

# **The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo Study Guide**

**The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo by Stieg Larsson**

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# Plot Summary

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo is the first installment of a trilogy by Swedish author Stieg Larsson. Journalist Mikael Blomkvist, fresh from being convicted for libelling a wealthy Swedish financier, is hired by an elderly industrialist to find out who murdered his niece more than 40 years earlier. He joins forces with Lisbeth Salander, a young woman with multiple tattoos and piercings but also a talent for hacking into people's computers, and the two find themselves tracking a serial killer who has murdered women for several decades.

Mikael Blomkvist is forced to formally resign his position at Millennium, the financial magazine he co-founded with longtime lover Erika Berger, after being convicted of libelling financier Hans-Erik Wennerstrom. While awaiting the beginning of his two-month prison sentence, Blomkvist receives an unusual job offer. Henrik Vanger, an aging wealthy industrialist, wants him to live on his family's island compound for a year, ostensibly researching and writing a chronicle of the dysfunctional Vanger family, but actually investigating the disappearance and apparent murder of his great-niece, Harriet, more than 40 years earlier. Each year on his birthday, Vanger receives a pressed flower like the ones Harriet used to give him, and he believes her murderer is doing this to torture him. Having nothing better to do, Blomkvist reluctantly agrees to take the job and moves into a small house on Hedeby Island where he is surrounded by other houses occupied by various members of the large Vanger family.

In the meantime, Lisbeth Salander is carrying out her duties as an investigator for Stockholm-based Milton Security. Salander is an odd young woman with many tattoos and piercings but few social graces. However, she is an excellent investigator because she is also an expert computer hacker. She has recently done a thorough background check on Blomkvist at the request of Vanger's attorney, Dirch Frode, before Vanger offered him the job. Because of her troubled background and instability, the courts have placed Salander under the legal guardianship of attorney Nils Bjurman, who brutally rapes her. However, Salander, who lives by her own unique code of ethics, exacts revenge that includes forcing Bjurman to begin a process that will eventually release her from guardianship.

Blomkvist learns that Harriet vanished from Hedeby Island when she was 16 years old. The entire Vanger family had gathered for an annual business dinner, but a serious accident resulted in the bridge between the island and the mainland being closed for 24 hours, stranding everyone on one side of the bridge or the other. Vanger has concluded that Harriet was murdered by a family member because no one was able to get on or off the island during the hours surrounding her disappearance. During the course of his research, Blomkvist meets members of the Vanger family, including Harriet's brother Martin, who now runs the family empire; Cecilia, with whom Blomkvist has a brief affair; Martin's mother Isabella, who resents his poking into the family's history; and Henrik's brother Harald, a raging anti-Semite. He also learns about Gottfried, Harriet and Martin's father, a drunk who drowned many years ago.



Eventually Blomkvist decides he needs a research assistant to help him unravel the mystery of Harriet's disappearance and Frode recommends Salander. The two are puzzled by an entry in Harriet's diary that appears to be a short list of names and phone numbers, but they come to realize it is a list of women who were brutally murdered many years ago, along with Bible verses that describe how and why the women were killed. The trail eventually leads them to Gottfried Vanger, who raped and killed a number of women and taught his son Martin to do the same. Both men also raped Harriet, who drowned her father and in the confusion following the accident, escaped from the island with the help of her cousin Anita. After Salander saves Blomkvist, who has been imprisoned in Martin's basement torture chamber and is about to be killed, they find Harriet living on a sheep farm in Australia and convince her to return to Sweden since Martin has now been killed in an auto accident as he fled from the island.

Salander uses her computer hacking skills to help Blomkvist, who has become her lover, obtain the information he needs to bring down Wennerstrom's large criminal empire. She also uses her skills to steal millions from Wennerstrom, leaving him without the resources to pay off his mafia connections, and she reveals his whereabouts to someone who has him killed. Salander also realizes she is in love with Blomkvist, but as she is preparing to tell him, she sees him with Berger and, realizing they will always be together, simply leaves.



# Prologue through Chapter 2

## Prologue through Chapter 2 Summary

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, by Stieg Larsson, is a multi-faceted thriller weaving a complex web of murder, financial malfeasance, and psychological intrigue. Journalist Mikael Blomkvist is facing a two-month prison term for libel when elderly industrialist Henrik Vanger hires him to investigate the murder of his niece, Harriet, more than four decades previously. Blomkvist is to conduct his secret investigation under the guise of writing a biography of Vanger's complicated and dysfunctional family. Blomkvist hires Lisbeth Salander, a young, gifted investigator and computer hacker with deep psychological issues, to help with his research, and the two unwittingly find themselves on the trail of a sadistic serial killer.

The prologue takes place on a Friday in November. A pressed flower is delivered to the home of a man who is celebrating his 82nd birthday. This occurs each year, and as usual, he phones retired Detective Superintendent Morrell. This has become an annual ritual for the two men, although there are never any new clues as to who sends the flowers, which have been coming for 44 years now. After hanging up the phone, the old man places the flower, which is called Desert Snow and is native to Australia, on the wall with the others and begins to weep.

Chapter 1 opens on December 20 and introduces Mikael Blomkvist, a journalist living in Stockholm. He is sometimes called Kalle, or Carl, after a young detective in Astrid Lindgren's books for children. He earned the nickname when he was 23 and just beginning his career, and he was instrumental in identifying and capturing a group of notorious bank robbers. Now Blomkvist has been convicted of libeling and defaming Swedish financier Hans-Erik Wennerstrom. He recalls that the story began when he was on a sailing trip with some acquaintances and ran into an old school friend, Robert Lindberg. As they drank together one night, Lindberg told Blomkvist about an incident some years earlier in which Wennerstrom apparently absconded with 60 million kronor, telling Blomkvist that he could use the information to write about Wennerstrom, but that he could not say where he received it. In hindsight, Blomkvist realizes that agreeing to this was a mistake.

