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# The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest

**Author:** Stieg Larsson (1954-2004)

**First Published:** *Luftslottet som sprängdes*, 2007, in Sweden

Translated from the Swedish by Reg Keeland (pseudonym of Steven T. Murray)

**Publisher:** Alfred A. Knopf (New York). 566 pp. \$27.95

**Type of Work:** Novel

**Time:** 2005

**Locale:** Stockholm and Göteborg, Sweden, and their environs

*The final volume of Larsson's Millennium trilogy, in which he explores social conditions, and particularly those of women, in Sweden at the beginning of the twenty-first century*

### Principal Characters

**Lisbeth Salander**, a brilliant computer hacker with photographic memory

**Alexander Zalachenko**, a Soviet spy who defected to Sweden and her father

**Ronald Niedermann**, her half brother, who works for Zalachenko

**Mikael Blomkvist**, an investigative journalist and publisher at *Millennium* magazine

**Richard Ekström**, the prosecutor at her trial

**Annika Giannini**, her attorney and Blomkvist's sister

**Evert Gullberg**, a retired leader of a secret Security Police section and a conspirator against her

**Erika Berger**, editor of *Millennium* and one of Blomkvist's lovers

**Jan Bublanski**, a Stockholm police inspector

**Frederik Clinton**, the acting chief of the secret Security Police section and Gullberg's fellow conspirator

**Anders Jonasson**, a doctor who attends her at Sahlgrenska Hospital in Göteborg

**Peter Teleborian**, a psychiatrist who assisted in the conspiracy against her  
**Torsten Edklinth**, a government official in charge of investigating  
crimes against constitutionally guaranteed freedoms  
**Monica Figuerola**, Edklinth's coworker and one of Blomkvist's lovers

A publishing phenomenon, Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy has sold more than 27 million copies in forty countries. Each of the three volumes has been filmed in Scandinavia, and a Hollywood remake of the first volume, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2008), was scheduled to be released in 2011. Centered on his protagonist Lisbeth Salander, each volume in Larsson's Millennium trilogy--the second one was titled *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (2009)--explores both Lisbeth's personal history and the recent history of Swedish society. Without disturbing contradictions, Lisbeth is presented both as an exceptional individual and as a prototypical postmodern "every woman," whose personal experiences both typify and exceed those of women in general in postindustrial Scandinavia, and, by extension, become indicative of women's place in a globalized world.

Named for the monthly magazine *Millennium*, where Larsson's lead male character and alter ego, Mikael Blomkvist, works as an investigative reporter, an editor, and a publisher, the trilogy as a whole constitutes an inquiry into what has gone wrong not only in the private sphere but also in business and government during Sweden's final decades of the twentieth century. Larsson's indictment of contemporary society is severe and is advanced on several fronts, but the linchpin of his analysis is the manifestation of male irrationality called misogyny. In fact, the Swedish title of the first volume translates directly into English as "Men who hate women," and the trilogy can be read as an exploration both of the reasons for this hatred and the various ways it manifests itself both privately and in society as a whole.

Larsson is an heir both to the practice of the Western mystery novel, associated with such outstanding female writers as Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers, and to a Scandinavian narrative tradition that offers a plethora of strong female characters. In the twentieth century, the Scandinavian novel was dominated by the style of psychological realism, which clearly has had a strong impact on Larsson. So also have such novels as the socially conscious police procedurals of Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, as well as perhaps Henning Mankell's relentless questioning of what went awry in Swedish society, presented through the work of his fictional police inspector Kurt Wallander. A possibly unlikely--but palpable--model for Lisbeth is the archetypal Swedish good-and-bad girl Pippi Longstocking, created by the children's writer Astrid Lindgren. Pippi has bequeathed both some of her physical strength and her resourcefulness to Lisbeth; indeed, Lisbeth may be viewed as a grown-up Pippi who has acquired a variety of piercings and tattoos and whose bisexuality is an affront to traditional patriarchy.

The story in *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* begins where the previous volume left off. Lisbeth has been nearly killed by her father, Alexander Zalachenko, and his sidekick, Lisbeth's half brother, Ronald Niedermann, who operate a crime ring involved with trafficking and money laundering. Zalachenko hates his daughter because as a young teenager she doused him and set fire to him in an attempt to stop his physical abuse of her mother. Zalachenko, a Soviet spy who relocated to Sweden and enabled several employees of the Swedish security police to build