

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into 'Legend of the Ice People'

## └ Introduction

### └ About Me

I hold a Ph.D. in Computational Engineering, a field that bridges computation and practical applications.

Over the years, I've taken on diverse roles: from developing intelligent fish portioning algorithms and custom SQL implementations to conducting genetic research with long-range sequencing. I've also crafted near-real-time recommendation systems for EVE Online and led an AI research team to optimize travel itineraries.

**Presently**, I have the privilege of mentoring young minds as an Assistant Professor in the Industrial Engineering Department at the University of Iceland.

- A career highlight was presenting on **Legend of the Ice People** at Reykjavík Databaseers, inspired by my literary podcast, **ÍSKISUR**. This modern literary analysis was truly exhilarating.
- Some might dismiss ÍSFÓLKID as 'trivial' for a distinguished conference like this. However, as we'll explore, a purely data-driven approach to ÍSFÓLKID unveils fascinating insights.

### About Me

I am a **Ph.D.** in Computational Engineering.

#### Past Roles:

- ▶ Software Developer at Valka
- ▶ SQL Consultant at AGR
- ▶ Research Scientist at deCODE genetics
- ▶ Data Scientist at CCP Games
- ▶ Head of AI Research at Travishift

#### Current Role:

**Assistant Professor** in the Industrial Engineering Department at the University of Iceland

#### Signature Talk

Analysis of **Legend of the Ice People** a.k.a. **ÍSFÓLKID** for Reykjavík Databaseers #6.

Inspired by the literary podcast I co-hosted, **ÍSKISUR**.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## └ Introduction

### └ A Surprising Insight

- When I presented at Databeers last June, I planned for a 7-min lightning talk.
- However, the audience's reaction took me by surprise.
- They were intrigued by the data-driven angle I took on ÍSFÓLKID.
- The discussions were so engaging that, with permission, we went well over time, turning that brief talk into a 45-minute in-depth discussion.
- So if there's one key **takeaway** from my experience, it's this: Data is all around us. With the right perspective, we can find and interpret data in the most unexpected domains.
- Be open to data, and it can unlock fresh insights and lively discussions, as I found out!

#### A Surprising Insight

What surprised most about my presentation at [Reykjavík Databeers](#) was the audience's reaction:

- ▶ They didn't expect a data-driven angle to **ÍSFÓLKID**.
- ▶ Astonished by **several** data-driven approaches to literature.
- ▶ Analytical framework shed new light and perspectives.



#### Take-Home Message

Anything can be data-driven with the right mindset. Data is everywhere; it's about looking for it and using it. Embrace data for fresh insights, even in unexpected domains.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## └ Introduction

### └ Backstory: From Cat Memes to Podcasts

In 2012, I stumbled upon the world of **internet cats** and was immediately *captivated*. It began innocently enough: I'd seek out **quirky cat memes** to share on my social platforms. Without even realizing it, I became a well known internet cat lady.

By 2016, I discovered a *hilarious* podcast named **My Dad Wrote A Porno**. Inspired by their creativity, my friends and I wanted to start our own show. But we faced a problem: none of our parents wrote erotic fiction. So, we **improvised** and decided to read **ÍSFÓLKÍÐ**, putting our own twist on it.

To incorporate my love for cats, I introduced a special segment at the end of each episode titled **Internet Cat of the Week**. And that's how two of my passions converged.

- 2012: Became the internet cat lady – Memes => Friends' Cat pics.
- 2016: Inspired by **My Dad Wrote A Porno** podcast.
- Solution: Read **ÍSFÓLKÍÐ** with our twist.
- Special Segment: (Internet) **Cat of the Week**.

#### TL;DR: **My Dad Wrote a Porno** (2015–)

A 3-time Webby Award-winning comedic podcast where host Jamie Morton reads his father's amateur erotic novel. With friends James Cooper and Alice Levine, they hilariously dissect awkward, improbable tales blending family and risqué fiction.



# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## └ Introduction

### └ About ÍSKISUR

ÍSKISUR is a rather unique podcast, combining two things many wouldn't expect to find together: literature and, believe it or not, cats. Each episode we dive into the world of **The Legend of the Ice People** by Margit Sandemo. This series is filled with both erotic and surreal elements, making it a treasure trove for lively discussions.

Now, here on the left, you'll see an image showcasing the internet sensations, Grumpy Cat and Lil Bub, to give you an example of what sort of cats are featured on our show. And to the right is our official podcast image on Storytel. It features myself alongside my amazing co-hosts Birna and Kristín.

