



THE Uninvited



**WHEN THE SPIRITS RETURNED TO ICELAND,
THEY DIDN'T COME TO PLAY**

by *Greg Taylor*

In the shadow of Christmas 1908, almost one hundred people sat quietly within a heated hall as another long Icelandic winter's night began. The sound of scuffing feet and low murmurs dominated the hall, as the tense crowd waited for a glimpse of the young man they had come to see. When he finally emerged from an adjoining room, the handsome 25-year-old strolled with purpose towards the pulpit at the centre of one end of the room. Seating himself at the nearby table – the only one in the room – he nodded to the official already seated and waiting for him. The white noise of the room died a sudden death; another official surveyed the crowd silently, instructed one man to lock the doors to the hall, and then another to put out the lamp illuminating the room.

Suddenly another light source appeared: a candle, lit beside the harmonium player, who launched into a hymn medley, accompanied by several people in the audience. The young man sat motionless on his chair for a long while, his hands clasped at his chest, as if in prayer. Then, suddenly his head and hands fell, as if a puppeteer had loosed his strings. The lead official signaled to the harmonium player, who brought the hymnal accompaniment to a close as the candle was extinguished. As the light died, the assembled group caught one last glimpse of the young man, as the official seated beside him suddenly grabbed his arms forcefully. The whole hall seemed to suck inward through pure weight of the tension in the air, as darkness enveloped all and through the silence only deep breathing could be heard.

And then, a voice sliced through the stillness, simultaneously making one hundred hearts jump. From the general area of the pulpit, with little fanfare, the dead had made their appearance. Talking through the entranced medium, the 'control' personality greeted all those present and introduced himself. Then, behind the crowd, another of the dead announced itself, and again, to the side of the hall a woman's voice addressed the audience in French. From the front of the hall the official called confirmation, "I am still holding his arms!"

A strong breeze rushed across the hall, confusing those who knew the doors and windows of the hall were locked shut. Cracking sounds were heard in the air, bringing the tension to fever pitch, when the harmonium player began shouting. He had felt the instrument begin lifting off the floor, and had thrust his left foot onto the floor while keeping his right foot on one of the pedals, in order to steady himself. Nevertheless, as the harmonium continued to bob across the floor he was compelled to jump along with it, until it was suddenly snatched away. The official immediately called for the lights to be turned back on, and those present were stunned to find the harmonium had been moved on top of a table on the east side of the hall, though nobody had heard any sound of it moving there or being put onto the table.

It took two men to lift the roaming instrument down from its perch, and they did so with some difficulty – and not without some noise.

The young man at the centre of this maelstrom woke from his trance, blinking at the bright lights. Not yet fully awake, he staggered from the hall, barely able to remain upright, apparently unaware of the extraordinary happenings in the hall just minutes before.

BIRTH OF A MEDIUM

Indridi Indridason was born October 12th, 1883, and grew up as the uneducated son of a farmer in a rural area in the western part of Iceland. In 1905 he travelled to the Icelandic capital of Reykjavik to take up a job as a printer's apprentice with the weekly newspaper *Isafold*. The young man's life may have continued in obscurity if it wasn't for a chance invitation from a relative, with whom he was staying, to attend a rather odd type of meeting.

The turn of the century was the golden age of Spiritualism. The previous few decades had seen the birth of the prestigious Society for Psychical Research (SPR), and genuine scientific investigation into 'superstar' mediums such as D.D. Home, Leonora Piper and Eusapia Palladino. Publications by members of the SPR were read widely by academics, and in 1903 the prominent Icelandic writer Einar Hjörleifsson Kvaran wrote a positive story on the evidence for life after death, inspired by the post-humous release of Frederic Myers' seminal book *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*.

