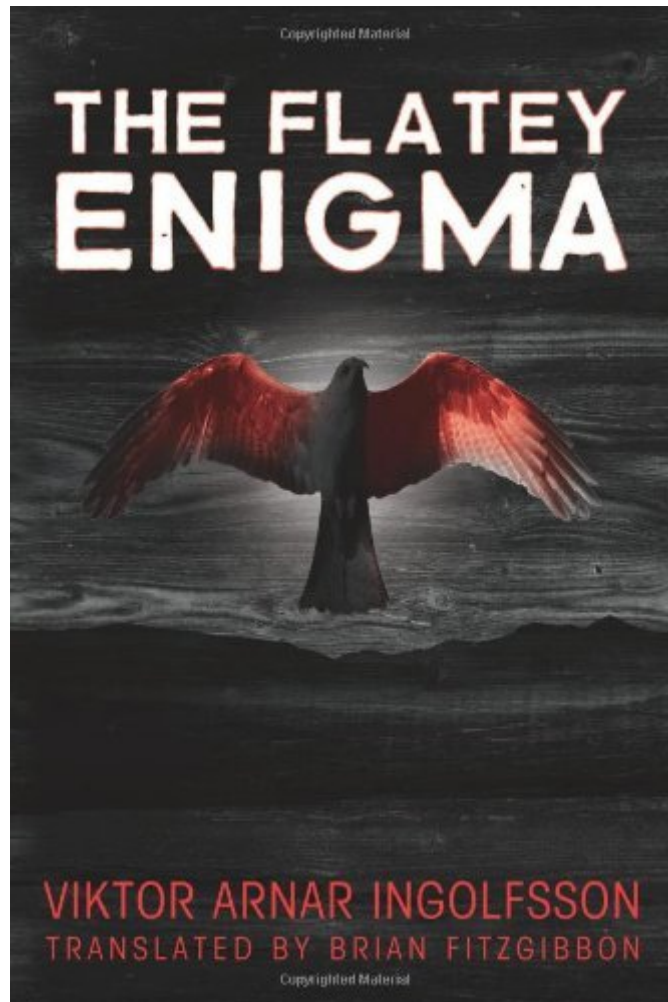


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The Flatey Enigma



Synopsis

Near a deserted island off the western coast of Iceland in 1960, the dawning of spring brings new life for the local wildlife. But for the body discovered by three seal hunters, winter is a matter of permanence. After it is found to be a missing Danish cryptographer, the ensuing investigation uncovers a mysterious link between the researcher and a medieval manuscript known as The Book of Flatey. Before long another body is found on the tiny island. This time, in the ancient Viking tradition, the victim's back has been mutilated with the so-called blood eagle. Kjartan, the district magistrate's representative sent to investigate the crime, soon finds himself descending into a dark, dangerous world of ancient legends, symbolism, and secret societies to find a killer. Nominated for the prestigious Glass Key award for Nordic crime fiction, The Flatey Enigma will keep you guessing until Kjartan has cracked the code.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book was definitely a difficult read to complete. I think it is the most "foreign" feeling book I've ever read. Let me explain what I mean by "foreign feeling". I've enjoyed fiction from South Africa, Europe, South America, North America and books written in the distant past. I'm a foreigner living in

a foreign country and I've lived in Africa and North and Central America. So, what's my point? My point is that I've been exposed to a perspective or two. But I have not encountered writing that depicts a social structure as strange as this book presents. The book is set in 1960 and follows the death of several people on a remote island called Flatey (a real place). Each chapter ends with a separate running dialogue that deals with the text of an ancient Icelandic epic. The chapters are very short, some no more than 2 sides of a page. The vignettes in the epic portions are bizarre, violent, & crude-- just what you'd expect from an ancient epic of a warlike people (not so different from the better-known Norse tales, Greek epics, and Beowulf). There doesn't seem to be any single main character, only a couple who get more exposure than the others. And we're talking some very weird characters, behaving in simple ways but motivated by bizarre impulses. Aaargg!! I'd like to say more about a couple characters, but I can't without ruining the story. The dialogue veers between stilted and extremely simple to hip and pretty funny at times. The first third of the book seemed to really dwell on food. And talk about some interesting food. I grew up on a fishery and thought we ate some pretty disgusting stuff. The stuff in this book goes to a new level-- fermented ray, fermented shark, puffin breast, baby seal fat, and on and on.

The Scandinavian crime genre offers many rewards for readers, but most of the stories I have read so far have very similar themes running through them. After a while the formula becomes familiar, like settling back in an old armchair that you have moulded to your comfort through countless hours of reading. The Flatey Enigma gives a brief nod in the direction of that formula in the sub-story dealing with police procedures in Reykjavik, but the rest of the book is very different. The action takes place mostly on the tiny island of Flatey in the Breidafjord Bay. Flatey in 1960 is a cold, bleak place with few resources, and its small community of inhabitants live close to subsistence level. They don't have the luxury of soft-eyed environmentalism that more affluent societies enjoy in 2012, so if you are likely to be upset by pragmatic descriptions of hunting and eating animals and birds more familiar to most of us in zoos than on the dinner plate, you might find some of the images disturbing. The book starts with the discovery of a body on a deserted island, but the first few chapters are more concerned with description and atmosphere than action. In this, Viktor Ingolfsson's familiarity with the island and its culture comes through, with evocative images of an economically depressed but close-knit community well-used to the dangers of their unforgiving sea and climate, but now faced with an unpleasant intrusion. The development of atmosphere, not threatening but hauntingly bleak and spare and timeless, is unusual in urban crime stories, although familiar in other genres. The thread weaving through the story, however, is the Flatey Book, a bound

vellum collection of medieval (and very bloodthirsty) Viking stories.

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