



# Hálendið

*Steinar Bragi*

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Tvö pör úr Reykjavík fara í hálendisferð að hausti. Á söndunum norðan við Vatnajökul gerir svartajökulu og fyrir slysni keyra þau á hús í auðninni. Jeppinn þeirra er ónýtur og þrátt fyrir dræmar móttökur íbúanna fá þau að gista. Ekkert samband er við byggð ból, húsið er varið eins og virki og á kvöldin læsa íbúarnir tryggilega að sér. Úti heyrast dularfull hljóð og eldar kvikna, atburðir úr fortíðinni leita á gestina og smám saman verður erfiðara að átta sig á því hvar óvinurinn leynist.

## Hálendið Details

Date : Published 2011 by Forlagið

ISBN : 9789979332312

Author : Steinar Bragi

Format : Hardcover 253 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction, Thriller

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## From Reader Review Hálendið for online ebook

### Paul says

Well, this is most definitely a first for me, time for some psychological Icelandic horror. The Ice Lands follows four friends travelling across the country. They are trying to escape the daily grind of the rat race and reconnect with one another. At one point they take a wrong turn and before they know it they are hopelessly lost. From that moment on things go from bad to worse.

As the narrative unfolds, there is a slow growing sense of unease that starts to develop. There is something out there in the empty landscape. This malevolent presence appears to be watching the group. It wants Egil, Hrafin, Anna and Vigdis, and they are going to have to go through Hell if they have any chance of surviving.

The setting is one of the things I liked most about this story. Steinar Bragi does an excellent job of capturing the desolate isolation of rural Iceland. I'd imagine the seemingly endless volcanic rocks would feel disconcerting to people who are used to living in a city. The group attempt to retrace their steps, but lose all sense of direction. They are unable to rely on mobile phones or GPS. Even the sat-nav has failed so they have no idea how to get back on the road to civilisation.

In hindsight I don't think The Ice Lands was quite what I was expecting. It is far more introspective and thoughtful. The author spends a lot of time detailing his four main characters, picking apart their lives and how they all intertwine. Every facet of their innermost thoughts and feelings are laid bare. They are a flawed bunch and there is probably just as much horror going on in their day to day lives as there is during camping trip. Bragi also uses each of his characters to explore the current shape of Icelandic society and the problems that the country faces.

I expect that this novel will split reader opinion down the middle. If I'm entirely honest I'm still not sure how I feel about it. I enjoyed the intense psychodrama of the character's lives, but I think there probably could have been more explanation when it came to revealing exactly what was going on. There are a handful of horrific moments, which are suitably unpleasant, I just wish there had been a few more. Perhaps I'm just too jaded? I found the ending of the novel unusual. This is probably why I'm still not sure how I feel about the book as a whole. I was looking for more of a resolution to events and it didn't quite get there. That said, I do think this book is worth a read. The characterisation is extremely good and the interactions between each of the small group's individuals are well observed.

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### Anna Dalvi says

It starts out well enough with a mysterious drive through the mists, and then the car hits a house..... but I just can't care about the characters at all, so the plot disappears into the blah-blah-blah of their interactions.

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### Artemiz says

Minu mõtted leiate siit.

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## **Mientras Leo says**

Una historia angustiosa que hace una crítica a la vida acomodada y falta de responsabilidad  
<http://entremontonesdelibros.blogspot...>

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## **Kerstin Gallas says**

Ehrlich gesagt hab ich die letzten 40 Seiten überhaupt nicht verstanden - alles wurde verwirrend und ich frage mich, wo genau ich jetzt was verpasst habe um das Ende zu verstehen. Dabei fand ich den Anfang und die Mitte ziemlich gut - der Autor schreibt flüssig, die Rückblenden waren interessant, der Spannungsaufbau gelungen.

Die Charaktere waren zwar alle gestört und nicht sonderlich sympathisch, aber ich fand sie authentisch. Fazit: schade, das Ende hat vieles zerstört.

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## **Kirsty says**

*The Ice Lands* is the second novel by Icelandic author Steinar Bragi, a critically acclaimed poet and author in his native land. Translated by Lorenza Garcia, the novel takes as its focus two couples, all in their thirties, who have been affected by Iceland's financial crisis. We meet reckless Egill, recovering alcoholic Hrafn, and their partners, Anna and Vigdis. The quartet decide to embark upon a camping trip; the weather and the poor visibility which it brings mean that the Jeep in which they are travelling crashes into a farmhouse in the middle of nowhere. When they meet the couple who live inside said farmhouse, the premise heightens somewhat: '... the isolated dwelling is inhabited by a mysterious elderly couple who inexplicably barricade themselves inside every night. As past tensions within the group rise to the surface, the merciless weather blocks every attempt at escape, forcing them to ask difficult questions: who has been butchering animals near the house? What happened to the abandoned village nearby where bones lie strewn across the ground? And most importantly, will they return home?' A Swedish publication, *Corren*, deemed the novel 'Iceland's *Twin Peaks*'.