Kvaran didn't limit his interest to just theory though; he decided to 'get his hands dirty' as well by taking the lead of the SPR and forming his own experimental circle, despite there being no reports at all of Icelandic mediums up till that point. As such, Kvaran and his group of friends forged ahead with some self-experimentation, beginning with attempts at automatic writing and 'table-tilting'. Kvaran would later relate how he came to discover the talents of



Indridi Indridason

Indridason accidentally in 1905, when the young man attended one of these table-tilting meetings with his relative Indridi Einarsson and his wife, with whom he was staying after recently moving to the Icelandic capital:

Indridi Einarsson was interested in the experiments but his wife much more so. Once when she sat by a table Indridi came along. She asked him to participate in that experiment.

Indridi had hardly taken his seat, when the table reacted violently and trembled. Indridi became frightened and was going to run out of the house.

From that time the experiments with Indridi started.

He came to my home and we sat down at a table. The table trembled, shook, and moved violently around in the room and nearly broke. Once it was overturned.

Kvaran questioned Indridason as to whether he had ever experienced strange things before this point, who replied that he had previously had some “remarkable visions”. As for the possibility that he was a budding performance magician, the young man claimed to have never heard of mediumistic phenomena, nor have seen performers such as conjurors and jugglers, due to his upbringing in the rural west of the country.

With Indridason’s ability at table-tilting obvious, Kvaran and his experimental circle began testing their star subject with automatic writing, an alleged method of receiving messages from the great beyond where the medium empties their mind and begins writing without conscious control. Indridason apparently succeeded immediately, with the messages from the dead offering a number of “proofs of identity”, according to Kvaran.

Then, on the weekend before Easter 1905, while attempting more automatic writing at Kvaran's home, Indridason fell into trance for the first time. The young medium had been making irreverent jokes at the expense of the 'personality' that he believed was sending messages through him, which seemed to upset the otherworldly ghostwriter. Indridason's hand all of a sudden wrote "You should not make fun of me", followed quickly by the message "Indridi shall now fall into trance". The control instructed Indridason to put his head down on a pillow on a table, and the others present to turn out the light; he lost consciousness a few minutes later and began to write. According to Kvaran, Indridason...

...wrote a few sentences with harsh jerks, and sighed heavily and screamed from time to time. He spoke with someone he obviously thought of as being with him, asked him not to treat him badly and expressed disagreement with what he thought was being said to him. Then, after about an hour, he was woken up, apparently by the same force that had put him to sleep. He was woken at our request; as we had never seen this stage before and we were uneasy.

Kvaran was persuaded by these early phenomena to step up the investigation into Indridason. His experimental circle was formalized as 'The Experimental Society' in the autumn of 1905, with the express intention of studying Indridi Indridason's strange talents. Its founding members included the highest members of Icelandic society, from Kvaran himself to Bjorn Jonsson, who would later become Prime Minister of Iceland. This research group became the sole agent for Indridason's mediumship, paying him a modest yearly salary on the proviso that he take part in no other séances without direct permission from the Society. They also built a small house for him, giving him free lodging, but for the main purpose of being better able to study him in an environment they felt they had control

over. The Experimental Society held sittings with Indridason once or twice a week throughout the year, only taking a short two-month break during the summer months.

MANIFESTATION DESTINY

In late 1905, the table tilting became table levitations. While Indridason was visiting with friends on a November evening in Reykjavik, the table they were sitting around rose up suddenly and bumped into their faces. Three of the men present attempted to push the table down, but failed to get it back to the floor, despite Indridason sitting with his hands above the table. In another séance shortly after, "peculiar" cracking sounds were heard in the air, moving all around the room, while the young medium remained completely still in his seat. And then the lights began to appear...

In their first appearance, sitters saw the lights floating through the air and on the walls of the room, sometimes flashing. Over successive séances, the phenomena seemed to grow more robust and diverse. Kvaran wrote of this phenomenon that the lights...

...had somewhat different color, some very white, others were more reddish. Once, during an experimental séance at my home, 58 lights were counted. These lights were of various shapes: some of the lights were round while others were oblong. They were of different sizes: some were small, about an inch in diameter, but others were stripes of light around two to four feet long...