**Disclaimer:** despite our deep dives into the book series, none of us claim to be actual cats or literary experts.

### About ÍSKISUR

- A literary and feline entertainment podcast\*
- Discuss the erotic and surreal book series *The Legend of the Ice People* by Margit Sandemo
- Each episode covers part of a book from the series and concludes with a segment on internet cats



Grumpy Cat first meeting Lil Bub  
Internet Cat Festival, 2013



Birna, Kristín, and dr. Helga

\*None of the hosts are actually cats or literary experts.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into 'Legend of the Ice People'

## └ Introduction

### └ About ÍSFÓLKID

- ÍSFÓLKID: A 47-volume family saga in historic Scandinavia, filled with mystical elements.
- Central is Silja and her family, marked by an age-old curse from Pengill.
- While Silja's bond with Pengill the Good deepens the curse's influence, their descendants wrestle with its implications.
- The family's enduring struggle is with Pengill the Bad, culminating in an epic confrontation.
- Throughout, spirits and mystical mandrake root play crucial roles, assisting the family.

#### About ÍSFÓLKID

- ▶ Epic 47-volume tale set in historic Scandinavia with fantasy elements.
- ▶ The tale revolves around a **curse** originating from malevolent Pengill.
- ▶ Silja, an ordinary woman, becomes intertwined with the curse through Pengill the Good.
- ▶ Their offspring, destined to face Pengill the Bad's rising evil, represent each book's focus.
- ▶ Culmination: The family's ultimate confrontation with Pengill the Bad.
- ▶ Spirits and mandrake root: Mysterious aids interspersed into the narrative.



- ▶ Silja: Innocent matriline of the cursed family
- ▶ Pengill the Good: Uncle of the cursed, foreseen ally for Silja
- ▶ Pengill the Bad: Evil-dwelling evil antagonist

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into 'Legend of the Ice People'

## └ Introduction

### └ Exploring Different Formats

**The Written format:** During the 80s, the *Ísfólkis* became more than just literature; it evolved into a cultural phenomenon, deeply embedding itself in the collective consciousness of a generation. Its impact extended beyond the pages, shaping real-life naming trends in Iceland, and later on I will show the data behind that.

Its relevance persisted, prompting a re-translation in 2007 for newer readers.

**The Audio format:** Storytel is a digital subscription service that offers audiobooks and e-books to its users on a global scale.

- *ÍSFÓLKID*, introduced in 2017, quickly became titans on Storytel, showcasing the series' undying charm. Their widespread success transformed them into one of the most sought-after listens on the platform.
- *ÍSKISUR*, initially a simple bookclub discussion among friends on Alvarpið, the podcast breathed a fresh, candid perspective into the series.
- Recognizing the value and its potential, Storytel approached us. Moved by the soaring popularity of the audiobooks, they offered professional editing, and a soundstage for recording, elevating our small DIY project to professional production standards.



**The Written Books**  
► 80s cult phenomenon.  
► Re-translated in 2007.  
► Influenced children's names.



**The Audio Books**  
► Top content on Storytel.  
► Widely listened to.

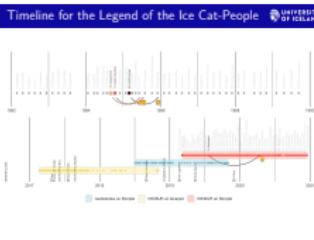


**The Podcast**  
► Small friend-led bookclub.  
► Started on Alvarpið Núttimars.  
► Moved to Storytel.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## └ Introduction

### └ Timeline for the Legend of the Ice Cat-People



**Visual Overview:** The slide visually encapsulates the publication journey of both the written form and its newer audio adaptations.

#### Upper half: Book Series

- Showcases the staggered release of the entire 47-part saga in Iceland.

#### Lower half: Audio Adaptations

- The journey began in earnest in fall 2016, when initial podcast episodes were recorded, but remained unreleased as we refined our production skills.
- ÍSKISUR made its debut on Alvarpið's 3rd anniversary in 2017, our podcast was featured alongside renowned titles such as Hefnendur and Englaryk.
- It's noted, this is before the major e-book release on Storytel. I like to think of ourselves as trendsetters.
- Although a hiatus intervened due to scheduling clashes and health issues, our passion project took a fortunate turn in 2019. Storytel recognized the podcast's potential and extended a collaboration offer. This meant not only compensation for our efforts but also relief from cumbersome post-production tasks, as we were living in different part of the country, and later different countries.
- Storytel continues the distribution of the audiobooks into fall of 2019.
- Our ÍSKISUR series reached its conclusion at the end of 2020. This marked the end of our intense four-year dive into Margit's world.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## Written Books

### └ Margit Sandemo, 1924–2018

Introducing the mastermind behind the book series: [Margit Sandemo](#). She brought to life the captivating tale of the cursed family we delve into today.