Chapter 2 introduces Lisbeth Salander, an investigator for Milton Security. At 24 years old with a Goth-like appearance and a number of tattoos including a dragon on her shoulder blade, she seems out of place as a private investigator but she has proven to be excellent at the job. She is thorough, but unorthodox, and her boss, Dragan Armansky, values her greatly, although he does not allow her to meet with the prestigious firm's clients. Today is an exception. Attorney Dirch Frode is in the office to hear Salander deliver the report he has commissioned on Mikael Blomkvist. She provides background information about his life and career, but Frode becomes more attentive when she says that she thinks Blomkvist might have been set up on the Wennerstrom matter because he failed to do his typical thorough research. Frode hires



the firm — and Salander — to investigate the matter further. Before the meeting ends, Salander mentions that although Blomkvist has been involved with a number of women, including one marriage that produced a daughter he rarely sees, he has had an ongoing relationship with Erika Berger, editor in chief of Millennium, the magazine they co-founded. She is married to artist Gregor Beckman, who knows about the unusual relationship and condones it.

## Prologue through Chapter 2 Analysis

Without using his name, the prologue introduces the character of Henrik Vanger and immediately sets up the ongoing mystery of Harriet Vanger's disappearance. Although neither the reader nor the characters involved realize it at the time, the flower itself holds a clue about Harriet's fate, because it is native to Australia. The brief chapter also establishes the first of the book's many examples of mistaken interpretations of events, as Vanger continues to believe that the flowers are coming from his niece's murderer in an effort to torture him. He has lived with the belief that Harriet was murdered for more than 40 years and now can consider no other explanation.

Blomkvist is introduced as a journalist who places a high value on professional ethics, a theme that will continue to be important throughout the book. He is resigned to his conviction, and accepts his punishment without much of a fight, refusing to reveal his source for the story on Wennerstrom. Although he now knows it was a mistake to make such an agreement, he is a man of his word and will continue to suffer because of his ethical code. His nickname of Kalle foreshadows the odd assignment he will soon accept from Vanger, since it refers to a previous incident in which he solved a crime. The chapter also provides the first mention of Blomkvist's unusual relationship with Berger, which will come into play later in the book.

The character of Salander is fascinating from the beginning because she is not what she appears to be. She is a study in contrasts, since her age and appearance provide no indication of her astonishing skills as an investigator, although it later becomes clear how she is able to uncover so much information about her subjects. Frode is the first of many characters to misjudge her based on her physical appearance and oddly antisocial behavior, and to reverse his opinion of her.



# Chapters 3 through 7

## Chapters 3 through 7 Summary

It is a few days before Christmas, and Blomkvist and Berger are talking in the offices of Millennium magazine. He feels that he has gotten a raw deal with the verdict, and insists that the only way the magazine will survive is if he resigns. Berger disagrees, but since the magazine is already losing advertisers, she decides to go along with his plan.

Blomkvist and Berger met at a party 20 years earlier and immediately began sleeping together. Eventually both married others, but their continued sexual relationship eventually broke up his marriage, although her husband, artist Greger Beckman, accepts their relationship.

While the Millennium offices are closed for the Christmas holidays, Blomkvist goes in to clean out his office. While he is there, attorney Dirch Frode phones him and says he has a client who wants to hire him for a freelance job, but insists on meeting him in person. Blomkvist is surprised when he identifies the client as Henrik Vanger, a retired industrialist who formerly headed a large family-owned business and is now in his 80s. Frode refuses to provide more information, so Blomkvist decides to think about the proposition, and after Frode leaves, he looks up some information on Vanger and his company on the Internet.

On Christmas Day, Salander visits her mother, who apparently has dementia and lives in a nursing home, and Blomkvist spends a few hours with his daughter, then goes to his sister Annika's home for dinner. Afterward, he calls Frode and agrees to travel to Hedeby Island to meet with Vanger. When he arrives at the family compound, Vanger tells Blomkvist that he actually lived on the property for a while when he was about 3 years old after Vanger hired his father to do some work for him, although Blomkvist doesn't remember it. Vanger says he wants Blomkvist to do two things for him, the first of which is writing a history of the Vanger family, including a great deal of dirt, purely for the purpose of revenge. He then gives Blomkvist an overview of the family. This includes his brother Richard, Richard's son Gottfried and his wife Isabella, and their children Harriet and Martin. Martin currently runs the family business but is allowing it to decline. When Blomkvist asks about Harriet, Vanger says that the second part of his assignment is to use the research he conducts for the biography to find out who murdered Harriet and has been trying to drive him insane for 40 years.

In Chapter 5, Vanger tells Blomkvist about Harriet. On September 24, 1966, the Vanger family had gathered for its annual dinner at which they discussed business. The event was usually very disagreeable. Harriet was then living in the main house with Vanger, her great uncle, rather than with her parents. She arrived home about 2 p.m., seeming upset and asking to speak with him, but he had other matters to attend to and said he'd talk with her later. Shortly afterward, a bad accident occurred on the bridge to the island, which drew several people to the scene to help and resulted in the bridge being closed



for 24 hours. Later in the afternoon, the family gathered for dinner but Harriet was nowhere to be found and was never seen again. After exhausting or discounting other possibilities, Vanger concluded that she had been murdered, and that it must have been someone in his family because everyone was trapped either on the island or off it by the accident.