There were a few times when light spread behind the medium on a whole wall, which was twelve feet wide and ten feet high. Sometimes it looked like a sort of net of light, with circular meshes: slightly darker circles around bright flashes. Again the light was

sometimes continuous, similar to the glow from a great fire. Those spreads of light were never as white as the small lights were, but were more reddish.

Before each appearance of the lights, the sitters usually felt gusts of wind in the séance room, strong enough to mess up their hair and flap the pages of the researcher's notebooks. The peculiar clicking and cracking sounds previously observed often accompanied the light show as well, while Indridason himself seemed to go through a painful ordeal during their manifestation. Kvaran noted that immediately preceding the appearance of the lights, Indridi would begin to shriek and scream, and would continue doing so while they remained. After séances, the medium would say that he "felt as if he had been beaten up."

And then, the dead appeared in person. In a sitting on December 6, 1905, soon after the lights had made their appearance, sitters were shocked to find they were not alone in the room. In the reddish glow of the anomalous luminescence, the torso and head of a man was seen, standing with his back to the group, some eight to ten feet from where the medium was sitting, still shrieking in pain. Students of the paranormal might recognize some similarities here with other cases, such as the investigation of poltergeist phenomena surrounding Doris Bither in the 1970s, in which researchers claimed to have seen the materialization of the upper body of a man during a manifestation of anomalous light phenomena.

On other occasions, sitters reported seeing a "luminous, beautiful light-pillar" appear, slightly larger than a human being, inside of which they could make out the form of a human figure. The appearance of the light-pillar was accompanied by a low buzzing sound (an interesting facet, for those who have read my previous essay on paranormal sounds), and soon after it would resolve into a fully-fledged, luminous human body:



Einar Hjorleifsson Kvaran

The medium was in a very deep trance. The new visitor was dressed in very fine white drapery, of which many folds hung down to the floor; and the light was radiating from him. We saw him at different places in the room. Once he stood on a sofa, and behind him was a red light, which was similar to a little sun, with whitish light streaming out from it. This sight I shall never forget. Frequently he managed to appear 7-8 times the same evening in different places in the room. Many times we saw the medium and this materialized being simultaneously. But this extraordinary visitor could not be visible for more than a few seconds each time. When he had finished showing himself he tried to touch a few sitters with his hand, arm or foot, and he always allowed us to touch his materialized body before he dematerialized it again.

On multiple occasions, witnesses noted that during these manifestations Indridason was visible in the ghostly luminosity thrown by the apparition. The figure in the room was not him.

A DARK AND FRIGHTENING CHANGE

Sittings with Indridason continued to yield strange phenomena. On a number of occasions, his left arm was said to be ‘dematerialized’ by his controls, with those present unable to find it via touch or in the glow of lit matches. The medium also began to be levitated himself, with sitters reporting that they could hear him being dragged along the ceiling, some 12 feet high. And there were also instances of apports – objects appearing in the séance room, seemingly out of thin air – and manifestations of strong, fragrant odors, a staple of physical mediumship and other Fortean phenomena.

One of the more evidential events at this time was an apparent case of ‘traveling clairvoyance’, very similar to the famed story regarding the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. A discarnate personality,

introducing himself as “Mr. Jensen”, said he had just been in the Danish capital of Copenhagen, where he had witnessed firemen overcoming a factory fire. The researchers immediately realized the possibility of this being investigated further – at that time there was no instantaneous communication link between Iceland and Denmark. They noted the time of Mr. Jensen’s statement, and the next day went to the Bishop of Iceland in order for him to witness the claim. A month later, when the next boat arrived from Denmark, a scan of the newspapers revealed that there had indeed been a factory fire at this time.

But in September 1907, one event seems to have precipitated a dark and frightening change in the mediumship of Indridason. While visiting a village on an island off the southern coast of Iceland, he reported seeing the apparition of a man, one Jon Einarsson, who had drowned himself a year earlier. Upon returning to Reykjavik, strange disturbances started occurring in the rooms which Indridason shared with theology student Thordur Oddgeirsson, and at subsequent séances. The medium also reported that he was having continued visions of the same man he had seen on the island.

