

R&R 081 The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo

Contributed by Webmaster
Wednesday, 10 March 2010
Last Updated Wednesday, 10 March 2010

More info...

Karin Elizabeth {BACK!} posted a photo:

Read reviews at ofbooks.blogspot.com

I added this review there yesterday already.

Stieg Larsson

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (Millennium Trilogy #1)

Translation: Reg Keeland

First published in: 2005 (Sweden)

This edition: Vintage Crime / Black Lizard (of RandomHouse), 2009

ISBN: 978-0-307-45454-6

Cover design by Peter Mendelsund

Stieg Larsson did not get to be there to witness what became of the three manuscripts he has left behind when he passed away in November 2004(1). The posthumous publication of the Millennium Trilogy has been a raging success ever since the first book, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, came out in Sweden in 2005. International success followed suit, and now the whole trilogy has now been published in English(2). *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* has been recommended to me several times by avid readers of the trilogy, and my interest was peaked by multiple assurances that this is good stuff.

I'm not a huge reader of the crime genre; apart from Dan Brown's recent blunder (*The Lost Symbol*), I've only been truly invested in one crime author the past couple of years: Kathy Reichs. She's unique and her expertise in the field of forensic anthropology give her books credibility and humanity - as she has examined victims in her own lab for years on end. It's hers, and recognizably so. Stieg Larsson wrote something unique, as well. Something that is his. *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is a crime novel, but it is so much more than that at the same time: tale of business corruption, but more so an intricate family saga, set in Scandinavia.

When Harriet Vanger, granddaughter of Henrik Vanger (one of the most influential businessmen in Sweden) disappears in the sixties, no one knows what happened. Did she run away? Commit suicide? Or was she murdered? Almost forty years later, there are still no answers. Convinced it was murder, Henrik Vanger hires economic journalist Michael Blomkvist, a good man who was recently set up and convicted of libel, to investigate what happened and who was responsible. A massive undertaking, Blomkvist decides to hire punk hacker genius Lisbeth Salander to assist him.

It sounded interesting, and it delivered. It just took a while. It's part one of a trilogy, so naturally a large chunk of the first

book will serve as a general introduction; the trilogy requires a proper build-up, and that in turn requires a patient reader. I for one appreciate a solid back story, instead of being thrown in the deep-end, especially in this genre. The lead characters Blomkvist and Salander don't start collaborating until more than halfway through the book, but their characters have been properly introduced and - while leaving enough to be discovered about these people - their actions later on in the book are properly explained, their motivations understandable.

Lisbeth Salander is a complex character, and unusual in her psyche. She is meticulous and careful, and there's a clear toughness and self-reliance there, yet she relinquishes control over herself to the justice system even though she doesn't actually need a legal guardian. There's a duality there. I want to know more about her and that alone makes me want to read the next books.

Blomkvist, meh. He's a bit simplified, in that he's pretty much another Robert Langdon (except Blomkvist is a bit of a himbo in comparison, frequent sexcapades and what not). Middle-aged, serious in his career, intelligent but slightly naive - the epitome of "The Good Guy". I am only thankful for Salander's presence, because Blomkvist's character alone does not have what it takes to carry this novel.

Honestly, I wasn't as taken with the translation by Reg Keeland. I haven't read other translations if there are any, so I cannot compare, but as is, this translation is robotic, with a mechanical sentence structure which hampers the flow of the text. It's quite business-like at times. But as with the beginning of the story, this is a "bear with it for a while" situation, and it becomes less bothersome as you go - because by then, the plot picks up, and that has your attention, not the grammar.

And when the plot does start to take off, so much information has already been bestowed upon the reader; the reader has enough material to actually think for themselves and to connect the dots. To me this is the reason why this book is a successful crime novel: the novel swept me away to Sweden and I felt like I was part of the investigation.

The few times I was able to put down this book had to do with the subplot involving corruption in business; in the days of the almost worldwide economic crisis, I've sort of had enough of hearing about men in suits who selfishly disregard all others in their ascension to wealth and power. Larsson, however, wrote this years before then. It's not his fault that in 2010, the subject of economy leaves a bad taste in my mouth. No, that whole subplot did not interest me; however, I was completely enthralled with the case of Harriet Vanger's disappearance.

The book's primary setting was pretty much brilliant. Blomkvist and later on Salander for the duration of the investigation live on a very remote island in the northern-Sweden, where Harriet actually disappeared in the sixties, where a large portion of the Vanger clan still lives today. And it's getting all the more likely that whomever is responsible for Harriet's disappearance might still live among them all. Peaceful and eerie at the same time, the location of most of the story was responsible for creating the book's tense atmosphere.

The Harriet Vanger part of the book becomes increasingly better plotted as you go and it gets harder to pause from reading. The resolution is surprising, but the reader does understand it and could very well have guessed it partially, making the reader feel a little accomplished, even. Unpredictability and plot twists are only good, in my opinion, when they make sense to the reader, in such a way as to make the previous 400 pages seem relevant still, not redundant. Too often a writer will want to shock his readers, in the process disregarding everything previously written and thus read. Stieg Larsson handled it well; he surprised, but it made sense. And that is what is called proper build up in a crime novel. This is a writer who took care of his work, who thought out his plot line before he started.

So trust me on this as I come back to what I stated earlier. This book takes time and patience. But the build up is magnificently done. The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo is an icy, cool read, and it takes a while to warm up to it. But once the book gets going, it is on fire.(3)

One side note: there are a few graphic, violent sexual scenes in this book (sexual abuse, rape). I don't enjoy them, but I'm not against sexual scenes in general or against violence in books. This is not a complaint. However, these scenes

could be quite confrontational and thus unwelcome to some readers, especially when those readers don't see it coming. I wouldn't feel comfortable not mentioning this.

1. He passed away from a heart attack. Larsson left three finished manuscripts, now known as the Millennium Trilogy. He had also left an unfinished 4th manuscript and had planned to write more books beyond that.

2. The Girl Who Played with Fire has been published in English in January 2009; The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest has been available in English from October 2009.

3. Hello metaphor talk :P Icy.. cool... warm up to... on fire. J/K. Just testing if you actually read these notes. Might make a habit out of adding additional info this way.

The R&R blog :)

Copyright Karin Elizabeth. All rights reserved.

R&R series © Karin Elizabeth. Do NOT copy and repost or reproduce the review or photo anywhere without my permission.

No group images or (admin) invites wanted in my comments. I will delete your comments.

Play nice.

I block assholes.

THIS IS NOT FREE STOCK.

Online Author And Book News

{mos_sb_discuss:2}