Meanwhile, Salander reads Blomkvist's controversial book about financial journalism and thinks he is a good writer. Later she sends an encrypted e-mail to the address <Plague\_xyz\_666@hotmail.com> and signs it Wasp. The message is "Have you got time?" She then goes out and waits outside a building until an old woman comes along and opens the door, giving Salander a chance to read the entry code and go into the building. She takes some photos of the meters and fuse boxes, and on the way out she looks at the resident list and sees that the top floor is occupied by someone named Wennerstrom. When she gets home, there is a response to her e-mail: 20.

Chapter 6 continues the discussion between Vanger and Blomkvist regarding Harriet's death, and Vanger says his obsession with her death is what caused him to back away from running the business. He shows Blomkvist the collection of pressed flowers and tells him that Harriet used to send him one on his birthday each year, then they continued to arrive after her disappearance. Blomkvist is intrigued, but still hesitant. Vanger asks him to sign a contract to live on the property for one year, writing the biography and looking for Harriet's murderer in the process, for the sum of 2.4 million kronor, to be doubled if he solves the mystery. In return for Blomkvist's best effort, Vanger will also give him proof that Wennerstrom is a swindler, based on something that happened 35 years ago when he worked for Vanger. In the meantime, Salander goes to meet a man she calls Plague, from whom she gets an electronic cuff and instructions on how to use it.

In Chapter 7, Blomkvist has decided to accept Vanger's offer, but Berger is unhappy about it and is afraid he will never come back. Armansky calls Salander to tell her that Frode has told them to drop the investigation of Wennerstrom, but she hates to give it up because she is becoming fascinated with Blomkvist's behavior during his trial.

## Chapters 3 through 7 Analysis

This section provides further information on the unusual relationship between Blomkvist and Berger, which will continue to play out throughout the book. They are not necessarily in love, but they have a sexual attraction that can't be denied, and although Blomkvist's marriage could not survive their continued sexual relationship, Berger's husband accepts it willingly, so they continue to sleep together openly. Beckman's acceptance of the relationship sets up a direct contrast to the effect it will eventually have on Salander's relationship with Blomkvist. The relationship spills over into the office, where they are co-founders of Millennium, but Berger is editor-in-chief and Blomkvist's boss. Blomkvist's official departure from the magazine and the losses it begins to suffer in the wake of his conviction are the precursors for Vanger's eventual involvement in Millennium.





The novel's theme of revenge is raised for the first time in this section as Vanger tells Blomkvist about some of his family's most despicable members. As the head of a large family business dynasty, it would seem that Vanger would be committed to preserving his family's reputation at all costs, but instead, he wants Blomkvist to dig up all possible dirt and publish it in a book as a means of exacting revenge on members of his family. This request is ironic foreshadowing, because Vanger has no idea at this point of the horrors Blomkvist's investigation will uncover, and that he will eventually ask him to bury the information rather than reveal it. The information that Blomkvist lived on the Vanger property as a young child is simply a red herring.

The details surrounding the day Harriet disappeared are important because they are the basis for Vanger's conclusion that Harriet was murdered. However, after more than 40 years of going over the information in his mind and with the detective who investigated the case, he has come to regard certain details as facts when in actuality they are not. His conclusions make sense to him only because he is basing them on incomplete information.

Salander's meeting with Plague and her acquisition of the electronic cuff are confusing at this point but provide the first clues as to how she gets the information for her investigations. In parallel scenes, Vanger promises Blomkvist information that will enable him to bring down Wennerstrom while Salander sets up a seemingly unrelated situation that will eventually be the source of his downfall.



# Chapters 8 through 9

## Chapters 8 through 9 Summary

Chapter 8, which takes place in early January, finds Blomkvist arriving at the Vanger estate, where he will live in a guest house on the property. Vanger takes him on a tour of the area and introduces him to several people. The cover story for Blomkvist's presence is that he is helping Vanger write his autobiography, which will enable him to poke around in family business. Vanger also fills Blomkvist in on various members of his large family, some of whom he thinks are possible suspects and others not. Blomkvist reminds him that he will have to serve his prison sentence at some point and that he might have to return to Stockholm at times to take care of magazine business, and Vanger says he might be able to help with the magazine's financial problems.

After getting settled in his house, Blomkvist takes a walk around the village. He also tries several times to phone Berger, but is never able to reach her. The following day, Vanger has all the background information on Harriet's disappearance delivered to Blomkvist, and it is a huge amount of material. Vanger begins going through the material meticulously, but he begins to wonder why he took this assignment because he feels so isolated. He learns that Detective Inspector Gustaf Morell had been the lead investigator on the case. It appears that Morell conducted a thorough search and investigation, including interviewing family members, but came up with no clues.

In Chapter 9, Blomkvist meets Martin Vanger, Henrik's nephew and Harriet's brother, who now runs the business and lives on the property. While most of the houses in the compound are old, Martin lives in a modern home he built a few years ago. Blomkvist continues reading the background material and trying unsuccessfully to reach Berger.

Back in Stockholm, Salander has a meeting with Nils Bjurman, her guardian. She had been a difficult child and teenager, being placed in and out of institutions and guardianships, and when she had turned 13, the court decided that a trustee should be assigned to take care of her interests until she became of age. The trustee had been attorney Holger Palmgren, who had gradually gained her trust and had recommended her for the job at Milton Security. A few months earlier, Palmgren had suffered a stroke from which he would not recover, so Bjurman had been assigned as her new guardian and Salander does not like him. Although Palmgren had allowed her to handle her own finances, Bjurman has taken that privilege away from her, giving her a monthly allowance while he pays her bills and puts money into savings for her. When he questions her about her job at Milton Security, she leads him to believe she does menial tasks like making coffee and sorting mail.