Then, during a séance on December 7th, the controls reported to the group that “Jon” was now in attendance, and was in control of “the power”, and in a very bad mood. Indridason went into convulsions, sitters felt their clothing and hats being grabbed at, and a full coal-scuttle was thrown, barely missing one of the sitters. Later that night, when Indridason and Oddgeirsson went to bed, a plate flew from the front room into the bedroom, and the medium’s bed was pulled suddenly out from the wall. Indridason was reportedly terrified by this development – regular sittings were canceled for some time, and members of the Experimental Society had to stay with him at night to calm his nerves.

The following night, Kvaran stayed to reassure the terror-stricken medium, locking the doors to the building and staying in the bedroom with him and the theology student after the lights were

put out. Suddenly, Indridason fell into a trance, and his chief control told Kvaran that “Jon” had just gone to get power, and this was very serious. The medium woke from his trance, but then things began to happen:

[T]he ends of the bed in which the medium and Mr. Oddgeirsson were lying were raised and lowered alternately and the bed shaken. The medium was lying on the side farther from the wall. He shouted that he was being dragged out of the bed, and was very terror-stricken. He implored Mr. Oddgeirsson to hold onto his hand. Mr. Oddgeirsson took his hand, pulling with all his might, but could not hold him. The medium was lifted above the end of the bed against which his head had been lying, and was pulled down onto the floor, sustaining some injuries to his back from the bedstead. At the same moment a pair of boots, which had been under Mr. Oddgeirsson’s bed, were thrown at the lamp, breaking both the glass and the shade.

Indridason was then dragged headfirst out the door of the bedroom and into the front room, despite desperately trying to grab hold of pieces of furniture, and having both Kvaran and Oddgeirsson pulling at his legs. They finally managed to get him back to his bed with great difficulty, but his legs were then lifted so forcefully that the two men could not push them back down to the bed.

Their reaction to these events was a natural one: they got out of the house as fast as possible, went to Kvaran’s home, and turned on all the lights! Nevertheless, phenomena continued – a book flew off a table and hit a hanging lamp in the drawing room, then continued on and hit another smaller lamp; a pot plant shifted a few inches; and knocks were heard on the walls of the room.

The poltergeist phenomena continued on subsequent nights, to varying degrees. On December 10th, the Experimental Society’s harmonium player (and also organist at Reykjavik Cathedral)

Brynjolfur Thorlaksson stayed with Indridason and Oddgeirsson, sleeping on a couch in the front room. Indridason once again fell into a trance, and the controls warned that “Jon” had gathered “considerable” power during the day. Two candlesticks were flung to the floor, and a brush was thrown across the room. Indridason then began screaming that “Jon” was there. Thorlaksson went to the bedroom and lay on top of Indridason, and had to use all his strength to hold him down. Oddgeirsson went to his aid, but a bedside table was smashed over his shoulders – he jumped back into his bed and pulled the quilt over his head, but the table continued to bash him mercilessly.

The accosted trio managed to light a lamp and began planning their escape from the building. Indridason started to get dressed, and was putting on his trousers when he was flung down onto the bed again. Thorlaksson rushed to help when a bowl flew from a chest of drawers in the bedroom straight for him. He dodged the missile, but reported that after it passed him the bowl changed direction and smashed into a stove in the outer room. Continuing on into the bedroom to assist the frightened medium, Thorlaksson was gob-smacked by what he witnessed:

[A] vision that I shall never forget. Indridi is lying horizontal in the air, at about the height of my chest, and swaying there to and fro, with his feet pointing towards the window, and it seems to me that the invisible power that is holding him in the air is trying to swing him out of the window. I don’t hesitate a moment, but grab around the medium where he is swinging in the air, and push him down onto the bed and hold him there. But then I notice that both of us are being lifted up. I scream to Thordur Oddgeirsson and ask him to come help.

