

REVIEW: Incendiary 'Girl Who Played With Fire'



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"The Girl Who Played With Fire" is a sequel that's every bit as good as the original, and unlike many sequels, it stands on its own very well. Based on the second novel in Swedish writer Stieg Larsson's "Millennium" trilogy, "The Girl Who Played With Fire" continues the story of the relationship between journalist Mikael Blomkvist (Michael Nykvist) and brilliant computer hacker Lisbeth Salander (Noomi Rapace), a girl with a very dark past.



Mikael Blomkvist is about to run a story that will expose an extensive sex trafficking operation between Eastern Europe and Sweden, implicating well-known and highly placed members of Swedish society. On the eve of publication, the two investigating reporters are murdered and the fingerprints

belong to Lisbeth Salander.

In **"The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo,"** Blomkvist was facing jail and disgrace and was bailed out by Lisbeth. The tables are turned in "The Girl Who Played With Fire," in which more of Lisbeth's dark, scarred past is revealed. As with **"The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo,"** abuse of women by men is a prevalent theme. (The novel **"The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo"** was first published as "Men Who Hate Women" in Sweden.)

Noomi Rapace reprises her role as Lisbeth Salander from **"The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo"** for which she won the Best Actress Guldbagge Award (Sweden's Oscar). Rapace is a genuine find. Absolutely perfect as the brilliant but edgy Lisbeth, Rapace, often non-verbally, nonetheless exudes an underlying vulnerability. Her Lisbeth is someone who's suffered, and created her own world with her own set of rules, as the ones in the outside world haven't helped her. But Lisbeth isn't passive, and when necessary, is not only dynamic but even violent.



Michael Nyqvist in "Girl Who Played With Fire" Photo: Music Box Films (c) 2010

Michael Nyqvist, one of Sweden's most popular and well-respected actors, returns to his role as Millennium publisher Mikael Blomkvist. He portrays Blomkvist as part everyman, part crusader, but not a Hollywood action hero, someone you're likely to believe in, and root for, partly because he isn't Jet Li.

In fact, the closest thing the movie gets to a typical action hero is Paolo Roberto, a former boxer who does get to show his stuff in a riveting fight scene that looks far more like a real fight than most Hollywood action scenes. Roberto, by the way, is also an author, chef, and has run for the Swedish Parliament. Micke Spreitz plays a heavy with "congenital analgesia," which makes him immune to pain, an atypically James Bond touch.

Fans of the first movie will be pleased to know that Peter Andersson returns as noted lawyer and rapist Nils Bjurman, and will be equally pleased to know that Lisbeth isn't quite done with him yet. Those who haven't seen the first movie needn't worry. They'll catch up quickly enough.



Micke Spreitz in "Girl Who Played With Fire" Photo: Music Box Films (c) 2010

"The Girl Who Played With Fire" is a relentless thriller, first and foremost. But where **"The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo"** dealt with Blomkvist's past, "The Girl Who Played With Fire" burrows into Lisbeth's, and that's a darker place. Director Daniel Alfredson has a sure hand, and the film has the polished look of a Hollywood film. His action looks more like real violence than most

Hollywood fight scenes. The nail-biting climax is worthy of Quentin Tarantino and will have audiences on the edge of their seats.

"The Girl Who Played With Fire" earns its "R" rating for violence a couple of sex scenes, including depictions of bisexuality and sexual abuse, that are longer and more explicit than most commercial Hollywood movies would permit.

The cinematography by Peter Mokrosinski is excellent, and the movie is at least as handsome as **"The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo."** Composer Jacob Groth's score is effective. The movie is in Swedish with English subtitles, a couple of which are against bright backgrounds and are difficult to read. Nonetheless, viewers should get used to the subtitles quickly, which is preferable to suffering the second (or third) rate acting that's common with dub tracks. Not to mention that actors' lips not matching the dubbed audio track is at least as distracting as reading subtitles.

"The Girl Who Played With Fire" opens at the Spectrum Theater in Albany tomorrow. **"The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo"** is now available on DVD and Blu-Ray. The final film in the trilogy, "The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest," also starring Michael Nykvist and Noomi

Rapace, and directed by Daniel Alfredson, is due out this fall. Once you see the first two, you won't be able to wait.

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