

Q&A with Ragnar Jonasson

1. *Rupture* is set outside Siglufjörður, in Hedinsfjörður. Can you tell us a little about the place?

Héðinsfjörður is the fjord next to Siglufjörður. It used to be completely isolated, and only accessible by sea or by crossing mountains. Not many people have lived there, and in the 1950s, the last remaining inhabitants left. In the book, I make up the story of two couples who move there in 1955, into an abandoned farmhouse. Héðinsfjörður is now, very recently, accessible via a mountain tunnel from Siglufjörður, and it is an absolutely stunning place, especially in the winter, when there is total darkness there, and the sky is filled with stars or Northern Lights.

2. What was your inspiration for this book?

The story behind the plot in Hedinsfjörður – which I won't discuss in detail for obvious reasons – essentially came from reading a story in the news about a certain political debate, which was the spark for the twist in the plot. Using Héðinsfjörður as a setting was somewhat obvious to me, as it is close to Siglufjörður, but also a very well known and somewhat mysterious place in Iceland, because up until the opening of the tunnel a few years ago, very few people had actually been there. It -was one of the very few remaining hidden gems of Iceland.

3. News reporter Ísrún seems to be a regular character in your books. Will we see more of her?

Ísrún has actually, so far, only appeared in *Blackout* and *Rupture*. I must admit I actually considered using her as the lead character in Dark Iceland book no. 5 (*Andköf*), to give Ari Thor some rest, but eventually I decided on using Ari Thor there, so Ísrún doesn't appear in the next one.

4. Family relationships are at the heart of this book, and it also focuses on the lengths that people will go both to protect their families ... and their secrets. Do you think that your portrayal is accurate?

I hope so. The story is of course a detective story in part, but for me it is equally important to try to write about believable characters and try to get their interaction and reactions right, reflecting on the events that they find themselves in.

5. You have a huge number of characters in all of your books, and yet they remain distinctive ... alongside several plotlines that ultimately weave together, it must be difficult to sustain the tension. Is it?

I think I actually prefer fewer characters, when that is possible, but some storylines do call for more characters, so in those cases I try to keep them as

different from one another as possible. The next book in the series, which is set at Christmas in an old and remote family cottage in North Iceland, has a very limited number of suspects, in a nod to the Golden Age of crime.

6. Are you a plotter or do you start a book and see where it goes?

A plotter, absolutely. I wouldn't start a book unless I knew exactly how the plot goes and – most importantly – how it will end, and how I can (if possible) surprise the readers in the final chapters. I also know what story I want to tell, in terms of characters and character development, and what specific issues I want to address.

7. The Dark Iceland series has not only been optioned for a TV series, but is now hitting bestseller lists around the world, and you've had praise from some of the most prestigious crime writers and press, too. Did you ever expect this?

Most certainly not. When I started writing about Ari Thor, about eight years ago, I thought he would be there for one book – but the reception in the UK, for example, has been incredible, and I am very thankful for that.

8. You translated many Agatha Christie novels into Icelandic. Is she still an influence?

Yes, she is. I think no crime writer who has read Agatha Christie can escape her influence. She was the master of plots, twists and setting, and I really want to be able to focus on these factors in my book, among others.

9. For the same reason, have you ever considered translating your books yourself?

Not really. I have written a few short stories in English (and translated some of my short stories as well into English) but I really believe that the translation of a full novel should be done by a native speaker. And Quentin Bates' translations have been excellent.

10. You are a lawyer, a lecturer at a university, an organiser of Iceland Noir, and an active member of the Icelandic branch of the CWA, as well as having a young family. How do you juggle it all?

I don't really know. My days are usually incredibly busy, from morning to midnight, and beyond sometimes, but I always make sure I have time to write in the evenings (or in the night), because writing is really such a big part of who I am, and I have always been writing, in one form or another.

11. Tell us about your writing day.

I usually don't really talk about writing, but rather write and let the books do the talking, but in essence I would usually write late in the evening. I try to do

that every single day, except for the summers. In the summer time, the days of the midnight sun, the nights are so bright it's hard to think about dark crimes.

12. What authors have been inspirations for you?

Many, many authors. In terms of crime, I could mention for example Agatha Christie, P.D. James, Ellery Queen, S.S. Van Dine, Peter Temple, Peter May, Andrew Taylor, Arnaldur Indriðason and Yrsa Sigurðardóttir.

13. What are you reading now?

I am reading probably a dozen books or so, mostly from the Icelandic Christmas Book Flood. But I am also re-reading Agatha Christie's *The Sittaford Mystery*, as it has a very cozy winter feel to it, *Another Little Christmas Murder* by Lorna Nicholl Morgan, and *The Couple Next Door* by Shari Lapena, plus I've just bought P.D. James' *The Mistletoe Murder*.

14. Will we see more of Ari Thor?

Ari Thor will indeed return in the next book in the series, set at Christmas, due for the holidays in 2017. It was called *Andköf* in Icelandic, but we haven't really decided on an English title yet.