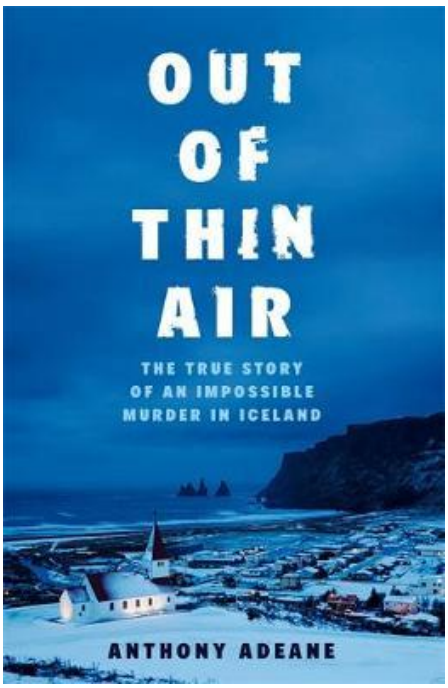

Out of Thin Air: The True Story of an Impossible Murder in Iceland

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In 1974, two men vanished without a trace under suspicious circumstances, shocking the people of Iceland, where serious crime is almost non-existent. More than a year later, there seemed to be a breakthrough when a small-time crook named Erla Bolladottir described a dream to police that they interpreted as a sign of trauma related to the men's disappearance. After lengthy interrogations, investigations, and courtroom dramas, Bolladottir and five acquaintances confessed to killing both men and were given prison sentences ranging from three years to life. But over the years the case against the convicted six began to disintegrate, and one major question remained unanswered: Why had they all confessed to murder if they hadn't done it?

Out of Thin Air joins Bolladottir in the present day as she pursues her exoneration, exploring the many facets of this bizarre and bewildering case and the social and cultural history of Iceland, a country of vast landscapes, extreme weather, and strange folklore, where more than eighty per cent of the population believes that elves might exist.

Out of Thin Air: The True Story of an Impossible Murder in Iceland Details

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From Reader Review Out of Thin Air: The True Story of an Impossible Murder in Iceland for online ebook

Wish Vintage Reads says

In the 1970's two men disappeared in entirely separate incidents in Iceland. Gudmundar Einarsson was 18 and vanished on his way home from a nightclub in early 1974. Geirfinnur Einarsson disappeared in November 1974. He had gone out late at night in his car to meet someone having received a phone call that his son had answered. Geirfinnur's car was found the next day with the keys still in the ignition. Neither man was ever seen again.

In December 1975 Erla Bolladottir and her boyfriend Saevar Ciesielski were arrested on suspicion of embezzlement charges. Their detention soon evolved into them being questioned about the murders of Gudmundar and Geirfinnur. Over the coming years many men were arrested on suspicion of the murders, ultimately 6 people, including Erla, were charged based on confession evidence. They were sentenced to substantial periods of imprisonment, Saevar to the longest sentence handed down in Icelandic history.

This book gives a detailed account of the authors quest to make a documentary about what has ultimately become a tragic miscarriage of justice.

I picked this book up on a whim in Waterstones, probably because of the title as I was reading Jon Krakauers' Into Thin Air at the time. I hadn't heard of these Icelandic murders before but the cover piqued my interest and I finally got round to reading it over the last few days. I am so glad I did. What a truly fascinating book! I really enjoyed how much I learned about Iceland through reading it, let alone trying to understand the shocking murder investigation that was carried out. Six people were sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment based solely on, clearly, unreliable confession evidence. As many of you know I spent many years as a detective investigating murders and I am fortunate enough to have worked in an era where the character of the detective is of no consequence and the obtaining of a confession is the last thing any decent investigator cares about. What matters these days is evidence and confessions are just too unreliable, for all the reasons they are made, to ever be the sole basis for a prosecution. But as we know from the UK's own history our justice system had to deal with miscarriages of justice to reach this point. Most do.