The novel's overall review score is quite poor, I felt, standing at 2.84 out of 5 on Goodreads. This made me a little sceptical, I must say, but I love Icelandic literature, and was determined to give it a fair chance. I felt a definite comradeship with all of the reviewers who have marked this a two- or one-star read quite early on, however; the dialogue is rather dull, and whilst the story is what really drives the whole onwards, it has not been overly well executed.

Bragi's opening paragraph captures Iceland's darkness effectively, yet rather simply: 'Over the highlands all was still. The shadows on the horizon darkened, growing sharper against the sky, before dissolving into the night'. Sadly, the writing never really regains this quiet power, and an inconsistency is visible throughout. The prose is very much of the telling rather than the showing variety, which gives the whole an element of dullness, and which renders the reader (or rendered me, at least) rather impatient for something to happen. Bragi is very matter-of-fact, and a lot of the details discussed or included feel superfluous. It's just quite a boring book, and excerpts of prose such as the following would encourage me to avoid the work in question: 'Through the open door of the barn they glimpsed bales of hay wrapped in green and white plastic. In the

yard in front of the barn stood a sand-blown Willys jeep. The old woman was crouching beside one of the wheels in a pair of grubby overalls, poking a tool under the body of the vehicle. Clearly she was in charge of more than the housework'.

*The Ice Lands* had a lot of potential, due not only to its setting, but to the intrigue of its plot. Not a great deal else occurs that is not described in the book's blurb, and it caused this particular reader to give up around a third of the way through. Had an author such as Halldor Laxness used a similar plot in his fiction, I imagine that it would be incredibly compelling, and quite difficult to put down.

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## Wolf Draven says

4,5\*

To bylo hodn? psycho :))

Moje recenze: <http://wolfdraven.eu/planina-steinar-...>

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## George K. says

?τσι ξαφνικ?, πριν απ? δυο-τρεις μ?ρες, κυκλοφ?ρησε στα ελληνικ? ?να βιβλ?ο τρ?μου γραμμ?νο απ? Ισλανδ? συγγραφ?α. Το εξ?φυλλο μου κ?νησε την προσοχ? απ? την πρ?τη στιγμ? που το ε?δα, δι?βασα και την περ?ληψη και ε?πα να το αγορ?σω, παρ? την ιδια?τερα μ?τρια βαθμολογ?α του στο Goodreads. Τι στο καλ?, σε πολ? μεγ?λο βαθμ? εμπιστε?ομαι τις εκδ?σεις Κλειδ?ριθμος. Λοιπ?ν, οι μ?τριες κριτικ?ς που υπ?ρχουν στο ?ντερνετ για το βιβλ?ο, μπορ? να πω ?τι δικαιολογ?νται, σε γενικ?ς γραμμ?ς.

Τ?σσερις ν?οι ?νθρωποι -δυο ?ντρες και δυο γυνα?κες-, ?λα θ?ματα της οικονομικ?ς κρ?σης με τον ?ναν ? τον ?λλο τρ?πο, πηγα?νουν μια εκδρομ? στην ενδοχ?ρα της Ισλανδ?ας, μ?να νοικιασμ?νο τζιπ. Στην μ?ση του πουθεν?, με την ομ?χλη να καλ?πτει σχεδ?ν τα π?ντα, παθα?νουν ?να ατ?χημα. Θα βρεθο?ν μπροστ? σ'?να απομονωμ?νο σπ?τι, ?που θα συναντ?σουν ?να ζευγ?ρι γ?ρων, με ιδια?τερα παρ?ξενη συμπεριφορ?. Στις προσπ?θει?ς τους για να φ?γουν απ? την ερημη? αυτ? και να βρεθο?ν ξαν? π?σω στον πολιτισμ?, θα συναντ?σουν ?να κ?ρο εμπ?δια. Επ?σης, θα ανακαλ?ψουν πολλ? περ?εργα και τρομακτικ? πρ?γματα...