- Born in 1924 and living until 2018, Margit's life was deeply intertwined with our ÍSKISUR project.
- With a literary heritage, including a poet for a father, she added her own remarkable chapters to the family legacy.
- She started her writing journey at 40, proving it's never too late to follow your dreams.
- Since the 1980s, her books were favorites in the Nordics, showcasing her storytelling talent.
- Her major works include: [The Legend of the Ice People](#), our key focus. [The Warlock](#) exploring a lineage of witches. [The Legend of the Realm of Light](#) a sequel to the Ice People's tales.
- Margit had a knack for blending history with fiction, transporting readers to rich and vivid worlds.
- Her stories not only entertained but also spotlighted the wonders of Iceland to a global audience by weaving into her tales that Lucifer found a home in Dimmuborgir.
- Her dedication to the Ice People for two decades speaks volumes about her passion and creativity.

- ▶ Norwegian-Swedish author
- ▶ Father was a Norwegian poet, Anders Underral
- ▶ Claimed lineage to Nobel Prize-winning author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson
- ▶ First published at forty years old
- ▶ Best-selling author in the Nordic countries since the 1980s

Notable Book Series	Years	n
The Legend of the Ice People	1982–89	47
The Warlock	1991–94	15
The Legend of the Realm of Light	1995–99	12

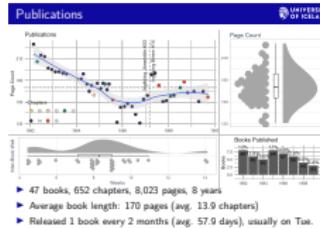


Margit signing [Algaljótar](#) in Eymundarhús, 2007

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## Written Books

### Publications



The scatter plot tracks Margit's book publications in Iceland through [Prenthúsið](#) over a busy 8 years.

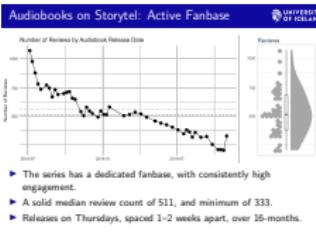
Key insights:

- Margit's output was impressive: 47 books in 8 years, which means a new book every 8-9 weeks, typically released on Tuesdays.
- She often stuck to a 14-chapter structure for most books.
- As the series progressed, the books got shorter, perhaps hinting at her comments about the narrative challenge in her epilogue, [Is There Anybody Out There?](#).
- Ingibjörg Jónsdóttir began translating the series in 1982, covering the first 33 books. Sadly, she passed away in 1986. Ingibjörg Briem then translated the remaining 14.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## └ Audio Books

### └ Audiobooks on Storytel: Active Fanbase



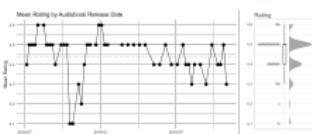
Leveraging publicly available data on Storytel, I analyzed the number of reviews and average ratings of each book.

- The scatterplot reveals engagement with the series on Storytel. The y-axis represents the number of reviews (log scale), while the x-axis shows the audiobook release dates.
- The series began with a high of 1104 reviews, dwindling to 395 by the end. This suggests that not all readers rate every book they listen to, but those who reached the end likely read earlier titles.
- The series' dedication is clear: a median of 511 reviews per book, never dropping below 333.
- Storytel's release strategy was methodical, launching a new audiobook chapter every Thursday over 16 months. This maintained listener engagement and promoted sustained subscriptions.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## └ Audio Books

### └ Audiobooks on Storytel: High Ratings



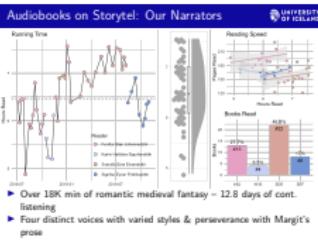
► Overall high rating, an average 4.44 stars out of 5.

