

BOOKS

WHAT ARE THEY READING?

New 'Dragon Tattoo' author preserves characters while maintaining quality

The most compelling fictional character of the past two decades

By **PATRICK WEBB**

Special to *The Daily Astorian*

What do you do if your favorite author writes three enjoyable novels then dies at age 50?

Judging by friends who are equally voracious readers, I am not alone worrying about that.

"The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" was the first in a series by Swedish writer Stieg Larsson.

It was followed by "The Girl Who Played with Fire" and "The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest."

The fictional books introduced two superb characters to the landscape of modern literature, Mikael Blomkvist, a driven, muckraking journalist, and Lisbeth Salander, a computer hacker. The book series, which spawned Swedish and Hollywood movies, was labeled the Millennium Trilogy, taking the name from Blomkvist's political-investigative magazine.

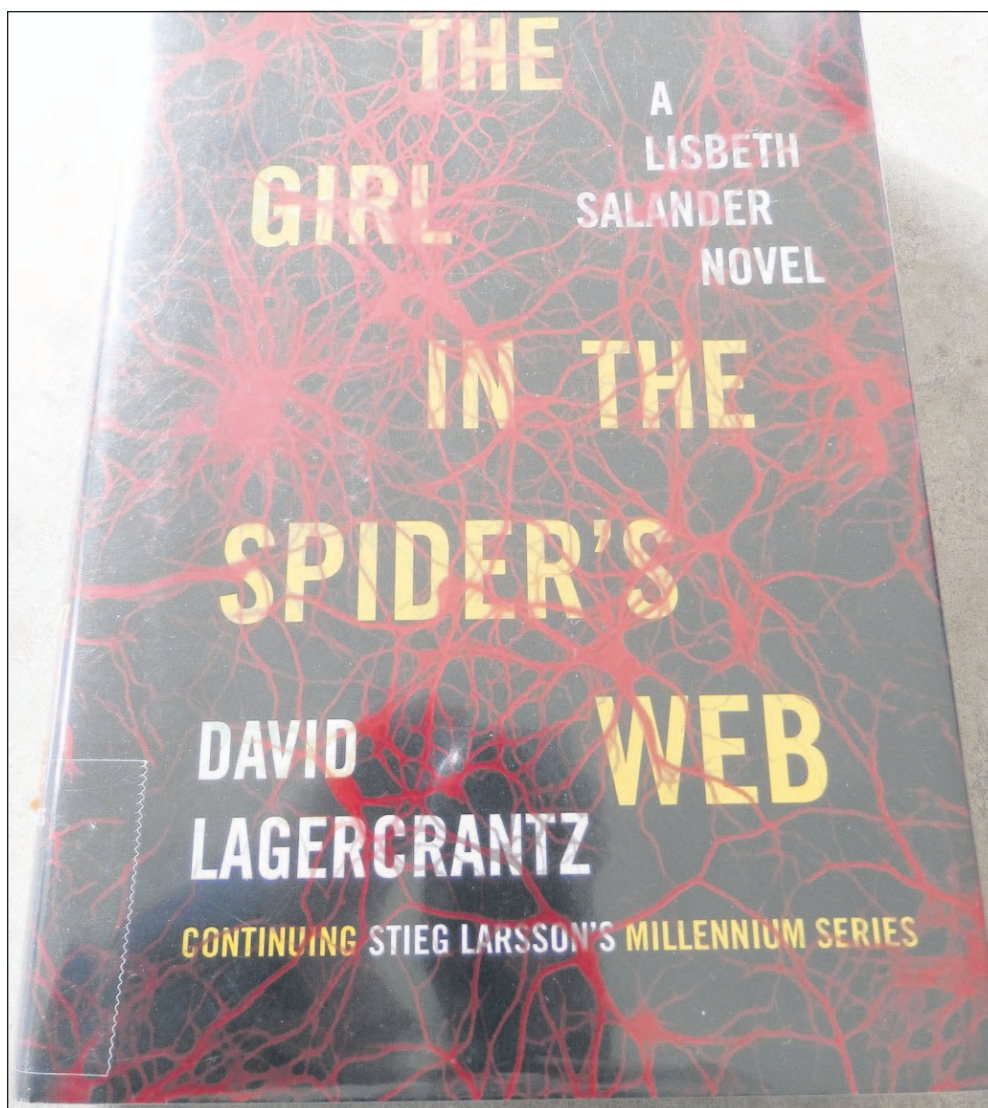
'An edgy free spirit'

I believe Lisbeth Salander is the most compelling fictional character created in the last two decades, if not my lifetime.

She is removed from her parental home after a violent crisis, then cruelly abused by her guardian, though she gains a perfect, justified revenge. She's a bisexual twentysomething, an edgy free spirit. She is the most awkward, difficult, annoying person anyone could wish to meet. She is also brilliant, and I use that word in both the American and British usages, intellectually superior and worthy of admiration.

You would never want to be her, but you might want to know her. You certainly would not want her as your enemy; but as your friend, you would have to work hard to accept her as she is.

I read somewhere that after the European films were shot, actress Noomi Rapace had to have therapy after portraying her. (I can no longer



"The Girl in the Spider's Web"

locate the quote — it could have just been hype.) There was a solid Hollywood remake of the first story, only two years after the 2009 original, starring James Bond actor Daniel Craig. I abhor unnecessary remakes, but this version didn't disappoint. Rooney Mara was excellent, though, with slightly less edginess than Rapace.

Did Salander die too?

The question remains, when Larsson had a

heart attack in 2004, did Salander die too?

The answer is "no," thanks to another Swedish writer, David Lagercrantz. With the blessing of the original publishers, his book, "The Girl in the Spider's Web," continues the Millennium story with Blomkvist and Salander.