Λοιπ?ν, το βιβλ?ο σ?γιουρα δεν ε?ναι τ?σο κακ? ?σο δε?χνει η βαθμολογ?α του στο Goodreads. ?μως, ε?ναι μια μεγ?λη χαμ?νη ευκαιρ?α για κ?τι το ξεχωριστ?. Ο συγγραφ?ας χτ?ζει μια τρομερ? ατμ?σφαιρα, μας γνωρ?ζει με σχετικ? ικανοποιητικ? τρ?πο τους τ?σσερις πρωταγωνιστ?ς, μας προσφ?ρει λ?γες ανατριχ?λες λ?γω των τοπ?ων, της ομ?χλης και κ?ποιων παρ?ξενων γεγον?των/σκηνικ?ν, ?μως στο τ?λος τα γκρεμ?ζει ?λα, μιας και δεν ?λυσε πολλ?ς απορ?ες και δεν εξ?γησε τα γιατ? και πως. Εντ?ζει, δεν χρει?ζεται να τα ξ?ρουμε και ?λα, ας μ?νουν κ?ποια πρ?γματα ανοικτ? στο τ?λος, αλλ? εδ? δεν κατ?λαβα γιατ? και πως ?γινε ?,τι ?γινε. Στο τ?λος συμβα?νουν δι?φορα κουλ? και μ?λλον τ?ποτα δεν ξεκαθαρ?ζεται. Να φτα?ω μ?νο εγ?; Μπα, και ?λλοι αναγν?στες αναρωτιο?νται...

Γενικ?, π?ρασα καλ?. Η γραφ? μου ?ρεσε αρκετ? (αν και ?ταν κ?πως... ανιαρ?, που και που), η ατμ?σφαιρα εξαιρετικ?, ?τσι σκοτειν?, μουντ? και γκρ?ζα ?πως ?ταν, και οι χαρακτ?ρες μ?λλον ενδιαφ?ροντες αν και ?χι τ?σο συμπαθητικο? κατ? την γν?μη μου -ο συγγραφ?ας ξ?δεψε αρκετ? χρ?νο για να μας τους γνωρ?σει, μερικ?ς φορ?ς εις β?ρος της αφ?γησης. Σε σημε?α ?μως με κο?ρασε, εν? απογοητε?τηκα απ? τον τρ?πο που ?κλεισε την ?λη ιστορ?α ο συγγραφ?ας. Σαν να μην ?ξερε ο?τε ο ?διος τι ?γινε πραγματικ?...

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## Blair says

This Icelandic horror story is set against the stark, evocative backdrop of the volcanic desert. In the first couple of chapters, a group of four friends on a road trip crash their car in the middle of nowhere. So begins a tale of terror in one of the remotest, most forbidding landscapes imaginable, told alongside a journey through the histories of these four characters.

We start with Hrafn, the driver, a rich kid who's lived a wild and glamorous life but, underneath it all, is profoundly troubled. His friend Egill is a sort of cut-rate version of Hrafn: not as rich, not as deep, not as smart, he comes off as the most unpleasant of the lot, and has a tumultuous relationship with his girlfriend Anna. She's a journalist, initially introduced as a caricature – the bubbly airhead – but later revealed to be much more complex than she appears, perhaps the most interesting figure in the story. Finally, there's Vigdís, Hrafn's therapist girlfriend. Undoubtedly the heroine, she is introspective, intelligent and mature, a sort of mother to the group.

The first 85% of the book is excellent. Hrafn, Vigdís, Anna and Egill are 'rescued' by an elderly woman and her virtually mute husband. Brought to stay at a boarded-up farmhouse, they discover the strange couple barricade their doors at night. Several efforts to leave prove futile, and they always seem to be brought back to the house. It turns out the friends have taken this trip together on impulse; now they're forced to spend so much time together, tempers begin to fray, and old tensions resurface, particularly between Hrafn and Egill. Things get even more creepy when the two men and Vigdís walk to the next 'town' and encounter a completely deserted village, littered with the bones of birds. Meanwhile, Anna explores the house, finding a lavish library complete with that gothic mainstay – a hidden room, secreted behind a bookcase. This discovery is the catalyst for a wild theory about the couple, who become more and more sinister with every thwarted attempt the group make to leave.

The last 15% or so, however, is terrible. I don't say that lightly: it genuinely made me feel pissed off about the time I'd invested in the rest of the story (admittedly not much time, since I found it so compelling I read it through in a matter of hours). The narrative devolves into a series of disgusting and nonsensical images. Nothing is resolved or explained. One character is horribly mutilated for no good reason I can think of, other than to provide a suitably shocking tableau.

