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Review: The Girl in the Spider's Web


2018-11-09 09:00:00 by [Chris Compendio](#)

Great 'Girl,' lame 'Spider's Web'

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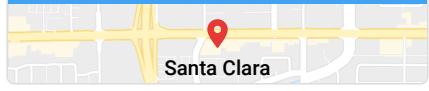
Lisbeth Salander should not be a superheroine. While the character is resourceful and strong, physically, mentally, and morally, *The Girl in the Spider's Web* turned her into some sort of action movie secret agent-type. As satisfying as it may be to see Lisbeth take down abusive and violent men, this movie isn't about how her investigating and manipulating skills are put to use, but rather her ability to beat up and tase random, faceless henchmen.

I thought that I was removed enough from David Fincher's 2011 *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* adaptation to view this semi-sequel, semi-reboot with fresh eyes, as I haven't seen the Fincher film in full for years. Yet as this thriller transitioned from one rushed scene to the next, I found myself missing that director's approach. I have much admiration for Fede Álvarez, even if he works in a genre that I'm not particular too. While his work on *Evil Dead* and *Don't Breathe* displayed passion, I couldn't see it in *Spider's Web*, and what resulted was a fairly average (but still good-looking) action movie.

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The Girl in the Spider's Web

Director: Fede Álvarez

Release Date: November 9, 2018

Rating: R

Hacker and private investigator Lisbeth Salander (Claire Foy) has found herself embroiled in a larger, international conflict. After making contact with a former NSA employee (Stephen Merchant), a program with access to the world's nuclear codes is in play, with various factions vying to retrieve it. Eventually, this predicament leads Lisbeth to face her own past, namely her estranged sister (Sylvia Hoeks). The premise reminded me a lot of both *Skyfall* and *Spectre*, in having a large-scale conflict that turns into a personal tiff, with *Spider's Web* even converging on a childhood home like *Skyfall*.

Despite my gripes about the action-heavy focus of the film and the characterization of Lisabeth, Claire Foy was magnetic as the protagonist. The character was never one I believed that any one actress "owned," and I think audiences should be lucky that we've had three different performers turn in good performances for the same character. Foy is steely, terse, and is able to say a lot without actually saying much at all. The role in this particular film is far more physical, and Foy handled the action with the appearance of confidence and deft.



It's a good thing that Foy was able to carry the film so well, because I truly did not give a damn about anyone else. Sverrir Gudnason is almost a charisma vacuum as journalist Mikael Blomkvist, who has hints at one or two character storylines and arcs, with his disdain for new media taking over his publication and his apparent obsession with covering his adventures with Lisbeth—none of these plotlines go anywhere or end in a satisfying manner. It's a godsend to the film that this version of the character isn't the protagonist this time around, with Lisbeth having all of the agency.

I'm a big fan of Lakeith Stanfield and his work in *Atlanta* and *Sorry to Bother You*, but he seemed to be in the wrong movie the entire time. As an NSA special agent attempting to track down the nuclear code MacGuffin, his character of Edwin Neeham has no distinct characteristics that stuck. He's introduced as a bit of a slacker, sitting at the very back during an important work meeting with his feet up, and dresses a bit like a slob. At the same time, he shows intense devotion to his work, is implied to have an infamous past, and at a pivotal moment is suddenly shown to be extremely, downright cartoonishly talented with firearms. With very little personality and drive other than "I have to get the thing," Stanfield's character only served as a means to move the plot forward.

The son of Merchant's character, played by child actor Christopher Convery, plays an essential role in the plot, having the key to the nuclear code program. I thought I was done with savant autistic children this year in movies after *The Predator*, but *The Girl in the Spider's Web* was an unpleasant surprise in reducing a complicated mental condition into a dumb plot point. Finally, going with the Bond comparisons, Sylvia Hoeks as Camilla Salander came across like a Bond villain, down to the occasional hackneyed monologue. Rarely did Camilla give off any menacing vibes, despite what the film wanted me to feel about her, and like other arcs and plotlines in the film, hers was the most undercooked—in a longer film, the relationship between the two sisters might have had more nuance.