This book cleverly explained the context of Icelandic history to assist with understanding why certain things were happening, the effects that having a USA base on the island had during and after the Second World War, the economic problems faced during the Cod Wars but then the impact of the banks collapse. Iceland was always a fairly closed community and murders were incredibly rare so when these two men disappeared the police weren't really up to a proper investigation and clearly just relied on the confessions and not corroborating them. When it became clear that the police were struggling, though already up to their necks in it, a West German recently retired investigator was drafted in. Not remotely experienced in murder investigations but nevertheless a man that was held in awe by the investigation team and the press. Little that he did was questioned. He came in and tidied the case up, neatly explaining what he felt had happened, resulting in the conviction of the six.

Saevar briefly confessed during the interrogations, for reasons that are clearly explained, but ultimately tried everything he could to let anyone know that he was innocent. No one ever listened. He fought and fought and ultimately destroyed his life in doing so. The author was able to provide fascinating detail about the research around solitary confinement - these suspects were held in such conditions for hundreds and

hundreds of days, and thereby give valid reasons as to why on earth people would confess.

Ultimately many lives were destroyed by the investigations / interrogations and the aftermath and effects continue to this day. In such a tiny community with few murders the subject of the disappearances of the two men was very much a talking point in Iceland and remains so. Apparently in Iceland if three people know, everyone does.

This book is really well researched and presented and I personally felt terribly frustrated for these people and their families. The author gained first hand access to many of those involved and interviewed them over many years. The only complaint I had was the lack of pictures! I would have been interested to see what everyone looked like but I am given to understand that the documentary was made and is out there somewhere so I am off to find it!

One of the best books I've read this year, really interesting. Tell me this, was a murder ever proved?

Paul Kerr says

A solid true crime book that doubles as a short history of Iceland. The interaction of changing attitudes and thinking of Icelandic society with the progress of an insolvable case is attempted, although wrapping that up with effect of memory issues, poor policing and political motivations makes for a somewhat confusing narrative. The cases become secondary to the author's view of Icelandic society, and throwing in a silver bullet at the end feel awkward. Interesting but not memorable.

Kelly Illegems says

Redelijk goed 3,5*

Sarnfield says

Not sure who recommended this book or how I ended up picking it up but it was long, drawn out, and not terribly interesting. Kept waiting for some major revelation but there was none.

Susan says

What an incredibly interesting true crime case in which it's not even clear that crimes were committed! At first the case seemed like it had all been figured out with corroborating confessions from all the accused but then the truth comes out and it's a shocker. Reading this I feel that I learned so much about Icelandic society and it really is intriguing. The one thing that was lacking from this book was illustrations. I think it really suffered from the lack of maps and pictures of the accused. I felt the need to Google the case just so I could see this information and the story would have felt more satisfying if pictures had been included.

Kusaimamekirai says

In 1974, two men in Iceland, ten months apart, seemingly vanished. While the two men lived miles apart, were nearly 20 years apart in age, and had different professions, Iceland had never experienced anything like it. This is the story of “Out of Thin Air” where the author Anthony Adeane seeks to reconstruct what happened to these men, the people eventually charged for it, and Iceland as a country.
It is also the story of the limits of human memory and how susceptible it is to coercion and suggestion. When the police eventually settled on a group of suspects in their early 20’s, they all were adamant that they had nothing to do with the crime. As time passed and they spent increasing long hours in isolation (one suspect spent well over 600 days in isolation before finally “confessing”) and under duress from constant interrogation, the suspects began to believe they were in fact guilty, each one construct a different story of their involvement until the police coalesced them into one narrative. It’s was disturbing and frightening to read (two of the suspects kept a prison journal that provide a kind of log to the daily disintegration of their minds) the fragility of the brain and how quickly under stress it can produce false memory.
The police under enormous pressure to solve this case resorted to several glaring examples of misconduct (in one case a plaster bust was made of a “person of interest” in the case for the public. It was later discovered the police provided the sculptor with a photo of the person they wanted.
Perhaps the most interesting part of this fascinating book however is its insights into Icelandic society. It was a country in the 1970’s where television was banned on Thursdays, the alcohol content of beer was not allowed to exceed 2.5% (a law that existed until the early 90’s), and a prison system so small that to this day the total number of inmates in a country of 300,000 people fluctuates around 150, many of whom are under house arrest until the space for a cell opens up.
In such a homogeneous country, perhaps it is no surprise that of the suspects, the one most reviled by the police, media, and public was a young man in a country where most male names end in -son and female names in -dottir, had a foreign sounding name, Saevar Ciesielski. His story was inextricably linked with a rapidly changing Iceland where hippies, drugs, new music, and an American military presence were making the Icelanders of their day uncomfortable. Cleansing society of Saevar was in many respects also metaphorical cleansing of a society unwilling to accept a changing world.
This is a short but fascinating book with multiple levels to it that I highly recommend for those interested in true crime, the limits of human memory, or how societies adapt (or don’t) to rapid change.

