



[The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo](#)

Screened at [Cornerhouse, Manchester](#)

Reviewed by [Anne Ryan](#) December 2011

Rooney Mara attempts to fill Noomi Rapace's big black motorcycle boots

On approaching the screen adaptation of a favourite book, one is invariably filled with some trepidation. The power of the image is so great that it can overwhelm the pictures we have in our minds. For my generation Mr Darcy will always be Colin Firth, for our mothers and grandmothers he is Laurence Olivier – and for a pre-cinema generation, well they had to make their own pictures.

I loved the character of Lizbeth Salander in Stieg Larsson's crime trilogy and felt that Noomi Rapace perfectly embodied this memorable heroine. Talk of a Hollywood remake filled me with foreboding, but as 55 million copies of the original trilogy have sold the US version, it seemed

inevitable - as we know American audiences do not like reading subtitles.

The original film was Scandinavian – the people looked real, characters had wrinkles and paunches, these were not bo-toxed gym bunnies. What would Hollywood do with these people and the terrible events of the novel? Thankfully David Fincher seems to have been given the creative freedom to produce an adult film, a real grown-up drama. Screenwriter Steven Zaillian has said that there was no pressure from the studio to lighten it up, and this is a dark film. There are scenes of sexual violence, but for once it is only the truth to say that they are necessary for the plot. We have to know what Lisbeth Salander has suffered and how far she is prepared to go to take her revenge. But Zaillian's great strength is in following the investigation, by the end we may not be able to repeat Salander's computing skills, but we feel we have a better understanding of the nexus between government and finance, even in the former socialist paradise of Sweden.



The actors, with the exception of Daniel Craig, speak with European accents and it is very clear that this is a dark Northern vision of life, and death. And a big point in Fincher's favour, although the older women are beautiful they have the wrinkles and dark circles which betray their real ages. Despite the big names and very skilled actors, the real star is Rooney Mara and her collaborators step aside and let her shine. It is a great role – an almost autistic woman abused by the social welfare system and by men, who takes her revenge using her almost supernatural computing talents.

Mara's performance is the rock upon which the film is built. Younger, frailer and more vulnerable than Noomi Rapace – she looks like a malnourished feral street kid and in one scene she screams and thrashes like a trapped animal. The audience fears for her even as we witness her capacity for violent revenge against her guardian.

The relationship between Mara and Craig is believable, and there is no trace of James Bond in his performance. This is a Daniel Craig for those who remember his pre-007 roles – notably as Francis Bacon's lover, George Dyer, in 'Love is the Devil'. He is a man who runs away from the gunman and whilst his future collaborator is negotiating computing firewalls he cannot even get a mobile phone signal.

For viewers familiar with the original novel and Swedish film there is a major plot change for which newcomers may well be grateful. Only at the end of the trilogy do we really understand Salander and the reason behind the work's original title 'The Man Who Hated Women'. But even for those who are not already fans, this story of family secrets and a hidden Nazi past is an enthralling mystery.

Fincher's film does have a slightly Hollywood ending and I confess I had a lump in my throat – but it is Christmas, and I hope that this film is successful enough to allow the director and his two stars to complete the trilogy.