There was a point while watching this film that I begrudgingly accepted that it was an action flick. There are scenes of brawling, a couple of car chases, and the occasional explosion. I found that none of these scenes, however, carried any weight or suspense. I'm usually compelled by asymmetrical action scenes, and I feel like Lisbeth should have a disadvantage against her opponents who are either armed or more physically imposing. Rather than include action scenes with some grit and brutality, or at least some cleverness to demonstrate the character's intelligence and wit, most of her victories are due to random dumb luck, or with the single press of a button on her laptop or phone. Speaking of, try counting the number of times a character finds another character with phone tracking—I lost count in following that lazy plot device.

For a crime thriller, *Spider's Web* just wasn't that thrilling. I really wanted to enjoy Stanfield's first scene in the movie, which was presented as a one take. The camera follows his character as he discovers that he's being hacked by Lisbeth, and it has the makings of a tense scene as he tries to get ahead of her. But there was something about both the camerawork and the editing that made it feel like we were just zipping through this essential moment—the way the scene was executed demonstrated a lack of patience that the film had to let its moments breathe. Perhaps it was just that action was too frequent in *Spider's Web*. Sure, *Dragon Tattoo* was super long and perhaps boring to some, but the bursts of violence make those moments more startling and thrilling (i.e. a gunshot coming from an unknown direction), and the ineloquence of some of the violence (i.e. a golf club to the face) made Fincher's film feel more brutal and real.

I think I was just so surprised how this film from Álvarez had a lack of teeth and grit. I am far from a horror aficionado, but I was absolutely sure that his work in that genre would have translated well to this fictional universe. From what I gather from *Dragon Tattoo*, having not seen the Swedish films or read the novels, we're meant to see the underbelly of the world, the worst of the institutions we are familiar with. Violence, particularly physical and sexual abuse run rampant behind our backs, and the response to that viciousness is perhaps just as savage. Besides a reveal of disfigurement, and a sequence involving a vacuum sealer, there was barely any of the realistic horror that I initially expected. I was surprised how tame *Spider's Web* was, with almost no nudity or uncomfortable, intense violence, to the point that with some more editing, this film could just be standard PG-13 fare.



I internally struggled whether or not I wanted more violence in this film. On one hand, I was wary of any potential scenes that might have been exploitative in nature, which could have delved into borderline torture porn territory. On the other hand, I wanted to explore the dark depths of this world—I wanted to feel discomfort and confront some realism that was tough to swallow. While I didn't want to see Lisbeth get tortured or fall into any misogynistic tropes, I wanted to see her overcome the darkness in some way.

I haven't checked the room temperature about what the opinions and takes on the character of Lisbeth Salander and her techniques are in this year of women empowerment, but in any case, I don't think *Spider's Web* had anything compelling to offer or say about abuse or any of the related political and social issues. Camilla directly verbalizes the film's dramatic question at the end of the film, and I do not believe that the answer Lisbeth gave was satisfying, leaving the film feel unfinished in a way and leaving me confused on what I was meant to learn about the character. Instead of a compelling character arc, all the film really has are motifs with chess and spiders. There are several shots of spiders, the bad guys are called the Spiders, and someone literally sings "Itsy Bitsy Spider" at one point, yet I couldn't even figure out what simple metaphor the film was trying to push with these overt moments.

While I didn't want to revel in violence and revenge porn like what other films in this subgenre provide, I just wanted to revel in *something*. If not violence, then Lisbeth's schemes and wit. I'm still taken aback by the montage sequence at the end of Fincher's film where Lisbeth elaborately takes down Blomkvist's enemy through various means, and nothing in this film came close to that satisfaction. Again, everything was solved too easily, usually with the single press of a button. Hacking is less of a simple tool and characteristic, and is more like a magical superpower to make the plot go faster.



Perhaps people not expecting anything more than an action thriller may still enjoy the movie, but I can't imagine any admirers of the Fincher film getting anything out of this. I don't blame Álvarez that bit—the film still looks pretty overall, and he still has an auteurist approach to the material. The thing is, I just don't think that the script was suited for his talents that we've seen before. And yes, Lisbeth Salander is still very much cool thanks to Claire Foy. While seeing her as a hooded vigilante might be cool to some, *The Girl in the Spider's Web* somehow made her less interesting by focusing the central plot on her backstory, not only taking away some mystery but also failing to extrapolate anything interesting.

I should have realized that something was wrong, just from the opening credits title sequence. Not only was it Bond-like, but the sequence went by so quickly that it was near impossible to read the credits themselves—perhaps there was something that *The Girl in the Spider's Web* was trying to say, but I just couldn't figure it out.