The precedent for other authors continuing the work of deceased writers is a long-standing one. Agatha Christie died in 1976 and lawyers for her estate guard her rights very rigidly. But

BOOK REVIEW

"The Girl in the Spider's Web,"
by David Lagercrantz.
Alfred A. Knopf, 418 pages, 2015

with permission, Charles Osborne and Sophie Hannah have showcased her characters; Hercule Poirot lives on.

Sherlock Holmes stories have been continued by Anthony Horowitz, among others, and even Mrs. Hudson, the sleuth's landlady, and Irene Adler, Holmes' love interest, have figured in spinoffs.

Not all are successful. When Ian Fleming died, James Bond was first continued by Kingsley Amis in "Colonel Sun." Bond's boss, "M," gets himself kidnapped in Greece and, well, really, it just wasn't very plausible, especially for over-critical readers. (I was in sixth grade and wanted to picket the publishers.)

So here's the dilemma: Read sequels and risk disappointment, or don't read them and miss out on your favorite characters solving a new puzzle.

Russian criminals and a secret society

"The Girl in the Spider's Web" begins with a computer expert put in danger when he returns to Scandinavia from the United States to care for his autistic son. Blomkvist, tipped to a potential newsworthy investigation about the man, is initially reluctant until he learns that Salander, with whom he has lost contact, is somehow involved. The plot features Russian criminals, a mysterious secret society and touches on the National Security Agency surveillance controversy.

A dilemma is defined as having two choices, both of them bad. I'd like to suggest another option: read the darned novel!

See for yourself how it compares.

And don't be worried.

If you are a fan of Larsson, you will not be disappointed.

In fact, you will be rooting for Lagercrantz to write another.

North Coast writer Patrick Webb is the former managing editor of *The Daily Astorian*.

How Shonda Rhimes broke out of her shell

Chronic naysayer learned to say 'yes'

By **FRAZIER MOORE**
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Shonda Rhimes, who owns ABC's Thursday night (with hit dramas "Grey's Anatomy," "Scandal" and "How to Get Away With Murder"), had found comfort and refuge in ShondaLand, the dream factory she rules as a mega-producer and writer.

But otherwise she was a chronic naysayer, which spurred her sister to mutter as they cooked Thanksgiving dinner in 2013, "You never say yes to anything."

This stinging rebuke led Rhimes to commit herself to a year of saying "yes" to whatever came her way.

For Rhimes, who describes herself back then as an introvert "to the bone," this meant saying yes to speaking engagements and social invitations she would have turned down before.

But that was just the start. "I feel like a different person," Rhimes, 45, de-

clared over tea this week at a New York hotel. A television titan who not long ago was legendary for shunning interviews and the media spotlight, she was relaxed and reflective as she shared with a reporter how "everybody asks: 'What happened to you?' I don't know what to say, except that I had this weird, transformative experience and I feel like I've completely changed my life from top to bottom."

Rhimes has chronicled this grand transformation and helped explain it to herself in her candid new memoir, "Year of Yes."

'Wanna play?'

For Rhimes, saying yes didn't just mean saying yes to Jimmy Kimmel when asked to be on his show (which terrified her, though it turned out fine) or making time, no matter how busy she was, for her three daughters when they asked, "Wanna play?"

More than all that, "yes" meant breaking her lifelong habit of avoiding new possibilities and opportunities.

Writing "Year of Yes"



Richard Shotwell/Invision/AP Photo

Shonda Rhimes arrives at the eighth Annual Essence Black Women In Hollywood Luncheon in Beverly Hills, Calif., in February. Rhimes has a candid new memoir, "Year of Yes."

itself became a part of the transformation process, which delivered her from being a remarkably successful woman who was, nonetheless, miserable, to newfound standing as "a better mother, a better friend, a happier boss, a stronger leader, a more creative writer," and someone who is kind, no

longer cruel, to herself.

"The more I wrote about what I was doing, the more I got out of it, and I ended up writing the book just for me, which I think was a good thing. If I had been thinking that anybody else was going to read it, I probably would have censored myself so that what came out was san-

itized," she laughed, "for my protection."

It isn't. One of the more revealing chapters recounts her relationship with an ideal man who wanted marriage and mistakenly got the idea she did, too.

Shutting the door

She ended up shutting the door on that relationship while, free of regret or self-recrimination, flinging open a door to the notion that choosing to stay single was the right choice for her.

Writing that chapter sparked an epiphany for Rhimes. She realized she unwittingly had led him on.

"He had said, 'I thought you were a traditional person,' and suddenly I realized that I had completely created myself for HIM as someone who seemed to want to get married. Up until that moment, I thought, 'How DARE he say I'm traditional?!' But then I realized, 'That was MY doing.'"

Another intimate section of the book is devoted to her dropping more than 100 pounds. In a painfully funny account, she recalls

being too fat to connect an airline's seat belt then choosing to hide her beltless state with a sweater in her lap rather than ask for a seat belt extension.

Health concerns, not vanity, led to her eventual weight loss. She continues to say yes to food, but now she also says yes to moderation.

Punchy writing style

The creation of "Year of Yes" was as swift as Rhimes' punchy, often stream-of-consciousness writing style. It poured out of her this summer and the next thing she knew, she was holding the book's galleys.

"That's when I freaked out. Suddenly this book was real, and I was reminded that everybody in the world is going to read it. So I had my panic. And then I re-read it and I felt OK. It's honest and wildly freeing."

And its publication finds her in a place, she reports, "where needing to say yes is less necessary, because it's much more automatic. There's not very many things that I'm running from now."

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