Upon hearing the call for help, the theology student made for the bedroom, only to have a chair hurled at him by some invisible force. Side-stepping the hostile furniture, he continued to the bedroom where he saw Thorlaksson lying on the chest of the medium, whose

whole body was in motion. He spread his weight across Indridason's knees to assist, when the two candlesticks from the front room drifted into the room and were flung onto the floor beside them.

The three men linked arms and began backing out of the room, with Oddgeirsson holding the lamp before them to illuminate any further threats. A hand-basin flew towards them from a table in the bedroom at head-height, then changed direction and smashed into the stove in the outer room, breaking to pieces. At 2.30 a.m., three grown men rushed out of the house into the Icelandic night, terrified.

If the physical violence wasn't intimidation enough that this new presence was a dangerous one, the threat soon became explicit. On December 17th, while staying at Kvaran's house, Indridason once again fell into trance. But this time something was different. Through choking sounds, it became clear that the usual controls were not in charge of the medium's body – instead, "Jon" began mumbling and swearing at those present. He then described Indridason as "a trained instrument which he should like to use at his pleasure", expressing his desire "to kill him and to do all possible harm to those in the so-called upper world". This seems to have spurred the other controls to combine forces and expel "Jon" from the medium's body, and diminish his influence. Curiously, as the malevolent spirit was being exorcised, sitters described hearing a buzzing sound surrounding Indridason. But the effort seems to have been a successful one, as Jon's power seemed to weaken from this point – so much so that he eventually appears to have reconciled and made peace with the medium and the experimental group.

THE INVESTIGATOR VERSUS THE UNINVITED

Given the high profile of members of the Experimental Society, not least within the world of publishing and newspapers, the extraordinary tales surrounding the Indridason investigation were soon headline news in Iceland. He became one of the most well-known identities

in the country, and – just as in the modern day – this led to plenty of accusations of deception, and calls for independent scientific investigation. On the back of the widespread publicity, one of the most respected scientists in Iceland, Dr. Gudmundur Hannesson – who in his life would serve as President of the University of Iceland, found the Icelandic Scientific Society, and spend 35 years as the Professor of Medicine at the University – requested permission to study Indridason. Noted for his integrity, though openly skeptical about the Experimental Society's reports regarding Indridason, Hannesson appeared to be the perfect candidate for external investigation of the phenomena. As such, the Experimental Society agreed to allow the respected professor to study Indridason.

Hannesson examined the Experimental House closely for any sort of hidden compartments or trapdoors that could conceal an accomplice or tools that would allow Indridason to fake the phenomena, but found none. When Indridason arrived for the séance, he would have to undress in bright light before Hannesson, and was given simple attire by the skeptical investigator to wear for the duration of the test. Hannesson then checked his hair for any tools of trickery.

The hall where the séance was held also had a makeover, with Hannesson installing a floor to ceiling net that divided the room into two parts, made of mesh "so small that it is quite impossible to get a hand through them". The medium and the watchman would be isolated on one side of the net, with the experimenters observing – as best as possible – from the other side of the net, guarding the single slit that provided access. Before beginning the séance, Hannesson made absolutely sure that there were no avenues for hoaxing by the medium:

No effort is now spared in examining everything as minutely as possible. The hall is searched from floor to ceiling, and also every article that is in it. Nothing seems too trivial to be suspected that it may in some way serve the purpose of the impostors.



Gudmundur Hannesson

This is no joke, either. It is a life-and-death struggle for sound reason and one's own conviction against the most execrable form of superstition and idiocy. No, certainly nothing must be allowed to escape.

And yet, once the doors were locked, and the lights turned off, extraordinary phenomena began almost immediately. Appearing shortly after Indridason went into trance, his controls noted that this séance might be unusually noisy, as some new and uninvited "visitors" had manifested. Voices were then heard in different parts of the hall, mumbling and cursing, before objects began to be thrown about the room with great force. Hannesson and his offsider instantly lit a match, but only saw Indridason and the watchman holding his hands, sitting in the same position as the watchman had reported during the commotion.