Henri says

Iceland went, in less than a century, from the situation of an island colony in the North Atlantic to the situation of a modern island attracting not only tourists in huge numbers (tourism today represents 1/3rd of the national income) but also the interest of "world powers" who discovered between 1939 and 1949 that it represented a major geopolitical goal given its geographical situation. Extremely poor for a long time and having to count on fishing in frigid waters as its main resource, it is also an amazing island where the whole town of Reykjavik as well as huge greenhouses are fed by natural heating, where tradition has led to one of the richest literary heritages in Europe, despite the fact Icelandic language is not an easy Scandinavian language. It is a friendly - but expensive - island where you will enjoy socializing by soaking in huge, warm communal baths and discover landscapes that evoke Mars more than this planet, and where trolls are considered real without a shadow of a doubt. It was the starting point of some Vikings' arrival on North American shores way before the Basques, the Portuguese, the Spanish, French, English, Dutch.... It has been

the site of one of the oldest Parliaments in European history, only gaining its independence, however, in the 20th century, after having been a colony of several continental Scandinavian kingdoms.

Ireland today has more than 300,000 inhabitants, and most tourists, however much they realize than on an island you will only find what you bring there, will not notice any difference compared to neighboring lands, whether you come from Scotland or from Nova Scotia. You will in many places find workers who have come from other parts of the European Union or even other parts of the world. In the 1970s, the island had about 200,000 inhabitants, and few "foreigners" had reached shores where most people were, in some way, related or part of a limited group of settlers, linked by their language and community history. At the same time, this tight-knit, unique identity had produced at least one major world writer, Nobel prize winner Haldor Laxness - one of whose novels, surprisingly, is already the story of a man who may or may not have committed a murder.

Some may criticize Adeane for spending a fair amount of time dealing with descriptions of Icelandinc landscapes and giving us details on the history of Iceland. I do not: after all, he limits what he says to what is important in relation to the "crime story" he is looking into, and does not narrate the entire Icelandic sagas for the fun of it. When he has one of the real-life characters shipped to Akureiri, the Nordic city, he does not tell us the story of the town. History, however, is essential, and not only because we need to understand the mindset of 1970s Icelanders, but because we have to realize the story told here has, quite possibly, a lot to do with things that happened in other parts of the world under the auspices of the US empire and its attempt at ruling the world.

This is a book you read and the re-read, slowly. You're surprised: after all it seems to be devoted to the story of two people who disappeared, one probably swept up drunk in a blizzard during a dark night close to a freezing ocean, the other one in the small town of Keflavik, quite possibly drowned in the same ocean and pulled far away by currents. Keflavik today is well-know to Transatlantic travellers, since it is the site of the airport, where Icelandair rules. At the time, and even though in the 1970s air travel has begun to replace sea voyages as the best way to go from one place to another, Keflavik and Reykjavik are much smaller, and how can police not find bodies and criminals on an island? Anyone who has driven from Keflavik to Reykjavik and around Iceland can easily answer that this place, from its lava fields to its wild areas, gives potential criminals and potentially lost souls all the space needed to just disappear. So the question several books have asked - in English - about this case comes back to: why did the police decide that, in two disappearances one year apart, there was enough "evidence" to support murder charges against not 1, not 2, but 6 and possibly more individuals? why, when it became obvious after a few years that there was, quite simply, no evidence - no bodies, no material traces, no convincing witnesses...in other words, nothing. If this was the story of Gudmundur and Geirfinnur, the two missing persons, their case would be closed in less than a chapbook.

