

Review: 'The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo' intense, edge-of-your-seat thriller



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The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo

Rating:

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Considering that this is a movie that didn't have to be made in the first place, David Fincher's remake of "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" is a thinking person's thriller that will have the audience on the edge of its seat for all of its two hour and forty minute running time. The track record of Hollywood remakes of European films shouldn't get anyone too excited, but Fincher and screenwriter/producer Steve Zaillian have pulled it off here. Both riveting

crime movie and intense contemporary drama, "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" is a dark, edgy modern *film noir* that's certainly one of the best movies of the year.

The first novel in Swedish journalist/novelist Stieg Larsson's "Millennium Trilogy," "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" juggles at least three parallel plots that revolve around the hunt for a serial killer. Disgraced investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist (Daniel Craig) reluctantly accepts a private commission from retired industrialist and all-around rich guy Henrik Vanger (Christopher Plummer) to solve the 40-year-old disappearance of his niece. Before being

offered the job, Vanger's attorney, Froder (Steven Berkoff) has a background check run on Blomkvist, which is done by a brilliant, but troubled, young computer hacker named Lisbeth Salander (Rooney Mara). Impressed by her results (not to mention her unorthodox and frequently illegal methods), Froder recommends Lisbeth to Blomkvist when he needs a research assistant. Lisbeth, who has been declared mentally incompetent by the courts, meanwhile, is being sexually abused by her court-appointed guardian, Bjurman (Yorick van Wageningen).

k. Danish director Niels Arden
The Girl with the Dragon
tor Michael Nykvist and Noomi
as Blomkvist and Lisbeth. The
first-rate production values,

cket-buying American

...they're really rather good when they can't speak and can read subtitles.

What we have here are Hollywood stars speaking English while playing Swedes in Sweden (the filmmakers haven't been dumb enough to try to transplant the story). Fortunately, most of them are smart enough to avoid fake Swedish accents—Robin Wright, who plays Blomkvist's publisher and sometimes lover Erika Berger—being an unfortunate exception. The Brits in the cast tend to avoid this mistake. Rooney Mara is doing an accent, but well enough that you tend not to notice.

Fans of the novel and Swedish movie version will actually probably enjoy comparing Fincher and Zaillian's solutions with those of the Swedish film to some of the adaptation problems Larsson's long, convoluted literary thriller poses. There are some differences. There will be no spoilers here, however.

Larsson's Blomkvist is your basic investigative journalist, former commando and rock musician. He's also a ladies' man on a Bondian scale. In the novel, female characters more or less take a number—you'll be getting it on with the hero in chapter twenty-two—we apologize for the wait. Some of this has been toned down. Blomkvist is portrayed as less of a man-ho' and Craig plays him with a surprising vulnerability. As Lisbeth, Rooney Mara is completely

unrecognizable from her last performance in Fincher's "The Social Network." And this is a star-making performance. Vulnerable yet violent, brilliant but completely antisocial, Lisbeth is a complex, edgy, dark character and Mara completely gets her.

The supporting cast, including Stellan Skarsgård as Martin Vanger, Yorick van Wageningen as Bjurman, Joely Richardson as Anita Vanger, Geraldine James as Cecilia Vanger, Stephen Berkoff as Dirch Frode is generally excellent.

The opening title sequence, by Blur Studios, is a heavy metal/alternative rock version of a James Bond title sequence, featuring Karen O's cover of Led Zeppelin's "Immigrant Song." It fits Lisbeth Salander, and we might as well start calling the song "Lisbeth's Theme" now. The metronomic score by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross, who shared an Oscar for "The Social Network," which stops just short of turning into Chinese water torture, contributes to building suspense, particularly in a climactic sequence where Lisbeth and Blomkvist are making separate key discoveries at different locations at the same time.

David Fincher movies tend to be exceptionally well-crafted, and "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" is no exception. The digital cinematography by Jeff Cronenweth ("Fight Club," "The Social Network") is Oscar-worthy. This is a rainier, snowier Sweden than in the Swedish version, interestingly.

Fincher doesn't tend to pull a lot of punches. "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" is rated R for "brutal violent content including rape and torture, strong sexuality, graphic nudity, and language." Lisbeth's anal rape by her abusive guardian is strong stuff and not easy to watch. Her poetic revenge, which may actually elicit applause, is at least as strong.

In a year laden with sequels, at least this is a remake that works. There will be sequels, just so you know. Larsson wrote three novels, and Fincher, Craig and Mara are reportedly all on board for "The Girl Who Played with Fire" and "The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest." Those will be remakes as well, by the way. But if they're as good as the second version of "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo," that'll be fine with everybody.