Then, the "spirits" turned things up a notch. The chairs beneath the medium and the watchman were snatched away and thrown into a corner of the room. The watchman, determined to continue holding onto Indridason, asked Hannesson to fetch the chairs for him. Lighting a match, the perplexed investigator noted the two men still in the centre of the room, only now standing, and one of the chairs lying in the corner of the room.

I make for it, and in spite of the dark I find it at once. The very moment that I turn round to take the chair *I am struck a heavy blow in the back* [Hannesson's emphasis], as it were with a closed fist. Yet a few seconds previously there was nothing to be seen in that corner. I forthwith take the chair to the men and find them standing exactly as before.

Hannesson returned the chairs and retired to his observing station outside the net. A few moments later, the watchman shouted with urgency that things were "getting serious" – Indridason had been

drawn up into the air with his feet towards the ceiling and his head toward the floor. The watchman exclaimed that he was trying to pull him back towards the floor, but that the force levitating Indridason had him at the limit of his strength to keep hold of the entranced medium. Then, all of a sudden, the pull slackened, and the medium sank back down slowly and the watchman put him back in his chair.

The reason for this (momentary) respite became clear when the voices of the “uninvited visitors” spoke in the dark, noting that they were going away for a short time to “get more power”. Upon their return, the chairs beneath the medium and watchman were repeatedly snatched from beneath them, and eventually broken into pieces. Then...

...the medium is pulled up into the air with so much force that the watchman, as he says, is repeatedly almost lifted off the ground. All this is accompanied by so much scuffling and struggling that apparently it is going to be unavoidable to go to the aid of the watchman, who is exerting himself not to let the medium go – up into the air!

The scuffle is now carried towards the lectern. Suddenly the watchman shouts that things have taken a dangerous turn, for the medium’s legs have been quickly pulled down into the lectern while the small of his back is resting on the edge. He fears that the medium will not be able to stand this and that it will result in disaster, for while he is pulling at his shoulders with all his strength “the others” are pulling at his legs.

We are about to go inside to give assistance, when we hear some still rougher shuffling and the watchman says that everything is again all right. He has, he explains, put one foot against the lectern and in that way been able to pull the medium out and get him on the floor. The tumult now ceases.

Once again the “uninvited visitors” spoke up, cursing and threatening Indridason, and then once again retreating momentarily in order to “fetch more power.” Again, there was no mistaking their return. With a terrific crash, the lectern was completely ripped from the wall and flung across the hall, and both the watchman and the medium were thrown into the air. The Reverend Haraldur Nielsson, who was acting as the watchman during this séance, described the turn of events:

After a terrible struggle with two vulgar entities, while I kept my arms round the shoulders of the medium, pressing his legs between my knees, a pulpit situated near the wall inside the net and solidly fastened by nails to the floor had its panels all of a sudden jerked upwards from the floor and flung outwards to the net. It will be observed that this involved wrenching the woodwork out of the floor as well as from the wall, the pulpit being firmly fixed to both. After this I myself while continuing to hold the medium was thrown with him up into the air, so that we crashed to the floor violently, I with the result of swollen hands, he with a little perceptible sore caused by a nail upon which he fell.

The lectern was thrown with such force that it was now lying against the dividing net. Hannesson, on the other side from Indridason and Nielsson, grabbed hold of the corner, and called out to the undead vandals, challenging them to pull it from his grasp. A menacing voice growled out of the darkness, “Eat hell!”, and the lectern was pulled away from Hannesson with significant force. The plucky investigator, for his part, replied to his ghostly antagonist with his own “uncomplimentary term”, and was answered in turn with a face-full of broken glass and other debris. According to Hannesson, this was “thrown from the empty quarter and from a *different direction* [Hannesson’s emphasis] entirely to that of the medium and the watchman, who were lying on the floor close to my feet.” Hannesson

was at a loss to explain what had just taken place: “Who in the world was it that threw these things?”, he exclaimed.