Blomkvist continues to learn more about the Vanger family's history, including the fact that family members cannot sell their company stock outside the family. It is also clear that Henrik Vanger has little use for most of his family and is hated in particular by his



brother Harald, who lives on the property. Harald, a Nazi, hates Henrik because he fell in love with and married a Jewish woman.

## Chapters 8 through 9 Analysis

This section brings the book's theme of isolation into focus as Blomkvist arrives for his year-long stay on Hedeby Island and realizes how truly alone he is there. The island seems desolate despite the number of Vanger family members living there, partially because so many family members are estranged from each other and live in virtual isolation even though they are geographically close together. He finds himself feeling even more isolated when Berger refuses to accept his attempts to contact her because she is angry with him for leaving. It is also in this section that Blomkvist begins to get a sense of the Vanger family, which includes many odd characters and more than one Nazi and anti-Semite, foreshadowing further revelations to come. As is typical in a well-crafted mystery, a large number of characters are introduced and the reader has difficulty sorting out who will be important and who will not.

We also learn more about Salander's troubled history and the reasons she is under guardianship even though she is an adult. She is not a person who trusts easily, and it had taken several years for her to develop a somewhat warm relationship with her former guardian, Palmgren, who is now incapacitated and no longer able to assist her. Her new guardian, Bjurman, is altogether different and lacks Palmgren's extreme patience in getting to know Salander and trying to understand her. Salander's initial mistrust of him foreshadows his upcoming rape and torture of her. Again, isolation emerges as a major theme as the reader learns a bit more about Salander's past and the reasons she is largely cut off from normal society.



# Chapters 10 through 12

## Chapters 10 through 12 Summary

Chapter 10, which takes place between January 9 and 31, finds Blomkvist getting to know Martin Vanger and his girlfriend, Eva. Blomkvist considers broaching the topic of Harriet's disappearance, but Martin doesn't seem inclined to talk about it. He also meets Harald's daughter Cecilia, who is unhappy about the book Blomkvist is writing, and is tired of her uncle's obsession over Harriet, whom she believes met with an accident. He also meets Harriet's mother, Isabella, who is angry about anyone poking into family business.

Later Blomkvist spends an afternoon with Morell, who thinks Harriet was murdered, perhaps because she was about to reveal something to Vanger that would incriminate or upset a family member. He tells Blomkvist that every police officer has an unsolved mystery that bothers him, and Harriet is his. Blomkvist continues to meet other family members, with the notable exception of Harald, who lives in the house next door to his but is reclusive and is never seen. Blomkvist learns from his attorney that he must report to prison on March 17, but that his two-month sentence probably will be shortened. He meets daily with Vanger, is becoming more fascinated with the mystery, and he has not yet begun to work on his plan to take down Wennerstrom. Vanger notices that Blomkvist seems a bit off balance sometimes and places a 20-minute call to someone in Stockholm on the topic of Blomkvist.

Berger comes to visit Blomkvist for the weekend and tells him the magazine is in serious financial trouble. Meanwhile, Salander meets again with Bjurman, who smells of alcohol and asks a number of intimate questions about her sex life.

In Chapter 11, Vanger invites Blomkvist and Berger to spend the evening with him and asks about the status of the magazine. He offers to become a partner in Millennium in order to solve its financial problems, but only on the condition that Blomkvist return as publisher. They work out a deal, but Blomkvist is unhappy because he is not consulted.

As Blomkvist continues going through the documents, he learns that Harriet changed during the last year of her life. She had become quieter, withdrawn from other people, and more religious, but in an interview with Morell, her cousin Anita disagrees with the opinion that she had been introverted. Blomkvist also reads Harriet's diary, which is somewhat sketchy. However, on the last page there is a list of five names and telephone numbers. Although Morell had focused a great deal of attention on them, he had not been able to figure out who the people are or whether it is some sort of code. After Berger returns to Stockholm, Blomkvist sees a light on in Cecilia's house and when he stops in to visit her, they have sex.

Salander's laptop is damaged when a car runs over it, so she goes to Bjurman to ask for money to replace it. He forces her to perform oral sex on him, telling her that if she is



nice to him, he will be nice to her. He also warns her that if she tells anyone, he will have her institutionalized.

Chapter 12 opens with a lengthy description of the erratic behavior that led to Salander being placed under a guardianship. Because of her background and mistrust of police, she is unable to report Bjurman's rape, but it is noted that she always gets revenge. Her childhood had included many physical fights with both boys and girls, and her classmates had thought she was crazy. As she had reached her teenage years, All The Evil happened, which set her on a path that led to being placed under guardianship.

Blomkvist and Cecilia talk after sex and she asks him to be discreet about their relationship. They also talk about the changes Harriet exhibited during her last year, and Cecilia notes that she hadn't confided in anyone. She also tells Blomkvist that Harriet's father drowned after getting drunk and falling from his rowboat, and that Martin had him. She says that Martin had a difficult time during his teenage years, but has turned out alright in the end.

Salander considers confiding in someone about her problems and asking for advice, but she has few friends and discounts all of them for various reasons. She realizes that she will have to take matters into her own hands, which does not bode well for Bjurman.

## Chapters 10 through 12 Analysis

In another example of foreshadowing, Detective Morell reveals his theory that Harriet was about to reveal something to Vanger that led to her murder, although his comment is so casual that it means nothing to either Blomkvist or the reader at the time. The section continues to throw out more red herrings in the form of various Vanger family members who are possible suspects in Harriet's murder, but her brother, Martin, leaves a very favorable impression on Blomkvist when they meet for dinner. Martin appears to be one of the most stable members of the family, a fact that is confirmed by Cecilia's opinion of him, which the reader later learns is exactly the opposite of the truth.