Enter, among others, a German spy or counter-spy who gets recruited to pull the strings of a supposed murder enquiry after, curiously, a meeting between US president Gerald Ford, Iceland police reps, and the West German government. It may not startle you when you read the first time through the book, but then it nags at you: while there is little doubt the small Reykyavik police has not had too much to do with murders and has lagged behind in a number of modern forensic developments, it also seems likely that some crime scene investigators from Britain or from Canada would be much more appropriate than a right-wing counter-spy with virtually zero experience in murder investigations and - to boot - no knowledge of Icelandic or of Icelandic people (one of suspects calling him "the Nazi" seems more than appropriate).

There is a good reason he's there, though. In the 1940s, the US (and its British allies) has understood how important this island, with its sheep and its volcanoes, might be in the world conflict coming up. US bases will develop from there, being a mixed blessing here as everywhere in Europe after 1945: employment and

financing will grow around the bases and because of them, but increased problems will develop because of the difference between US "culture" and the different local one. I do not like General Charles de Gaulle, but he decided wisely when he kicked US bases out of France. Many in Iceland - starting with Haldor Laxness - were not strong supporters of a continuing US presence, however much it brought "urban modernity" to a somewhat "provincial" island. What Adeane's book is telling us, as a spectral analysis of an incredible case of forced confessions, but also of somewhat forced international presence, is that unsavory things may have happened because of that presence. He never declares it formally, but we have an increasing feeling, as we read, and as we connect with other readings about that time, that what he really wants to say is that possibly, quite possibly, Iceland was used as part of one of those many more or less illegal projects from the CIA that have been known collectively as MK-Ultra. In other words, why would it be impossible to not do in Iceland, a highly controlled environment by its very insular nature, what was done at the same time in various forms in Canada, in France, and probably in many other places?

MK-Ultra has basically two goals: one was to try and "subvert" potential Soviet spies, the other one to test how you could bend and control minds - and particularly young, unsuspecting, vulnerable minds. MK-Ultra would use drugs, sleep deprivation, basic forms of torture (usually in out-of-the-way orphanages or other institutions where more or less deficient kids would find themselves enslaved by trauma bonding if they were bright enough to realize it), relentless verbal threats, and so on. Curiously, Reykjavik police would use exactly the same tactics to break a bunch of young, vulnerable people whose main crime was to use drugs (some of them brought illegally into a country where even drinking strong beer was an offense at the time) and try to play Bonnie and Clyde to the embezzle funds (with zero hope of not being discovered, since on an island you're kind of trapped). The London-based forensic psychologist of Icelandic origin who followed the case over the years and finally supported a judicial review testifies that he has never seen people who had to be in solitary that long. Is he naive or playing dumb? Obviously there were reasons for keeping these young individuals in similar conditions, but they had nothing to do with an investigation that was based on nothing. It had to do with, obviously, some form of psychological testing. It worked: from the girl who betrayed her boyfriend (adding guilt to the psychological mix) to those who invented all the material elements of a crime they could not have committed, the manipulators could not have dreamt a better experiment. They also tested the ability of the political powers to successfully challenge a judicial monstrosity: if needed be, it was proven that grand speeches by politicians, even in high positions, achieved...nothing. It took forty years to finally get the Icelandic judicial system to admit the obvious: no bodies, false and planted suggestions, torture-like interrogations, no material data, amounted to ...no case. Forty years. Not lost for everyone: it was, for those who conceived and engineered the whole thing, a fabulously successful experiment. At all levels.