Turning the lights on, the investigators surveyed the destruction: smashed chairs, the lectern in pieces, and an empty, unpainted space in the room where the lectern had once stood.

Hannesson continued to investigate the mediumship of Indridi Indridason for the whole winter, constantly trying to detect fraud. But he was never able to ascertain any trickery; “on the contrary, the bulk of the phenomena were, as far as I could judge, quite genuine, whatever their cause may have been.”

Many years later, when Reverend Neilsson was leaving to attend a conference in Copenhagen on psychical research, Hannesson told him: “You may state as my firm conviction, that the phenomena are unquestionable realities.”

THOSE THAT BURN BRIGHTEST...

Indridason’s mediumship was put under the microscope almost constantly until 1909, when, on a trip to visit his parents in the summer of 1909, both he and his fiancée contracted typhoid fever. Indridason survived, barely; his betrothed did not. The illness brought his mediumship to an end, after just four short years of producing some of the most remarkable phenomena ever witnessed in a séance room. Indridason would go on to marry another girl, with whom he had a daughter. But it seemed almost as if death had become his true companion: the baby died before reaching two years of age, and soon after Indridason himself contracted tuberculosis, resulting in his own death on 31st August, 1912. He was just 29.

The case of Indridi Indridason seems to embody the old saying, ‘those who burn brightest, burn fastest’. In just four years, and aged only in his 20s, he produced *all* of the classic phenomena associated with physical mediumship: raps, lights, levitation (of both objects

and himself), apports, self-playing musical instruments, voices, anomalous odors, breezes in closed rooms, and even supposed materializations of human figures. This despite there being no real tradition or knowledge of Spiritualism, nor conjuring tricks, in Iceland at the time of his discovery – a factor that only seems to be enhanced as a consequence of his rural upbringing.

So what are we to make of this case, a century on from Indridason’s passing? For me, personally, the requirement by the ‘spirit controls’ of total darkness during the séances is an almost insurmountable problem – it positively screams fraud. Members of the Experimental Society even tried dim red light, thinking it might not have such an impact, but it still caused the phenomena to diminish. However, we can’t just discard the case by assuming that Indridason was a talented hoaxer who did magic tricks in the dark. We also have to contend with the numerous instances of ‘poltergeist’ phenomena that occurred in full light, apparently spontaneously, which were viewed by multiple witnesses. Added to that are instances where investigators turned on lights at short notice without noticing anything untoward. For example:

Hannesson once unintentionally switched on an electric torch without asking for permission. He heard one of the “ghosts” shout, close under his nose: “You damned scoundrel!”. At the same time the torch flashed and lit up the whole inner area. Hannesson saw Indridason hanging limp in his chair in the same position as the watchman had stated, and everybody sitting still in their own seats.

The other possibility that comes to mind is that Indridason had an accomplice (or accomplices), allowing him to stay seated and guarded, while they worked their ‘magic’. This would help explain objects moving to different parts of the hall, and incidents where multiple ‘spirit voices’ – including a woman who spoke in French – talked or sang simultaneously. For instance, Neilsson noted:

I have often heard two voices speaking or singing loudly, while I was sitting alone with the medium inside the net...holding both his hands and talking with the control.

Sometimes the control spoke through the medium while the voices were singing, but more often he was silent while the singing was going on but started speaking the moment it ceased.

Hannesson was especially wary of this possibility, as he felt the medium was too well-guarded, and unable to return to his seat with enough speed and silence. "I was on the whole more suspicious of such an assistant than of the medium himself," he once commented. But how did such an accomplice make his way into the isolated area that Hannesson had set up, given the net and the investigators' careful scan of the space for hidden spaces and trapdoors? And how did they make a getaway in those cases where a light was turned on at short notice, leaving no time for an intruder to disappear? To Hannesson, this factor alone "precluded that a man who might have been in the inner quarter could escape."