Blomkvist's tryst with Cecilia reveals another side of his personality — the casualness with which he treats sex. He is portrayed as an attractive man who enjoys sex, but although his relationships are fairly large in number, he treats his partners with respect, putting him in contrast to the characters who appear normal but in fact practice extreme violence against women. One of those characters is Bjurman, who takes advantage of Salander and his authority over her. We also learn more about Salander's isolation when she considers confiding in someone, but realizes she has no one she can trust. Salander's references to "All The Evil" recur from time to time throughout the book, but there is never an explanation of exactly what occurred to set her on the path she is now on. The book's theme of revenge also comes in to play in this section as Salander calmly determines that although she cannot go to the authorities with the information about Bjurman's rape, she has other ways of handling the situation on her own.

Blomkvist's physical isolation is mitigated to some degree when Berger visits him for the weekend, but his emotional isolation worsens when he realizes that Vanger and Berger have already made arrangements for Vanger to become involved at Millennium. He is geographically isolated on the island and also being cut out of the business decisions that affect his magazine.

Other important clues that surface in this section include the drowning death of Martin and Harriet's father, Gottfried, the mysterious names and phone numbers found in Harriet's diary, and the personality changes she underwent during the final months of her life.



# Chapters 13 through 16

## Chapters 13 through 16 Summary

Salander begins investigating Bjurman, hoping to find something she can use to change her situation, but the results are discouraging. His record appears to be clean and she can't find anyone who says anything bad about him or his work as a guardian for children. She considers killing him, possibly by causing a heart attack, but decides that what she really needs is the ability to control him and her situation. When he asks her to come to see him at his home rather than his office, he brutally rapes her anally and tells her to come back again the following week. He has concluded that she is mentally disabled and therefore would not be believed if she reported him.

Blomkvist falls into a routine and begins to confide in Cecilia. He is making progress on the Vanger family chronicle, but not on the murder investigation, although he does think that the list of names and numbers in Harriet's diary must mean something.

As Chapter 14 opens, Salander takes a few days to recover from the brutal rape. She does some research and realizes that Bjurman is a sadist and has chosen her as his victim. She gets another tattoo — a narrow band around her ankle — and tells the tattoo artist that she wants it as a reminder. At the agreed upon time, Salander returns to Bjurman's apartment, but as they go into the bedroom, she tasers him. While he is unconscious, she ties him up and searches his bedroom, finding a variety of sadistic sex paraphernalia. When he awakens, she shows him a DVD she had secretly recorded of the previous rape. She recorded it with a tiny camera hidden in her backpack, thinking he would ask for oral sex again, but instead got evidence of how sick Bjurman truly is. She instructs him to never contact her again, give her control of her finances, prepare glowing reports about her behavior and progress, and in a year or two, ensure that she is released from guardianship. She then tattoos his midsection to say "I AM A SADISTIC PIG, A PERVERT, AND A RAPIST" and indicates that she will kill him if she ever learns that he has been with a woman, even of the woman's own free will.

Blomkvist begins his prison term on the same day Mellinnium announces that Vanger will be part owner of the magazine. Salander is in Armansky's office and hears the story on the radio with interest. She begins to realize that there is a mysterious connection between Wennerstrom, Vanger and Blomkvist and decides to investigate further on her own.

In Chapter 15, Blomkvist completes his sentence and returns to Hedeby. Vanger tells him that things are improving at the magazine, but that Wennerstrom is trying to organize a boycott among advertisers. Blomkvist goes to see Cecilia, but she tells him to leave. He goes back to work on the investigation and in going through some photo albums, he sees that at least 20 photos taken on the day of Harriet's disappearance include Cecilia. His instinct tells him that this is important, but he isn't sure why. Later, Cecilia comes to his cottage and says she is in love with him and they have sex. Berger





arrives unexpectedly and finds them together, but shrugs it off. The following Monday, Blomkvist goes to look at Gottfried's cabin, which is now owned by Martin and is located on a remote part of the island.

In Chapter 16, Blomkvist finally gets a break in his investigation. He sees a photo of Harriet taken at the parade she attended a few hours before her disappearance. She is looking to the side and appears frightened by what she sees. He also finds a photo taken on the day of the disappearance showing Cecilia in Harriet's bedroom window. Blomkvist begins trying to track down other photos taken at the parade that might show what Harriet was looking at.

## Chapters 13 through 16 Analysis

Several of the book's themes come into full play in this section, including violence against women, revenge and Salander's unique moral and ethical code. She is so outraged over Bjurman forcing her to have oral sex with him that she considers killing him and making it look like an accident, but in the end plans only to obtain proof the next time they meet and use it against him. She gets more than she bargained for when he brutally rapes and tortures her rather than forcing her to perform oral sex, and when she recovers, she exacts a form of revenge that not only provides a fitting punishment for Bjurman, but also solves the problem of his guardianship over her. Despite her outward appearance, Salander is a very clear thinker and careful planner, and someone who is prepared to and capable of solving her own problems, something she has had to do since childhood because there is no one else to whom she can turn. She also uses the rape as a reason to get yet another tattoo, this one of a small band around her ankle, which is symbolic of the constraints Bjurman used on her and a reminder that she will never allow herself to be placed in that kind of situation again.

As part of her revenge against Bjurman, Salander also exhibits a characteristic that she continues to show throughout the book — a tendency to protect other women against men who are violent toward them. She could have solved her own problems simply by making sure Bjurman relinquished control of her finances and moved toward releasing her from guardianship, but she goes further by demanding that he have no more contact with women and tattooing a clear message on his body to ensure that any woman who might be with him, even of her own free will, would be warned about his sadistic tendencies. It is one of the book's most powerful scenes and portrays Salander as a strong, capable woman despite her outward appearance.

