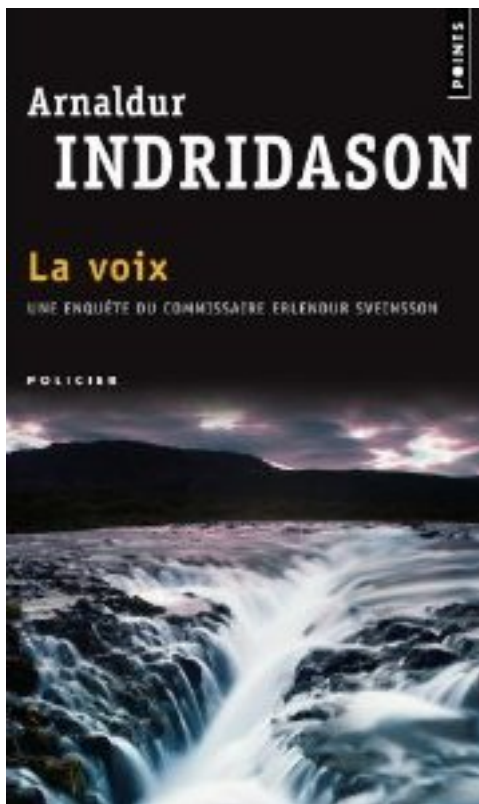


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# Arnaldur Indriðason

## La voix (Inspector Erlendur #5)



Title: La voix (Inspector Erlendur #5)

Author: Arnaldur Indriðason

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## Description

Mauvaise publicité pour l'hôtel de luxe envahi par les touristes! Le pantalon sur les chevilles, le Père Noël est retrouvé assassiné dans un sordide cagibi juste avant le traditionnel goûter d'enfants. La direction impose la discrétion, mais le commissaire Erlendur Sveinsson ne l'entend pas de cette oreille. Déprimé, assailli par des souvenirs d'enfance douloureux, il s'installe dans l'hôtel et en fouille obstinément les moindres recoins...

## Insightful reviews

Antonomasia: A short prologue in italics tells of a boy chorister at the beginning of a concert. Then the novel proper opens one 19th December, when a hotel doorman in a Santa suit is found dead with his trousers down. (An image which some decades ago would have been unusual and shocking, now merely sordid.) The only book in his room is 'A History of the Vienna Boys' Choir'. There's an obvious route for the story to take from here. Though Indriðason may not be the sort of author to follow it *exactly*.

Whilst *Voices* is still a compulsively readable mystery like its two predecessors, it has more flaws, more noticeable ones, and some inconsistencies (most minor and making no overall difference, but one is significant to the plot). *Silence of the Grave* had such attention to detail; this sequel seems an some absent-minded slump following a triumph. The detectives are having a bit of an off week too - probably because it's the run up to Christmas - and the investigation is sometimes amusingly shambolic. (What, they still haven't done that? If this was set in Stockholm or London someone would be getting bawled out by their superiors...) A perennial quirk of the series remains as Erlendur, due to personal baggage, prioritises digging into the past over conventionally obvious aspects of the present and gets away with it. This could hang better with the grittier, realistic side of the stories if a paragraph or two at least mentioned setting some constables to do the legwork on routine contemporary angles he's neglecting. Erlendur's naivety about a couple of matters was entirely unbelievable in a policeman of 30+ years' service, and in one instance was out of step with something else he'd said in the same book. ([view spoiler](#))

In *Jar City* and *Silence of the Grave*, my understanding developed at around the same pace as the investigators', but here, there were things that seemed obvious to me at the beginning... assumptions I thought might be dispelled, based on the track record of the earlier books. Not quite.

(The following are spoilers for things that emerge near the end of the book.) ([view spoiler](#))

I also wasn't quite convinced by part of the conclusion. ([view spoiler](#))

*Voices* doesn't have such pointed social comment as its predecessors - these are crimes resulting from messes that happen everywhere in the western world, and it would take far more than the sort of change or vigilance that Nordic crime novels implicitly call for, for these things not to happen. ([view spoiler](#)) A couple of features of Icelandic society receive brief criticisms: wastefulness and the aversion to second-hand goods, and that "no-one is ever allowed to excel

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in this dwarf state" - there are places like this in every country, but Jante Law may make the attitude more acceptable in the Nordic states. One significant issue recurs time and again though in these books, that sentences even for violent crimes in Iceland are extremely short. [Haven't checked this independently yet.] And whilst it isn't a crux of the book, and perhaps that's significant in itself, one of the least liberal aspects of contemporary Nordic political culture emerges here, a (still relatively subtle) sense of distaste about sex workers, in contrast with the consciously empathic portrayal of other 'difficult' social groups. The best chance these characters get is to say "you wouldn't understand"; there's no real insight. It's easy to see this as the product of a country that would ban strip clubs less than ten years later. (Tangent: the use of the word 'tarts' in the translation is odd and archaic in the context, as a routine slangy word by non-loutish police officers and others including [ex] prostitutes themselves. 'Hookers' instead, maybe? One of very few mis-steps in another good translation.)

The recurring characters and their development are part of what I like in this series.

*Voices* occasionally features Marion Briem, a retired detective and former boss of Erlunder's, presented with ambiguous gender and sexuality; Marion is usually contacted by phone, apparently has a voice that could be male or female, and is always described sans pronoun. A note in *Jar City* mentions how this relates to Icelandic surnames: most surnames are patronymics ending in "son" or "dottir", making sex/gender immediately apparent on paper, but Briem is a Danish surname which gives nothing away. The only real clue in the text so far is in *Jar City* when a particularly bigoted old policeman describes Briem as a 'bastard' - I don't know what the Icelandic original was, or if it's a gendered insult. My mental image of Briem is sometimes as a butch woman, but because of that old officer, more usually of a man who has a few camp / feminine aspects in his presentation, without being so outrageous that he couldn't be a respected police detective in the 60s and 70s. There's a currently untranslated book in which Briem is the lead character - it would be interesting to see how the ambiguity is treated, if the act of writing a whole mainstream novel about the character, not just a few paragraphs, will change things.

From the series in general, I'd been taking away an inaccurately positive sense of the relationship between Erlendur and his twentysomething on-off heroin addict daughter Eva Lind. Their conversations actually pretty damn awkward on the page. But other people's difficult relatives don't push the buttons your own do. And the reader gets to hear many of Erlendur's thoughts, there's an impression of someone who understands, but is unable to articulate it, and is going through something like a therapeutic process single-handed. I still warm to him because he has an instinctive awareness of psychological effects, that he understands his walking out when she was a kid had *something* but certainly not everything to do with the way she turned out, and he's found a pretty good balance of letting her do her own thing and helping out when really necessary. Eva Lind seems both rude and brave in saying things that seem futile, but it's not necessarily futile to say them to him, as it may be to some who see the world differently, because the cogs are turning, albeit slowly.

I've read enough of these books now to start to see an obvious pattern in the structure - time for a bit of a break before any more, so they don't start to feel monotonous.





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