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The Girl in the Spider's Web reviewed by Chris Compendio



MEDIOCRE

An exercise in apathy, neither solid nor liquid. Not exactly bad, but not very good either. Just a bit 'meh,' really.

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Chris Compendio is one too many Chris's (Chrises?) writing for Flixist and Destructoid. They are a massive MCU fan who also writes and podcasts for Marvel News Desk, and a Nintendo fanatic who wr... [more + disclosures](#)

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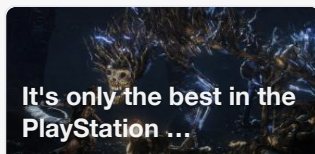
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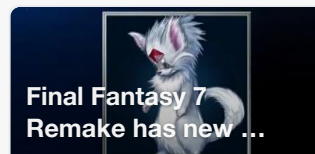
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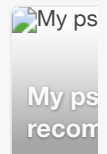
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
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 **Wonderful_Person** · a year ago
 The author went nuts with this character. Her backstory and the characters in her life do not reflect the grounded mystery from the first film/book. She was as cunning as she was helpless at times, she had a edge that let her overcome odds that normal folk couldnt, but the edge wasnt suppose to be bomb-making and martial prowess, she was a far more interesting character before any of that.


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 **Silver twoso** → Wonderful_Person · a year ago
 That's because it's not the same author.
 The first three books were written almost entirely by one guy, and then edited after his death, the second part of the series is written by his now widowed wife, and there's a good amount of reason as to why it's controversial, so the total shift is because it wasn't written by the same person


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 **Wonderful_Person** → Silver twoso · a year ago
 Haha damn alright, it wasnt the author fanboying out it was his fanfiction huffing ex.


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 **Silver twoso** → Wonderful_Person · a year ago
 Not quite, as she worked extensively with the original 3 as well. I think the bigger issue is she didn't create the character or the setting but felt it necessary to continue working having a solid grasp of the idea. She is working within a frame work but it's not very concrete so I think this was a case of the story getting lost


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 **Dere** · a year ago · edited
 I hadn't heard anything about Gwen Stefani for awhile


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 **Perro** → Dere · a year ago
 Don't speak
 I know just what you're saying
 Just please stop explaining
 Don't tell me cause it hurts


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 **70s Bush** · a year ago
 Ouch. I loved Evil Dead and Don't Breathe so I'm going to give this a chance. Seems like this has been getting hammered by the critics.


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 **mix** → 70s Bush · a year ago
 Evil Dead and Don't Breathe were great so based on that, I too will give it a chance.

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 I am wishing Ruby Rose played the girl :(


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 **Benderisgreat** · a year ago
 Waiting for the Marvel gender flipped version where Lester Salander (played by Idris Elba) takes on abusive women. Also maybe he hacks the server at Nintendo with Zero Cool and Acid burn.

^ | v · Share ›


 **Dango** · a year ago
 I hate it when my grill is covered in spider webs. My least favourite part of autumn for sure.

^ | v · Share ›

 **Mateusz** · a year ago
 I've liked The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo and I had high hopes for this one especially. Goddamnit.

^ | v · Share ›

 **ph00p** · a year ago

 Hard to beat the dildo scene from the original.

^ | v · Share ›



Occams ROBOT · a year ago

I like her jacket.

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streetmagik3 → Occams · a year ago

That's what earned the .5

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Grand Theft Auto IV is headed back to Steam, but with some omissions

Rockstar's game-changing crime sim *Grand Theft Auto IV* is coming back to Steam, following its sudden [disappearance from the platform back in January](#). Both the original title and Episodes From Liberty City will return as a single release, *Grand Theft Auto IV: Complete Edition*, on March 19.



It does seem that the new release will feature several changes, however. Due to the removal of Games for Windows Live, *GTA IV* will be sans its online functionality, including its multiplayer mode and leaderboards. Licence expiration also means that several radio stations will have mysteriously vanished from the playlist, (RamJam FM, Self-Actualization FM, and Vice City FM), though it seems this will only be temporary.

The good news is that all save files will still be compatible. Also, players who already own both *GTA IV* and *Episodes From Liberty City* will automatically be able to consolidate both titles into the *Complete Edition*... which kinda isn't complete. Anyway, you can check out all the details over on [the game's official Steam page](#).

[Grand Theft Auto IV coming back to Steam in March](#) [@Nibellion]

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