Adeane, at one point, suggests that this may have been the case - a government-led manipulation - but shies away in horror from the notion. He points out, however, that we find similarities here with cases in other parts of the world. We have the Christian orphanage where kids were subjected to continuous abuse. The Breidavik kids are the brothers in pain of Duplessis's orphans in Quebec and the boys and girls cared for by Dr. Cameron at the Dorea institute on the US-Quebec border, and many more. Few survived sane. But it gets better. A conservative judicial and police force will quite easily consider that young people guilty of using drugs, committing petty crimes, and listening to rock music, are far from the choirboys they would love young people to be. in other words, considering the 1970s, it was quickly considered that the little group of young people accused of nonexistent crimes were nothing less than the Icelandic version of the Manson family.

The link here gets even more interesting, since several studies have very seriously considered the "Family" to have been part of an organized attack on the values espoused by the 1970s youth movements. In other words, the scapegoats of chaos were to be used as proof that any values considered modern or "hip" were wrong and had to be controlled. From there to a concerted attack on more "leftist" or "liberal" views, there was not

much of a gap to go across. After all, even in Canada, it took the 1990s to finally remove from the government boards a secret provision that planned to send all "communists" and related thinkers to concentration camps in case of a national emergency. Given the way Quebec premier Duplessis defined "communist", it meant that basicallt anyone looking like former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, or his son Justin, the current Prime Minister, would have ended in the slammer. Probably starved from sleep and brought to write long confessions to lots of dreamlike "crimes" after a little while.

Adeane's book is not "new" when we consider that the "Gudmundur and Geirfinnur" case is well-known in Iceland, having kept people on their toes for forty years (a decision to reject the sentences for murder was finally made this year, although it does not suppress some other sentences that occurred in connection with those). In a closed, small society, it is not only important for the supposedly "guilty" to be cleared of wrongdoing, it is extremely important for their children and grandchildren to be. Even though, it could be argued, Vikings arrived in Groenland, and then in Newfoundland, because of a murder and the need for the murderer to move out of Iceland for a little while...

Other books have been written about this, offering in one case many more documents, visual and written. Before "The Reykjavik Confessions" by Simon Cox there had been "Sugar-Paper Theories" by Jack Latham. After some BBC movies, an Icelandic one by Egill Egilsson is slated to be shown in 2019. We may wonder, though, why this sudden surge of interest in a nonexistent crime case. The answer lies in the subtext of all those. At a time when a new type of "Cold War", the shape of which is yet unclear, is obviously heating up as the Star-Wars like US empire is on the wane, we fear more than ever that fascist-like parties may get in power, or use military force, to manipulate and manage opinions, individual judgement, and socio-political relationships. Iceland may not see tomorrow delegates send by Goering exploring its wildest recesses like the 1930s (that type of nazism is hopefully gone for good) but it has to play with influences from China, and a Nordic situation with others including Russia, Canada and the USA to share the Arctic Circle, as well as the question of knowing how to relate to an increasingly right-wing US view, and not only to host meetings of Reagan and Gorbatchov, or chess games between Fisher and Spassky, which turns out to be more or less the same after all.

This makes this book valuable. If we were dealing simply with a blabbering girlfriend spilling her imaginary guts against her slightly criminal - and slightly "foreign" - boyfriend, we'd be much better off reading one of the remarkable crime novels by master Arnaldur indriðason. We're not dealing simply with that. We may never be sure what we're dealing with, since after all the archives of MK-Ultra were destroyed by the CIA except for a few rescued documents (enough to make us shiver), but we know the agency has never shied away from interrogating people in prisons on EU territory that did not have to follow US judicial standards, and those prisons probably looked very much like the now destroyed establishment where you could keep someone in solitary for nearly as long as the longest prisoner at Guantanamo. The empire does not like unstable situations where it considers it has a right to establish itself.

In a sense, Iceland, haven today for many North American and European tourists, land of sheep, wool and volcanoes, of bananas grown in greenhouses, land where the traditional meals include shark rotten from a trusted recipe and sheep's head, land of magic when I read the novels by French writer Pierre Loti who is now remembered in a fjord and in a Reykjavik cemetery, land where a stone in front of Parliament officially recognizes the fundamental right to dissent, land which fought banks in its bankruptcy after going through unbridled foreign capitalism, Iceland offers us through this story a warning for the future and a look at how dangerous some practices in manipulating minds and implanting narratives in people have become.

