

REVIEW: 'The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest' buzzes with excitement



Photo: Courtesy Music Box Films, (c) 2010



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"The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest," based on the final installment of the late Stieg Larsson's "Millennium Trilogy," which also includes "The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo" and "The Girl Who Played With Fire," is a riveting thriller that buzzes with excitement. Director Daniel Alfredson, who also directed the incendiary "The Girl Who Played With Fire," picks right up where he left off. So make no mistake, this is a sequel to a sequel, and you're expected to keep up. (And since both "The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo" and "The Girl Who Played

With Fire" are available on home video, this shouldn't present a problem.)

The fabulous Swedish actress Noomi Rapace reprises her role as goth anti-heroine Lisbeth Salander, this time (spoiler alert) recovering from a bullet wound to the head, and about to stand trial for three murders. Michael Nykvist again plays investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist, a fantasy extension of novelist Larsson, who was himself a crusading anti-facist

journalist. Blomkvist recruits his sister Annika (Annika Hallin, reprising the role from "The Girl Who Played With Fire"), a lawyer to represent Lisbeth, as dark government forces conspire to silence both Lisbeth and Blomkvist.

This is the longest of the three films, though it's by no means dull. Even though this time around Lisbeth is confined for much of the movie, the astounding Rapace conveys strength, intelligence and determination at every turn. And Alfredson knows his material. When Lisbeth is led into court, in full goth regalia, chains, leather, facial piercings and a spiked mohawk, he gets it. This is Lisbeth triumphant, her spirit completely indomitable. And this is precisely why so many readers love the books and international audiences love these movies. Lisbeth, victimized since childhood, refuses to be beaten down, refuses to break. And Rapace, an actress completely unafraid to take chances, is willing to let Lisbeth not be warm and cuddly. This is a woman who bristles, who learns to trust slowly, although she is fiercely loyal once she's decided to let someone in.

Nykvist plays Blomkvist as an everyman, and it's hard to imagine that Daniel Craig, who's playing the role in David Fincher's English language remake of "The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo," currently shooting in Sweden, will be as accessible, although in some ways he may actually come closer to Larsson's conception. But to millions of international moviegoers, Nykvist is Mikael Blomkvist every bit as much as Noomi Rapace is Lisbeth. This is an actor who can do as much with his face when he has no dialogue as most actors can with pages of it. Very well-known in his native Sweden, he's a pleasure to watch.

Alfredson, as with "The Girl Who Played With Fire," directs his action sequences with a sure hand. This may not be primarily an action movie, but the set-pieces as good as anything Hollywood can dish out. But it's the story that's the point here, and "The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest" wraps up the conspiracies and mysteries that have been unfolding in the first two films. The plot is every bit as absorbing as the first two films in the series, and the acting is superb. I can't stress enough not to worry about the subtitles. After a couple of minutes you won't notice them.

David Fincher has his work cut out for him. The bar's already been set pretty high.