- Now, the y-axis showcases the series' mean ratings.
- Ratings stay consistently commendable, between 4.1 and 4.6 stars, with a median of 4.5 stars.
- It's key to note that Storytel combines e-book and audiobook ratings, which might blur distinctions between content and narration quality.
- A notable dip in ratings in the series' latter part matches Margit's admissions of writer's fatigue. This hints at the series' changing quality and readers' keen observations.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into 'Legend of the Ice People'

## └ Audio Books

### └ Audiobooks on Storytel: Our Narrators



Shift your focus now to the narrators, who rendered 18,000 minutes (about 13 days) of medieval romantic fantasy.

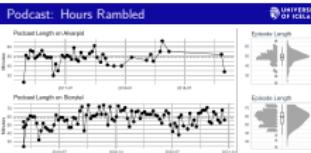
The y-axis shows total narration hours per book.

- Although the written book length decreased, audiobook durations increased. This could suggest narrators might have slowed down their reading pace.
- Rumor has it the first narrator left after a third of the series due to its intense and controversial themes.
- The second narrator tried to voice each character uniquely. This radio-play style, however, saw a dip in ratings. Though book content primarily influences ratings, changes in narration styles might also play a part.
- Ratings rebounded with the third narrator's traditional style. She narrated almost half the series.
- Kudos to the narrators for their distinct styles and dedication.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## └ Podcast

### └ Podcast: Hours Rambled



- Over a period of 45.8 months, there is 7,762 minutes of **quality** content, or 5.4 days of continuous listening.
- Average length is 57.6 minutes on Storytel (48.5 on Alvarpið), but never surpassing 75 minutes.

Moving on, let's discuss the duration of the **ÍSKISUR** podcast episodes available on Alvarpið (a free streaming platform syndicated on Nútíminn.is) and the subscription-based Storytel.

Both platforms introduced the series with a teaser. However, their approaches varied:

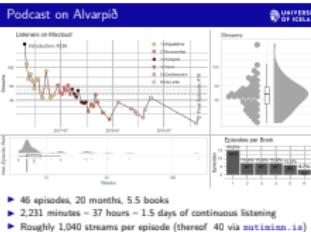
- Alvarpið had a more freestyle format.
- Storytel adhered to a structured approach, ensuring uniform episode durations.

The data highlights this: Over 4 years, we produced 7,762 minutes (or 5 days) of content. Episodes on Storytel averaged just under an hour, roughly 10 minutes longer than on Alvarpið. Notably, no episode on either platform exceeded 75 minutes, underscoring our aim for concise, captivating content.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## └ Podcast

### └ Podcast on Alvarpið



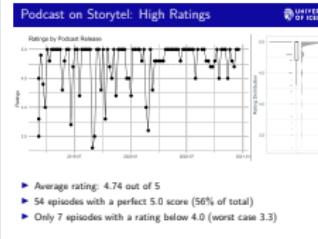
Diving into our experience with the Alvarpið platform: Over 20 months, we crafted 46 episodes, delving into 5.5 books.

- Although I couldn't get exact listener counts for each episode, we were informed of a range of **800-1000** listeners per episode through platforms like iTunes. Data from **Nútíminn**, via Mixcloud, reflects around 40 streams per episode.
- We started with one chapter per episode but quickly transitioned to two chapters for sustainability.
- Challenges arose by the sixth book, with health issues and logistical obstacles cutting short our coverage.
- Kristín and I recorded from Reykjavík while Birna was in Reyðarfjörður, revealing the hurdles of independent production.
- Fortunately, Storytel approached us. Their entry not only promised compensation but also took over technical aspects, letting us focus on book discussions and my personal favorite: the cat segment.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into 'Legend of the Ice People'

## └ Podcast

### └ Podcast on Storytel: High Ratings



Teaming up with Storytel brought not just technical relief but also glowing audience feedback, as depicted in this chart.

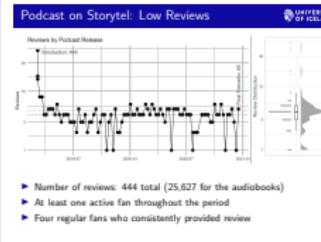
- Our average rating is an outstanding 4.74 out of 5.
- Over half of our episodes, 54 to be exact, received a flawless score of 5.0, highlighting listener satisfaction.
- Only seven episodes went below a 4.0 rating, with the least score being 3.3.
- These figures reflect the consistent quality of our content, augmented by Storytel's professional touch.