You think I'm into conspiracy theories, kind of paranoid? Well, maybe you should,m after reading this, read a little on MK-Ultra, and read with an open mind The Shadow over Santa Susana, n which Adam Gorightly

revisits the "Manson case". It might change your mind about all this...but remember: whatever we read in English or French is, unfortunately, a translation from that unique and complex language, Icelandic, that provided world literature with one of its most important traditions.

Kedar Kulkarni says

This should have been two different books- one on economic history of Iceland, the other on the mystery of a missing person. Both combined, it is an incoherent mess.

Frankly, the material on the main theme (mystery and wrongful convictions) itself is thin and not-extraordinary. The wikipedia article on the trials is a much better read since it is succinct. The book rambles on and on about how Iceland evolved economically before the murder, how it was evolving during the trial and how it evolved later and frankly it is all unnecessary and unrelated. I found myself skipping the pages.

Helen Carolan says

At first I thought I wouldn't like this one and was about to give it up, but a couple of chapters in it really picked up. In the early 1970's 2 men disappeared without trace in Iceland. Some years later a group of young adults are arrested for an un-related fraud and find themselves being charged with the murders of the 2 men.Police used subtle tactics to gain confessions from the group. But this is more than just a true crime story. It's also about Iceland's flawed police force and it's justice system.A terrific read.

Virginia Van says

Iceland is not a country with a high murder rate. As a result, everyone in Iceland knows the story of two men who vanished in 1974, their bodies never fund. Were the disappearances connected? Were they murdered? The case seemed solved when six people were arrested and confessed to the crime, but over time disturbing new evidences suggested the six had perhaps confessed to crime of which they were not guilty. A riveting look at false memory syndrome and the reliability of confessions in courts of law. And lots of interesting background about Iceland, its history and culture.

Cheryl says

I read this book because I’m participating both in Book Riot’s Read Harder Challenge (read a book of true crime) and the ATW80 challenge to read a book set in each country of the world. I did not anticipate that this would be a five star read for me but it was wonderful! Adeane discusses the - still unsolved - mystery of two men who went missing in 1974 in Iceland as well as telling us a lot about the recent history of the country. I learnt a lot about why people might confess to crimes of which they may not be guilty; the unreliability of human memory; and the influence of “confessions” on our perceptions of criminal cases. I also learnt about the “globalization” of Icelandic society; the growth of the Icelandic media; and the country’s 2008 banking crisis. The author also throws in references to elves, volcanoes, the growth in tourism, and Bjork! Somehow,

it just works!

Janet Emson says

One cold January night in 1974 a young man leaves a nightclub and is never seen again. Months later another man receives a telephone call late at night and leaves his home. He too never returns. One murder in Iceland is unexpected, two in short succession almost unheard of. Police are quick to arrest suspects. Confessions are obtained and convictions followed. But those confessions may not have been as they seem.

I've been lucky enough to visit Iceland. It is a wonderful country, with a close-knit feel. There is beauty in its stark landscape and a wonderful sense of history permeates it. This essence of Iceland leaps from the pages of Out of Thin Air. There is something mysterious and slightly magical about the country and the book echoes that. (It was also great to read a book where I recognise the places and have actually been to them).

As well as being a fascinating look into Icelandic life, Out of Thin Air is a study in how criminal investigations shouldn't take place. Forty something years ago investigative methods were different to today's policing. Unfortunately violence was rife, as was the use of more persuasive tactics to elicit confessions. Add into the mix a police force unused to dealing with major investigations such as murder and it was a recipe for disaster.