The unusual relationship between Blomkvist and Berger is also seen in this section. While Cecilia makes an unsuccessful attempt to end her relationship with Blomkvist because her feelings for him have gotten too strong, Berger is unaffected when she arrives to find the two of them in bed together. Their relationship has existed for many years and is based on a close friendship, so she is confident enough not to feel jealousy over seeing him with another woman because she realizes her connection with him can't be broken by their relationships with others.





# Chapters 17 through 19

## Chapters 17 through 19 Summary

Blomkvist tells Vanger about the photos he found, but not the fact that Cecilia was in Harriet's room. His daughter arrives and he learns that she has gotten involved in a religious sect. A comment she makes causes him to realize that the numbers on Harriet's list are actually references to Biblical verses rather than phone numbers. Eventually he determines that the names or initials on the list might be victims of brutal murders that occurred many years ago and the Bible verses refer to the way in which each woman was murdered.

Vanger has a serious heart attack and is hospitalized. Blomkvist tells Frode what he has learned and asks for a research assistant. Frode immediately thinks of Salander and accidentally lets it slip that he had her investigate Blomkvist, who demands to see the report. When he reads it, he realizes how much Vanger had known about him and the magazine from the beginning, and that Salander could only have gotten the information by hacking into his computer.

In Chapter 18, Blomkvist shows up at Salander's door and says he wants her to help him with his investigation. Armansky has approved and they sign a contract. Returning home, Blomkvist is certain someone has been in his house although nothing seems to be disturbed.

As Chapter 19 opens, Blomkvist visits Vanger at the hospital, and Vanger tells him to continue the investigation even if he dies. Martin stops by to tell Blomkvist that since Vanger is ill, he will step into his spot on the magazine's board. Salander visits her mother, who doesn't seem to know her. Blomkvist continues looking for photos that will provide a clue regarding what Harriet saw at the parade, and Salander begins researching the list of murder victims. She also finds at least one who fits the pattern, but is not on the list.

## Chapters 17 through 19 Analysis

The book is at approximately the halfway point before the two main characters finally meet each other in this section. In direct contrast to Salander's complete control over Bjurman, Blomkvist immediately gets the upper hand by taking Salander by surprise, but she senses that he is not harmful and is not intimidated by him. The fact that she behaves passively in a situation that would ordinarily be upsetting to her provides the first inkling of the feelings she will later develop for Blomkvist.

Although their progress seems slow, Blomkvist and Salander are finally on the right track to resolving the mystery of Harriet's disappearance. One clue comes in the unlikely form of Blomkvist's daughter and the unnerving realization that she, apparently like Harriet, has become involved with religion. While it leads to information that will be

critical to the investigation, this is another red herring designed by the author to lead the reader to believe that a religious sect might be involved in the case.

In another important revelation, Blomkvist realizes that Salander has hacked into his computer, giving her access to an unlimited amount of information. This also reveals another facet of her personality and sets up her eventual activities to bring down Wennerstrom, who has been all but forgotten at this point in the novel.

The theme of violence against women becomes a stronger focus as Salander begins to unravel the mystery of Harriet's diary notations. Her research reveals a long string of murders in which young women were subjected to extraordinary violence and torture, although the connection to Harriet's disappearance is not yet clear.



# Chapters 20 through 23

## Chapters 20 through 23 Summary

Salander arrives at Blomkvist's cabin with her report on the five murders on Harriet's list, plus three more that fit the pattern. They wonder how Harriet got involved and think there must be a connection to the Vanger family. All the murders had occurred between 1949 and 1966, and they had been sadistic killings involving animal sacrifice and fire. They also realize that all the victims' names are traditional Jewish names, and that the Vanger family has included several anti-Semites and Nazis. Salander says she thinks the perpetrator is not an insane serial killer, but a bastard who hates women. They consider various people who might have a connection, including Otto Falk, who was pastor of the local church at the time. Salander seduces Blomkvist, and the following morning, they find the corpse of a cat on the porch. The cat has been tortured and killed.

Blomkvist and Salander realize that someone must know they're making progress on the investigation. They are puzzled by the time span of the murders and wonder whether it could have involved two people, one older and one younger. They decide they must protect themselves, so Salander returns to Stockholm to pick up some equipment. While there, she visits her mother, who doesn't want to let go of her hand when she is ready to leave. Blomkvist talks to Frode about the break in and the cat incident, and in sorting through who might be involved, he learns that Cecilia's sister Anita, who lives in London, has recently visited. He also talks to the local pastor and begins to get the idea that Harriet might have been reading the Bible for research rather than a religious conversion.

When Blomkvist goes out for a run, someone begins shooting at him but he is able to escape. Furious, he goes to see Cecilia and asks a number of questions, including why she had been in Harriet's room on the day of her disappearance, but Cecilia denies that she had been there. When Salander returns, she installs a series of cameras and alarms at the cottage.

In Chapter 23, Blomkvist and Salander continue to wonder if there could be two killers. Blomkvist realizes that Salander has a photographic memory, but his discovery upsets her and she tells him she is a freak. Blomkvist looks through more of Vanger's family photos. Seeing that Cecilia and her sister Anita look enough alike to be twins, he realizes it had been Anita in Harriet's window. He finds another photo of young Martin wearing a jacket with a red patch, which matches a grainy image of the person Harriet saw at the parade. Blomkvist realizes it had been Martin who frightened her, but he also notes that Martin had been on the other side of the bridge when Harriet disappeared. Meanwhile, Salander goes through materials at the Vanger Corporation's archives and learns that the company has an office or factory at every location where a murder had taken place. She also finds a connection between Gottfried and one of the victims.