Switching from the hurdles of Alvarpið's self-production to the streamlined process with Storytel gave our mission renewed vigor.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## └ Podcast

### └ Podcast on Storytel: Low Reviews



Alright, let's ground ourselves with a touch of humility here. Taking a look at this chart, we can see a humbling snapshot: our review count isn't quite as jaw-dropping as we might have hoped. Sure, we've got a commendable rating, but in terms of review numbers? Our 444 reviews are dwarfed by the 25,627 the audiobooks received. Clearly, we were a small fish in the Storytel pond.

**Full disclosure:** I didn't religiously review our podcast episodes. After the initial rush of hearing our voices on the platform, I realized that since I was relistening during post-processing (penning the accompanied text summaries a must-read, by the way), there wasn't much point in re-re-relistening. I've believe my co-hosts shared my sentiment. However, every silver lining has its cloud:

- We always had at least **one** die-hard fan who never failed to review,
- and we'll forever be grateful to those **four** mainstays who consistently showered us with feedback.

While our podcast felt like a cozy book club, a running joke was that there was only one listener. But looking at our review count, it seems the joke was closer to the truth than we thought. Nonetheless, it's not the quantity that matters, but the quality.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into 'Legend of the Ice People'

## Podcast

### └ Podcast Platform Comparison

	Podcast Platform Comparison							UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI
	Episodes	Books	Total Running Time (hours)	Average Length (min)	Median Days to Next	Average Days to Next	Max Days to Next	
Alvarpið	46	6	37.2	48.60	7	13.69	161	20.3
Storytel	96	47	92.2	57.61	7	6.85	14	21.4
	142		129.4					45.8*

\*4.1 months hiatus between Alvarpið and Storytel

As we conclude, here's a bird's-eye view of our podcast journey:

- We went from crafting 46 episodes on Alvarpið to a staggering 96 on Storytel.
- The average episode length slightly increased on Storytel.
- Notice the stark difference in release consistency: Alvarpið saw gaps as long as 161 days, while Storytel never went beyond a 14-day hiatus.
- In terms of overall engagement, both platforms gave us roughly 20 months of active podcasting each, but let's not forget that 4.1-month pause we took in between.

Most importantly, we had a blast throughout the journey, and we managed to cover all 47 books in the series in record time (in true Margit fashion)

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## └ Storyline

### └ Ice People Family Tree

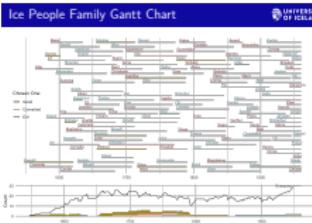


- Diving into the narrative intricacies of the 47-book saga, we're brought face-to-face with a sprawling family tree that traces its lineage back to the matriarch Silja Arngrímsdóttir and her cursed beau, Pengill the good.
- Their descendants' tangled relationships are laid out here, and it's impossible to ignore the density of the connections – hinting at a significant amount of inbreeding. This compact lineage, while perhaps challenging for readers (and narrators!) to digest given its incestuous undertones, does offer us a silver lining – it's surprisingly **slide-friendly**. Managing to represent 17 generations in one visual would generally be a challenge, but this is a rare exception.
- Cursed family members are color-coded: yellow for **virtuous**, green for **malevolent**, and pink for those who found **redemption**.
- As we scan through the tree, it's curious to note that the distribution of the curse doesn't seem to follow a strict genetic pattern. Entire generations sometimes escape its grasp, suggesting that Margit perhaps allowed a degree of creative freedom over genetic accuracy in deciding who bears the curse.
- This intricate web of relationships, filled with cursed figures, highlights the need for a data-driven approach to unravel and understand Margit's artistic choices.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## └ Storyline

### └ Ice People Family Gantt Chart

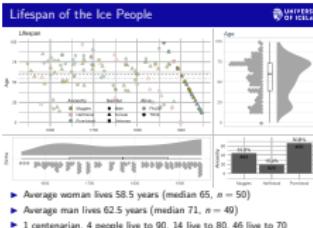


- To decipher the complex family tree and its concurrent relationships, we turned to a **data transformation**: the **Gantt** chart, usually a tool for project timelines, but here, it's a brilliant visualization of lifespans and intersecting narratives.
- Spanning from the mid-1600s to the 1960s, this chart offers clear insights into overlapping lifetimes, painting a vivid picture of contemporaneous characters.
- Margit frequently intertwines character narratives, often through romantic unions. This attraction amongst cousins is both a narrative device and a manifestation of their shared, cursed lineage. Despite many generations, the family size stays around 20 members, peaking at 30 later on.
- Typically, 1-2 cursed individuals from the Ice People are alive at any given time. However, a spike occurs in the early 1700s with six simultaneous cursed beings.
- Mar, in particular, isn't directly of the Ice People. He's of the Taranqyes lineage, which traces back to their common ancestor the infamous Pengill the Bad.
- The gaps in the family tree regarding cursed individuals suggest that the Taranqyes lineage might be the ones carrying the curse for those missing generations, as the narrative asserts there's always one cursed person per generation.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into 'Legend of the Ice People'