Many of those who were involved in the case, including those convicted, remain in Iceland. They have had to live under the shadows of events from over forty years ago, each one dealing with it in their own way. I found myself searching the internet for more information on the six suspects. It was truly fascinating to read about what they went through, and how they dealt with the fallout of the case. The book looks into investigative methods, of both the Icelandic police and the German investigator sent to assist. It is a study in detection at the time, and the limits placed by lack of experience. It is also a study in the phenomenon of false confessions, of suggested memory and the effect that solitary confinement can have on the human mind.

The book reads very much like a documentary, which is apt given the author, Anthony Adeane was researching the case for a documentary. Interviews with those involved form the bedrock of the book, bringing the cases even more to life. As with most non-fiction crime books there is a sense of unease in that the complete truth will never be fully known. But such is life.

It's hard to not go into too much detail without giving anything away, so I will leave it there.

The cases of Guðmundur and Geirfinnur still causes much discussion in Iceland today. And it's easy to see why. A fascinating look into a dark part of the country where the Northern Lights shine.

Helen says

A must for Icelandophiles. This is mainly the story of the disappearances of two men in 1974 (possibly connected but probably not, if I have followed the rather convoluted events). Iceland has a famously low murder rate, and this case became so well known in Iceland that protagonists are still recognised in the street. The case takes in a group of young people whose lifestyles had led them to crimes such as fraud, smuggling,

and drug dealing, a group of well-connected nightclub owners, the Prime Minister of the day, and eventually an expert from Germany who investigated the case. Many questions remain, not least whether there was in fact any murder at all, as there were no bodies and it appears that multiple versions of confessions were obtained using methods which were highly unreliable (excessive solitary confinement, violence, and suggestion, and the creation of a clay head which was meant to be like a photofit but for which we discover the artist was given a picture of a particular suspect to work on). The book takes in a lot of general background on Iceland in the earlier twentieth century as well as the 1970s and Iceland today, and provides an explanation for the confused confessions, looking at false memory syndrome as well as poor police practice. Illustrations and a map would have been useful, particularly a map.

Greg says

Iceland's most infamous murder case isn't the sort of bone-chilling true-crime you'd normally find. By all standards, a double murder seems delightfully tame, but to a country nearly devoid of violent crime, the walls of isolation crumble as the tide of modernity flows in. The mystery revolves around the disappearance of two men Guðmundur and Geirfinnur, two seemingly unconnected men, two mysteries ten months apart from each other. Seemingly at the center of the drama is counter-culturalist, petty-criminal, Sævar Ciesielski and his beatnik girlfriend, Erla Bolladóttir. What follows is a complex web of ever-changing layered narratives, of a who-done-it rooted Icelandic identity and a police force deeply in over there heads.

All the suspects confessed, corroborating their stories. It appears to be open and shut case, but things are not what they seem, and roughly four decades later, the tide of public opinion now believes the six were wrongly convicted.

Out of Thin Air is far more a cultural primer for modern Icelandic pop culture and history than it is a murder mystery, as we're treated to historical events, quirks of Icelandic culture, meant to give deeper context. Along the way, we learn about ghostly voices that supposedly emanate from the Vatnajökull glacier by farmers who fell in its crevasses on the way to fish or that citizens of Reykjavik print the names of residents on the doors and are prone to leaving their heat cranked, and windows open in the middle of winter. Those looking for a gripping mystery might be off-put but rarely is a single crime so connected to a culture's DNA. In the end, these tidbits add up and give us a sense of what it means to be Icelandic, and thus ends up being the bigger reward.

Bert Zee says

I knew a little about this case before reading as I’ve seen the BBC Storyville documentary about it. It’s a pretty interesting true-crime case that still to this day has people baffled. The book does a great job of giving you all the facts and information, it’s also really well written and set out for people that may not have had previous knowledge like myself.

I really enjoyed how it was also at times a little bit of a history of Iceland, normally I don’t like when books go off track but I rather enjoyed it with this. All the little tidbits about Iceland were so interesting and even though this is a book about 2 murders, I would move there in a heartbeat if I could.

If you dig a true-crime take to get you thinking and inspire your inner armchair detective then you should

definitely check this one out.

All in all, it’s a great read,