When Blomkvist goes to Martin's house, Martin takes him captive in a secret torture chamber in his basement. Martin knows that Salander is at the company archives and has asked the security guard to call him when she leaves.

## Chapters 20 through 23 Analysis

All of the book's major themes continue to play out in this section. Salander's research reveals still more horrific murders, and the connection to religion is strengthened when they realize that the victims, including those who aren't on Harriet's list, all had Biblical names of Jewish origin.

The character of Salander comes into slightly clearer focus in these chapters. Despite her overall isolation, much of which is of her own choosing, she remains a faithful visitor to her mother despite her mother's poor condition. Her mother's reluctance to let go of Salander's hand as she prepares to leave foreshadows dire events to come, including Blomkvist's brush with death and the mother's own impending death, since this is the last time Salander and her mother see each other. In addition, perhaps because of events in her own history, Salander has a very clear focus when it comes to the way men treat women. While Blomkvist thinks they are tracking someone who is an insane serial killer, it is Salander who immediately sees that it is someone who simply hates women and gets pleasure from destroying them both psychologically and physically, much like her guardian Nils Bjurman. Salander also takes a step outside her isolation by seducing Blomkvist.

This section also sheds additional light on Blomkvist's relationships with women. While sex is obviously important to him, friendship is equally important. His friendship with Berger is the glue of their relationship that enables them to overlook their relationships with others, and he makes a tremendous effort to remain friends with Cecilia despite her rejection of him as a lover. While he enjoys his new sexual relationship with Salander, he makes it clear that what he really wants is to be her friend, something she has difficulty believing and accepting.



# Chapters 24 through 27

## Chapters 24 through 27 Summary

As he is held prisoner, Blomkvist realizes that Martin is still killing women after first holding them in his torture chamber. As he prepares to kill Blomkvist, Martin explains that his father, Gottfried, taught him to torture and kill women, and that he disposes of the bodies by dumping them at sea. Martin asks Blomkvist what happened to Harriet and Blomkvist realizes that Martin did not kill her after all. Martin says that he had planned to kill her, but he arrived too late and was unable to get to the island.

In the meantime, Salander continues to go through old company newsletters and spots a photo of young Martin wearing the red jacket, so she, too, realizes it was Martin who frightened Harriet at the parade. At 11:30, she starts to tell the night watchman she's leaving, but since it's a long walk to the other side of the building, she simply leaves. When she tries to call Blomkvist, she sees that he has called her 13 times between 3:30 and 9 p.m., but nothing in the past two hours. Arriving at the empty cottage, she goes through the video from the surveillance cameras she installed and figures out that he must have gone to Martin's house.

Martin is about to strangle and possibly rape Blomkvist when Salander arrives, beats Martin with a golf club, and rescues Blomkvist. Martin escapes in a car, but deliberately crashes into an oncoming truck as Salander chases him, and his car bursts into flames. Salander takes care of Blomkvist, but insists that they don't notify the police. She wipes away all their fingerprints and gets rid of any evidence that they were in Martin's house.

In Chapter 25, Salander returns to Martin's house and collects evidence of his crimes. She realizes that his goal was violence and killing, but his real interest had been in the hunt, which fueled his sexual fantasies. She burns all of Martin's detailed records and drops his laptop into the lake. When Frode arrives with the news of Martin's death, Salander tells him what happened and says it's up to him what to do with the information, but that he is to leave Blomkvist and herself out of it. Blomkvist is uncomfortable, but realizes they have now waited too long to call the police.

Going over what they know, Blomkvist and Salander realize that Gottfried raped Martin and taught him to rape his sister Harriet. Blomkvist tells Vanger he is leaving for a while and asks if he still wants to know the truth. Vanger says yes, and Blomkvist promises he will come back when he can. He goes to London and finds Anita, who refuses to speak to him. Salander's friend Plague has arranged surveillance, so when Anita calls someone in Australia immediately after Blomkvist's visit, they are able to trace the call.

Salander and Blomkvist prepare to go to Australia, but she stays behind when her mother dies. In Australia, Blomkvist finds Harriet living under the name Anita Cochran and running a large sheep farm. He tells her everything that has happened, and she tells him her story. When she was a teenager, her father raped her for a year and her



mother did nothing even though she knew. One day, Gottfried took her to his cabin and told her about the women he had killed, quoting the Bible verses she later recorded in her diary. Harriet got away and when Gottfried chased her, she pushed him into the water and held him under until he drowned. Martin saw this and raped her, and from then on she was in his power until he was sent away to school. On the day of the parade, she saw him across the street and realized she'd never be free of him, so in the confusion after the accident, Anita smuggled her off the island, helped her leave the country, and stayed in touch with her through the years. She married Australian sheep rancher Spencer Cochran, who is now deceased, and had a family with him. She tells Blomkvist she is relieved to have finally told someone the story.

In Chapter 27, Blomkvist accompanies Salander to her mother's funeral. The only other person there is Armansky. Afterward, Blomkvist tells Salander Harriet's full story and she blames Harriet for not taking action in the beginning, which would have prevented Martin from murdering so many women. The two have an argument when Salander mistakes Blomkvist's gesture of friendship for a desire for sex and she leaves, but later returns and Blomkvist realizes she probably has Asperger's Syndrome. Meanwhile, Harriet returns to Hedeby and reunites with Vanger. She reveals that she is the one who has sent the pressed flowers every year, thinking Vanger would realize that she was alive and well. As word spreads about Martin's death and Harriet's return, there is much confusion over what will happen with the company, but Vanger decides Harriet would be the best choice for a new CEO. Vanger asks Blomkvist not to write about Gottfried and Martin for the sake of Harriet and his company, and he vaguely threatens to harm the magazine. Salander says that she is not bound by journalistic ethics, so in return for her silence, she demands that Frode identify as many of Martin's victims as possible and compensate their families, and that the Vanger company donate 2 million kroner annually to organizations for women in crisis. Blomkvist learns that the information Vanger has on Wennerstrom is worthless, but Salander reveals that she has hacked into Wennerstrom's computer system and has proof of his criminal activities.

