

David Lagercrantz, *The Girl in the Spider's Web* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2015)

David Lagercrantz's *The Girl in the Spider's Web* is a continuation of the Millennium Series written by the late Stieg Larsson, and published posthumously starting in 2008. The Millennium Series novels were international bestsellers, and Larsson's death left some readers wanting more. Lagercrantz attempts to create a fourth novel for the series. He brings back to life Larsson's compelling characters from first three novels, while also creating new characters and adding intrigue that keeps readers interested and connected to the series

In Larsson's original conception, Mikael Blomkvist, a Swedish investigative reporter, became famous for solving the disappearance of Harriet Vanger, the daughter of a wealthy businessman. He was assisted by Lisbeth Salander, a very private but skilled hacker who had a troubled past and an aversion to authority. Mikael later vindicated Lisbeth who was accused of murder. The two, an unlikely duo, become a skilled crime-solving team.

In *The Girl in the Spider's Web*, Mikael has taken some hits which have left his reputation in question. Many believe his best days as a journalist are behind him. In the middle of the night, he receives a call from Franz Balder, a renowned scientist who wants to see him right away. Knowing he needs a good story to revive his career, Mikael agrees to the meeting—but arrives seconds after Balder is shot to death in his bedroom. He enters the home to find Balder's autistic son, August, who has just witnessed his father's murder. August is not only autistic, but a savant who has the ability to reveal the identity of his father's killer. The murderer leaves August behind, and is unaware of his abilities until his associates, who are monitoring the authorities' phones and computers, uncover the information.

In his investigation, Mikael discovers clues that Lisbeth is involved in some way. He contacts her, and she begins her own investigation. Lisbeth seems to be the only person capable of protecting August from the maniacal killer. Using her own set of skills, she is able to save August from the killer and get him to safety. While in hiding, Lisbeth tries to help August identify the killer before another attempt is made on his life. While she works with the boy, Mikael uses his investigative abilities to uncover the reason Balder was killed and by whom. Although Lisbeth and Mikael do not physically work together, they use their own cryptic system in an attempt to solve the mystery.

There are many storylines and people linked to the murder of Balder, weaving in and around the plot and creating a web in which Lisbeth is in the middle. Instead of being directly involved in the action, Mikael spends most of his time researching and interviewing people while Lisbeth takes all the risks. The story jumps around, leaving the reader to wonder how the various elements connect. There are many law enforcement agencies that have bits of information, yet they are all suspicious of one another and are unable to piece the information together. The reader may be left to wonder if the chaos is an allusion to law enforcement concerns in Sweden.

Devout fans of the Millennium Series will notice the absence of Larsson's spirit in the story, but there is enough similarity that the characters seem authentic. Lagercrantz has breathed life back into the beloved characters created by Larsson, while weaving his own style into their personalities. He builds the story slowly, without mention of Lisbeth Salander until the end of the fourth chapter. The tension builds and when she finally arrives on the scene, it's as if she never left. Lagercrantz's ability to bring Larsson's characters back without missing a beat shows a good writer can carry on where another has left off. He immerses himself in the world created by Larsson.

At the beginning of *The Girl in the Spider's Web*, Lagercrantz includes a description of each character from the Millennium Series who continues in the fourth novel. With this addition, a reader

can pick up the book and enjoy it without having read the first three novels. *The Girl in the Spider's Web* is able to stand on its own; however, I would definitely recommend reading the complete series.

Compared to Larsson's raw, gritty style of storytelling in the first three novels, *The Girl in the Spider's Web* seems a bit watered down. For example, after a childhood filled with abuse and neglect, Lisbeth has become a cold, hardened loner who lacks social skills. But Lagercrantz has given her compassion and she has more dialogue in this book than in the first three combined. Perhaps because she sees many of her own attributes in August, she comes to care for him and goes to great lengths to ensure he will have a better life than she did.

There was a delicate balance to be maintained in continuing Larsson's work. It was important for Lagercrantz to shape the characters in his own way while taking care to respect Larsson's creation. I think he was able to accomplish this feat skilfully, and I look forward to reading the next book.

Dana Gibson