Nevertheless, various elements of the case continually provoke the skeptical mind. Indridason was apparently a rural lad who could barely write, let alone speak in other languages – but his grandfather's brother Konrad Gislason (who became his third 'spirit control') had been a professor of Icelandic at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. On one occasion, sitters were amazed with Indridason performing some "remarkable" gymnastic feats while in the trance state, "which were so complex and difficult that Olafur Rosinkrans, who was a gymnastics education instructor, could not repeat them". Society members put this down to some sort of paranormal influence, but is it suggestive that – like many conjurers and escape artists – Indridason used his fitness and gymnastic ability to create 'magic' in the séance room, such as the 'levitations' where his feet were drawn up toward the ceiling? Perhaps the most concerning of all is the time

when – on a rare occasion when a flash photographer had been allowed into the séance room – Indridason seems to have been caught using bedsheets to try and create a ghostly effect.

It is, all in all, enough for me – as someone who demands an extremely high threshold of evidence – to file the case under "probable fraud". Nevertheless, there is no shortage of incidents that seem to defy rational explanation, assuming the original reports are accurate, so I am unwilling to discard it completely. To give one quick example: on one occasion the Experimental Society decided to ask for an apport from the spirits, to be fetched from someone's house – the identity of whom they decided *after* the medium had gone into trance. Not only did the spirits bring them an item from this house, almost instantaneously, but they also described the scene at the visited house (three men sitting near the item, talking) accurately.

But even in the case of fraud, questions arise. Perhaps the most significant of which is: why would Indridason assemble such a formidable conjuring skill-set, only to be 'accidentally' discovered and undertake four whole years of testing for only a modest yearly payment, when he probably could have made a lot more (and been in a lot less danger of discovery) by setting out on his own as either a performing magician or a fake medium? Perhaps this was a long-term goal, cut short by his illness and death, but it seems unlikely. And given that many of the séance phenomena appear to have required an accomplice, who was it, and why were they partnered with Indridason?

Hannesson himself struggled with reconciling his natural skepticism with what he observed during his experiments:

After prolonged observation I saw no way round the inference that the things move often, if not always, in an altogether unaccountable manner, without anybody's either directly or indirectly causing their movements by ordinary means. But although I cannot get away from this conclusion, I am utterly unable to bring myself to believe in it

altogether. It is not easy for unbelieving people to accept the theory that inanimate things move about without any natural causes.

If nothing else, the case of Indridi Indridason makes for a terrific, creepy, Fortean tale. A medium tested by top scientists and academics for almost four years, convincing them all that something paranormal was going on. Séances with hostile and physically aggressive spirits that could have come straight out of a 1980s horror movie. A fantastically talented young man – either as a medium, or a trickster – whose own life was a tragedy. And all occurring at the turn of the century, the age of the great mediums, a period that seems to be almost immersed in a paranormal fog.

And as a parting note, I can't but help provoke the interested Fortean into one last bit of fun contemplation as to whether there could be any possible link between Indridi Indridason, of Iceland, and the strange, otherworldly man who turned up in West Virginia during the birth of another Fortean mystery, the Mothman – an individual who called himself 'Indrid Cold'...

Greg Taylor is the owner and editor of the online alternative news portal, *The Daily Grail* (www.dailygrail.com), and is also the editor of *Darklore*. He is widely read in topics that challenge the orthodox worldview, from alternative history to the mysteries of human consciousness. Greg currently resides in Brisbane, Australia. He is currently working on a book surveying the evidence for an afterlife.

Due to many of the original reports on Indridi Indridason's mediumship being published in Icelandic, this essay is based largely on (and fully acknowledges its debt to) two sources: "The Icelandic Physical Medium Indridi Indridason", by Loftur R. Gissurarson and Erlendur Haraldsson (*Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* Vol. 57, Part 214, January 1989), and *Icelandic Spiritualism*, by Loftur Reimar Gissurarson and William H. Swatos, Jr.