## Chapters 24 through 27 Analysis

Salander's fear and distrust of authorities comes into direct conflict with Blomkvist's strong code of professional ethics in the aftermath of Martin's death. Despite his injuries, his first instinct is to notify the police about everything that has happened, but Salander is in control and insists that they keep the information to themselves. Even though she and Blomkvist are victims and not guilty of any wrongdoing, she cannot go against her instincts for self protection, which are the result of her life's experiences. Blomkvist suffers enormous guilt over the cover-up, but his respect for Salander, along with the knowledge that too much time has passed by the time he is able to think clearly, causes him to put aside his ethical code and go along with her wishes.

The book's theme of isolation is featured in several respects. Harriet is likely alive because the accident stranded Martin on the other side of the bridge, giving him no opportunity to carry out his plan to kill her. Harriet has also chosen a life of isolation for herself, living on a remote sheep farm and remaining far from her family, yet she has



reached out to Henrik each year through the delivery of the pressed flowers. Like his conviction that Harriet was murdered, Henrik was able to see no possibility other than that the flowers were sent by her killer, rather than recognizing the clues that she was alive and well, and even hints of her whereabouts, since the most recent flower is native to Australia. The name of that flower, Desert Snow, is symbolic of several things, including the two very different lives Harriet has led and the two locations in which she has spent her life. In addition, the isolation of Gottfried's cabin enabled him to torment his daughter, and it gave Harriet an opportunity to kill him. Martin's basement is also a symbol of isolation for his many victims, including Blomkvist, who has broken through Salander's isolation, prompting her rescue of him.

Another piece of the Salander puzzle falls into place as Blomkvist realizes that she probably has Asperger's Syndrome, which would explain her unusual behavior and lack of social graces. However, Salander's mistrust of others causes her to misinterpret his gesture of friendship, moving her back into isolation despite her warm feelings for him.

As the section comes to a close, Blomkvist again struggles with his professional ethics in agreeing to keep the story of Gottfried's and Martin's crimes a secret, but Salander uses her personal ethical code to attempt to make some degree of amends for their crimes and do good for other women in crisis.





# Chapters 28 through Epilogue

## Chapters 28 through Epilogue Summary

Back in Stockholm, Salander tells Blomkvist about the electronic cuff she attached to Wennerstrom's broadband cable that enabled her to intercept all his computer information. They go through the financial information but have trouble figuring out what he and his companies have been doing.

Blomkvist moves to his rustic cabin in Sandhamn and begins writing furiously. Salander arrives with more of Wennerstrom's computer information and stays, enjoying playing house. Harriet takes over Vanger's spot on the magazine board and wants to befriend Blomkvist and Berger. As Blomkvist is working, he tells Salander that Wennerstrom had an affair with a 22-year-old waitress, got her pregnant, and had one of his thugs hold her under water until she agreed to get an abortion with no compensation. This piques Salander's interest and she begins reading through Wennerstrom's e-mails and other documents, finally coming up with an idea. Blomkvist eventually finishes his work and presents it to Berger. He refuses to tell her about the horrors they experienced with Martin, but he tells her that Salander saved his life and that they must protect her as a confidential source.

Wennerstrom's empire is complex and includes some legitimate businesses as well as others that are clearing houses for illegal weapons, money laundering, and other criminal activity. Salander borrows 120,000 kroner from Blomkvist, saying she needs it for only six weeks, but refuses to tell him what she needs it for. She goes to Zurich and, using a series of fake identities and disguises, steals \$260 million from Wennerstrom's secret accounts.

In Chapter 30, Blomkvist's story and an accompanying book are published and they are bombshells. The information is backed up by e-mails and other documentation from Wennerstrom's own computer, and the story implies that Blomkvist accepted his prison sentence rather than reveal the source of his information. The blow to Wennerstrom's empire sends the Swedish stock exchange into a freefall. Wennerstrom disappears and is found dead six months later. He has been shot. We learn that Salander knew that since she had cleaned out his secret accounts, he no longer had the money he needed to pay off the Colombian mafia, and she turned his address over to a Miami lawyer, considering it payback for the impregnated waitress. Eventually Blomkvist reads about Wennerstrom's bank accounts being cleaned out and recognizes a photo of Salander despite her disguise and, realizing what she has done, he begins laughing hysterically.

It is now December and Blomkvist and Salander go to his cabin for the holidays. When she struggles to identify her feelings, she realizes she is in love with him. Blomkvist makes one last visit to Hedeby to collect his fee from Vanger, and says he won't write a chronicle of the Vanger family. Cecilia and Harriet are now running the Vanger company.





As the book concludes, Salander goes to tell Blomkvist about her feelings for him, but when she sees him with Berger, she simply turns around and leaves.

## Chapters 28 through Epilogue Analysis

Salander's extreme hatred of men who are violent toward women is key to the book's final chapters. She enjoys spending time with Blomkvist at his cabin, but doesn't share his fascination with Wennerstrom's complex financial dealings and his crimes until Blomkvist casually mentions the story of the woman he forced to have an abortion. This is a topic that interests her, and it sets her on the path to stealing Wennerstrom's money. In the end, both get revenge in their own way. