendur's perspective. Occasionally, it switches to Sigurdur Óli or Elínborg. The reader is only allowed access to the thoughts of the character they are following. They are not able to know what anyone else is thinking. This creates a sense of mystery. Other characters could be lying or hiding something and the reader would have no idea until the character they are following finds out.

The majority of the novel follows Erlendur because he is the lead detective of the investigation. This allows the reader to see the major events of the story first hand rather than learn them through another character informing them of developments in the case. However, the author does occasionally change the perspective to follow Sigurdur Óli or Elínborg. Most of Sigurdur Óli's perspectives allow the reader a moment of comic relief to lower the tension of the case. For example, Sigurdur Óli's investigation into Holberg's workplace provides no information that propels the case forward, but it does provide some humor when he yells at one of Holberg's hard of hearing coworkers to determine if he had slept at Holberg's home. The shifts to Elínborg often propel the story forward since she is able to gather information that neither Erlendur nor Sigurdur Óli can gather due to a lack of tact on their part.

The occasional flashbacks follow the victims to allow the reader to see what happened that night rather than have someone retell it to them. It's more interesting for the audience if the story allows the reader to see and experience the past for themselves rather than have a page or more of someone explaining what happened in the past. It also increases the disgust with Holberg and the horror of the crimes because the readers are experiencing that night through the mindset of the victim rather than being an unattached third party.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this book is simple and straightforward. This novel is appropriate for a high school audience. The only complicated part of the language in this novel is the fact that this is a translation from Icelandic and written for a European English speaking audience. This means that certain objects will have a different word than an American English speaker would normally use to describe them. There are also occasional errors in translation, such as missing quotation marks, which will confuse the reader if they are not aware of this beforehand.

The author does not use much in the way of imagery or metaphors, so the audience will have little difficulty following the story. However, if the reader has not been exposed to police mysteries before, some of the terms that Erlendur and his team use may be



confusing. Forensics appear in this story frequently. If the audience is unfamiliar with what forensics is or what the forensics department does, they could be confused by some of the technical terms used.

## Structure

The story is divided into 45 chapters which are approximately five pages in length each. The majority of the novel is in present tense, with occasional flashbacks to the victims. This gives a sense that the reader is there with the police force rather than reading a police report about a case that is now closed. The flashbacks allow the reader to have a more complete understanding of the case than would be had if the entire story was in present tense and a character explained everything that happened to the audience.

This novel is set up like a police procedural mystery. This means that the novel is attempting to create a realistic police investigation for the reader to follow rather than following a private investigator like Sherlock Holmes. Police procedurals also follow several cases rather than one large case. One key difference between a typical police procedural novel and this book is the way the culprit is handled. In a typical police procedural, the criminal is revealed at the beginning and the story involves the reader watching the police come to the criminal. However, in this book, the reader does not know the identity of the criminal until near the end of the novel. This creates suspense about who committed the crime and blends the police procedural and whodunit sub-genres together.





## Quotes

HE'S A MONSTER WHAT HAVE I DONE?

-- Disa Rós (Chapter 4)

**Importance:** This quote is found on the message tree in the home of Disa Rós' parents after Erlendur has interviewed them. It is the only major clue that Erlendur receives in the runaway bride case. It serves to deceive the reader into assuming that her fiancée is the monster in the message. In reality, the quote refers to the bride's father who has been sexually abusing her since she was a child.

Preserve my life from fear of the enemy.

-- Elín (Chapter 8)

**Importance:** This is the Bible verse that Kolbrún put on Audur's grave. This quote introduces Psalm 64 into the story and gives a context for the reader to interpret how it applies to the story. It also shows Kolbrún's concern for keeping her daughter safe from harm.

She blamed herself. I expect that's a common reaction.

-- Elín (Chapter 11)

**Importance:** This quote occurs in one of Elín and Erlendur's conversations. Elín is describing Kolbrún's condition after the rape. It foreshadows how all of the sexual assault victims in the book will respond to the crimes that have been done to them.

He was even madder than me.

-- Ellidi (Chapter 13)

**Importance:** This quote occurs while Erlendur and Sigurdur Óli are questioning Ellidi in prison. It characterizes Holberg by stating that even someone like Ellidi thought he was crazy. Ellidi has already done and said several things to establish himself as violent and mentally disturbed. This same man says Holberg was even worse than he is.

He told her about the other one!

-- Ellidi (chapter 13)

**Importance:** This quote is Ellidi's desperate attempt to keep Erlendur and Sigurdur Óli in the room. By saying this, Ellidi gives Erlendur the lead he needs to begin the next step of the investigation into Holberg's murder.

Maybe it was necessary to wash people's sins away every now and again.

-- Narrator (Chapter 17)

**Importance:** This quote invokes the Biblical motif by comparing rain to baptism. The purpose of baptism is to wash away sins, so using this quote evokes comparisons to



baptism. It also foreshadows what Erlendur is about to do. Erlendur feels guilty that he is coming to tell Elín that his team will be digging up Audur's grave, a deed he knows she will disapprove of.

He told me once that photos were the mirrors of time  
-- Theodóra (Chapter 20)

**Importance:** This quote occurs when Erlendur visits Grétar's mother in the nursing home. Theodóra tells Erlendur what Grétar thought of photography, which helps connect him to the crime through the photo of Audur's grave found in Holberg's apartment. This quote also bluntly states the symbolic meaning of photographs in this case.

Do come in. Don't be afraid. It's just meat...No soul, no life, just a carcass of meat.  
-- The Pathologist (Chapter 21)

**Importance:** This quote occurs in Erlendur's first meeting with the pathologist to look at Audur's body after it was exhumed. This quote begins the moral question of whether or not people should remove the organs of the dead. Erlendur often shows disgust over the idea of taking the organs of the dead, while most of the medical professionals treat it like it is just a normal part of the business.

She said he wasn't feeling very well  
-- Klara (Chapter 23)

**Importance:** This is Klara talking about her mother's meeting with Erlendur in the nursing home. Theodóra seems able to tell that something is wrong with Erlendur after their brief encounter. This increases the mystery and suspense of Erlendur's condition because it hints that there may be something seriously wrong with Erlendur.

We haven't talked about anything else since you started looking for her.  
-- One of the women from Húsavík (Chapter 26)

**Importance:** This quote occurs during one of Sigurdur Óli's interviews with the women on the list. This woman seems overly friendly given Sigurdur Óli's inability to use psychology. She is very curious about the case. The fact that the popular gossip topic in Húsavík is a secret that someone has been trying to hide for most of her life shows a lack of privacy.

Iceland, where everyone seemed related or connected in some way  
-- Narrator (Chapter 35)

**Importance:** This is one of the thoughts that goes through Erlendur's mind while he is at home contemplating the cases he is working on. The author bluntly states the theme that everyone in Iceland is connected.

Who are you if you're not yourself?  
-- Einar (Chapter 44 paragraph 288)

**Importance:** This is the most moving example of how not everyone is what they seem. This shows that Einar was not the man he believed himself to be. This line also gives the reader insight into the extreme cognitive dissonance Einar is experiencing in his final moments so his reasoning for committing suicide can be understood.