My problems with *The Ice Lands* underline the division between horror fiction and the gentler type of ghost stories and creepy supernatural tales I tend to prefer. Maybe films are a little different, but when it comes to words on a page, I don't have a taste for the kind of pointless gore on display here. I don't mind stories being left open, either, but there has to be SOME elegance to it, not just a jumble of weirdness and violence. Most of *The Ice Lands* is riveting: the tension builds nicely, the characters are each fleshed out effectively, the story is a real page-turner. But the ending ruins much of that, and means that overall, I can't truly recommend it. Those with a stronger stomach for horror might find it more palatable.

### **Sue G says**

The story is about four friends and a dog who are on a camping trip in the volcanic wilds of Iceland. There are tensions between the four and they see the trip as a way of mending their relationships but things have already become fraught early on in the journey when they crash in the middle of nowhere. They take refuge in an isolated farmhouse occupied by a mysterious elderly couple.

The efforts to resume their journey are thwarted - they fail to leave in their jeep, or in the car they borrow from the couple and even resorting to leaving on foot they end up returning to the dark and menacing house. At the times where they have put some distance between themselves and the house they make further mysterious discoveries in the wilderness - an abandoned car, an abandoned village on a cut-off 'island'.

The inside of the house, farm and the couple are no less puzzling. They struggle to figure out the relationship between the uncommunicative man and woman, there are animals' bodies on the doorstep and a hidden room that just adds to the mysteries.

As the story unfolds the backstory of the characters comes out which casts light on them both as individuals and on the relationships between the four of them. In some ways these feel like caricatures - this isn't a criticism but it feels as if the author was using the four people to highlight some of the issues around the financial crash (the book was published in Iceland in 2011). Their lives and perspectives are quite exaggerated but their reactions to the events after they become stranded seem surprisingly relaxed.

I still don't know what to make of this book. It was part crime, part thriller, part horror and part, well, just plain weird. I was really taken in by it. I didn't particularly like the characters, but I wanted to know what happened to them (or what had happened to them). I didn't have any issues with the writing or translation. There was probably too much of the characters' backstory for me but the story was atmospheric, tense, dark - it really gripped me. But I just couldn't figure out what was going on... Since finishing the book and while writing my review I've had a look to see what other people make of the book. There is a full synopsis on Wikipedia which tells me that it 'enjoyed very positive reviews' although it seems to be struggling to do so in the English translation. Perhaps it just isn't reaching the right audience.

Thank you to the publisher for the review copy.

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### **Raven says**

With a nod to Halloween, felt it right to include *The Ice Lands* in this wee round-up. I would probably describe this as an existential version of *The Blair Witch Project*, mixed up with *Lost* with shades of *On The Road*. I must confess, that for large portions of the book, including the not the most easily comprehensible ending, I was rather confused at quite what the jiggins was going on. Suffused with the dark, bleak and completely terrifying landscape of rural Iceland, and the creepy inhabitants of a house that I'm fairly sure was not constructed of gingerbread, four unwitting, and not entirely likeable egotistic individuals find themselves privy to a nightmare experience. With enough schlock horror moments to keep you on the edge of the seat, and some not always welcome diversions into the world of scientific academia which were

initially quite interesting and then waned, Bragi has constructed a unique blend of traditional shocker, and highbrow horror, that chills and perplexes in equal measure. I was dying throughout for these frankly annoying characters to reach grisly ends, but did they? That would be telling. As much as I was confused by some aspects of this tale, I did make it to the end, having had a sense of enjoyment, and frustration, in equal measure. I think overall I liked it, but at times it was just a little...how can I put this... too much up itself for a totally enjoyable reading experience. Sort of recommended.

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### **Emmanuelle says**

Μ?λις ?κλεισα το βιβλ?ο και μου ?χει γεννηθε? η εξ?ς απορ?α: ?ξερε, τελικ?, ακ?μα και ο ?διος ο συγγραφ?ας τι ?γινε στο τ?λος;  
Οι χαρακτ?ρες δεν θα μπορο?σαν να ε?ναι πιο αντιπαθητικο?, σε κ?θε προσπ?θεια να δικαιολογ?σεις την συμπεριφορ? τους, σε απωθο?σαν ακ?μα περισσ?τερο  
Ωστ?σο, ο ?διος ο συγγραφ?ας χρονοτρ?βησε αρκετ? για να παρουσι?σει την ζω? του καθ?να, με αποτ?λεσμα να επιβαρ?νεται η αφ?γηση  
Γενικ?, η γραφ? και η ατμ?σφαιρα που δημιουργε?ται θυμ?ζει θρ?λερ και σου δημιουργε? το συνα?σθημα της αγων?ας  
Δεν ?ρχεται,?μως, καμ?α ανατροπ?, καμ?α κ?θαρση