## └ Storyline

### └ Lifespan of the Ice People

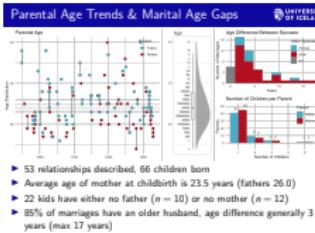


- The data shows a unique age **bimodal distribution** diverging from the typical bell curve.
- Many women, due to the curse, don't survive childbirth, leading to a life expectancy drop around the mid-20s.
- Those women who overcome this hurdle often live up to 70 years, resulting in a second age peak.
- Margit ensures symmetry: while women face childbirth peril, men, characterized by their recklessness, confront their own early-life dangers. Those men who navigate past these threats also enjoy an extended lifespan, reinforcing the bimodal pattern.
- Looking at relationships: A third of characters are unrelated to the Ice People or **muggles**. Half are pure-bloods, having both parents from the Ice People. The rest, about 15%, are half-bloods.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into 'Legend of the Ice People'

## └ Storyline

### └ Parental Age Trends & Marital Age Gaps

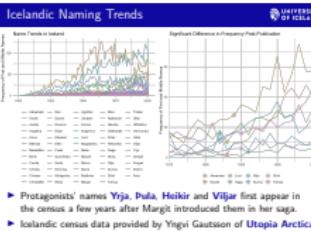


- Ice People women typically become mothers around 23.5 years, a choice influenced by prevalent dangers.
- The curse dictates family size. One non-cursed child often stops family expansion, but a cursed birth may lead to larger families, hoping the generation's **curse quota** is filled.
- Parental absence is a saga reality; a third of children grow up without a parent, and it's not due to immaculate conceptions but the harsh reality of abandonment.
- Yet, amidst these peculiarities, some aspects mirror our world. In 85% of Ice People marriages, husbands are typically older by an average of three years a trend not uncommon in our own society.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into ‘Legend of the Ice People’

## └ Storyline

### └ Icelandic Naming Trends



- In the 1980s, **Ísfólkis** transcended literature, influencing Icelandic naming trends.
- Names like **Pula**, **Yrja**, **Heikir**, and **Viljar** gained popularity post-publication, previously being unknown to Icelandic census.
- There were significant surges: **Sunna** increased 4-fold, **Silja** doubled, and **Saga** had a 5-fold jump.
- Some name spikes, like **Sölv**, might be unrelated to the saga due to the character's malevolent nature.
- However, names like **Villimey** remained exclusive to the saga with no real-world adoptions.
- Thanks to Yngvi Gautsson of **Utopia Arctica** for the insightful data, helping clarify misconceptions from my earlier Reykjavík DataBeer Talk.

The saga's sway on Icelandic names emphasizes Margit's lasting cultural imprint.

# Pushing Boundaries: A Data-Driven Dive into 'Legend of the Ice People'

## └ Final Remarks

### └ Thank You

- While I'd have loved to be present, I'm currently in Italy, raising a glass to our **ÍSKISUR** adventure alongside my incredible co-hosts.
- A huge thanks to Alvarpið and Storytel for granting us a platform to share our passion for **Ísfólkíð**.
- To our "**only fan**" – all four of you – your spirited support has been invaluable.
- Heartfelt gratitude to the **organizers** for offering me this stage today.
- Cheers to **Reykjavík DataBeers** for igniting the data-driven exploration of **Ísfólkíð**.
- Immense appreciation for **Margit**, whose work occupied four profound years of my life.
- To every **listener**, thank you. I'm always open to discussions about data, **Ísfólkíð**, or cats! Feel free to touch base on Twitter, email, or explore the data available on GitHub.

### Thank You

Feel free to contact me at [helgaingim@hi.is](mailto:helgaingim@hi.is) or [@tungifoss](https://twitter.com/tungifoss) on Twitter.

Get the source of this data analysis at:  
[github.com/tungifoss/  
iskisur-rek-data-beers](https://github.com/tungifoss/iskisur-rek-data-beers)



Thank you!

## **Temporary page!**

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