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### **Covadonga Mendoza says**

Iba a darle dos estrellas hasta el final, donde me di cuenta de la tremenda pérdida de tiempo que es leer este libro que, literalmente, no trata de nada, pero de nada nada. Desolación como la de las tierras altas de Islandia, personajes aburridos sin interés, y casi indistinguibles unos de otros, un misterio estúpido y un final surrealista que no significa nada. TOMADURA DE PELO.

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### **Amalia Gavea says**

Always in the hunt for anything that belongs to the Nordic Fiction genre, I was led to *The Ice Lands*, a thriller set in Iceland. I hadn't read the reviews and I was immediately sold when I read the blurb. Plus, the Icelandic setting is more than enough to attract my attention. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough to make me like this book.

The story isn't something we've never seen before. Two young couples start a road trip to observe the glaciers and the Icelandic nature in general. They lose their way and find themselves in a house, in the middle of nowhere, an old couple being the only residents in the area. So far, this is not innovative at all, but it sure sounds intriguing. What promised to make it special was the setting. And it did, initially. There was a foreboding feeling during the first stages of the narration, a claustrophobic aura emanating from the house and the owners as opposed to the vastness of the landscape which has its own secrets. However, the writer seemed uncertain of the direction the story was about to take and the construction collapsed soon.

Bragi tries to touch on a lot of subjects, all of them relevant to our world as we know it. There are references to the political upheaval and the financial collapse of Iceland, the moral decay of the upper classes, the frequent use of drugs and alcohol as a way to overcome the distress caused by bankruptcy. There are also

references to the Icelandic traditions about elves, trolls, fairies, etc. The Icelanders retain a deep belief in the supernatural. They respect its presence and, as a result, they manage to preserve their natural environment as much as possible, which is more than can be said for the majority of the countries of our planet.

Sadly, Bragi doesn't succeed in bringing all these issues to focus in a satisfying way. The writing is repetitive, devoid of soul, the dialogue is wooden, awkward, unrealistic. It seemed hard for me to believe that friends and couples would interact with each other in such a manner, no matter the cultural differences between cultures and codes of behaviour. These people were so rude to each other, I couldn't take them seriously after a while. Perhaps, it was a matter of translation, it often happens with Icelandic novels. In my opinion, it wasn't that. The writer tries too hard to create a kind of a mysterious, atmospheric language, but the result made me bored and disinterested in the story. As for the end? Well, having an open-ended story is one thing, having a conclusion that makes no sense at all is completely different.

My main problem was what I considered to be the wrong focus of the story. There was a kind of obsession with sex and the sexual lives of the characters. It was unnecessary, overdone and performed in a vulgar way. I am not interested whether these characters have special talents in the bedroom. I thought I was reading a thriller, not a cheap, trashy novel. I am not interested in a couple's troubled erotic life, I'm here for the mystery. Nor do I care about the different kinds of websites with sexual content. If your aim is to shock the reader, do so with your story, not with references to sick, twisted perversions involving minors. It was at this point when I seriously thought to abandon the book altogether. More than once.

The characters are all problematic, a typical feature in Nordic Fiction, but even this turns redundant in the hands of the writer. They consume drugs, they smoke and drink alcohol non-stop. This would be the perfect premise for the "unreliable narrator" trope but no, another failure. Vigdís is the only character that is decently written and developed. The male characters are hedious creatures and Anne is an irritating fool who tries to appear smart, when the only thing that she succeeds in is being manipulated by her disgusting boyfriend.

There was much potential to the story, in the hands of any capable writer it would have been a blast. Here, the execution is choppy, the characters try too hard to come across as troubled and tormented, and the focus on sex made the book a trashy read, something that I just couldn't take seriously. It lacked any basic element of a good book, the haunting, distinctive aura that makes the Nordic Mystery such a fascinating genre. I am sorry to say that this is one of its poorest examples.

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### **Liz Barnsley says**

Sadly have had to give up on this one. No rating as I didn't finish it. Its not that its badly written or anything like that but it just wasn't grabbing me at all. A little too much nothing. Although setting was a plus and well described the rest was just too, I don't like to say dull but yes. Dull.

One of those "its not you its me" moments.

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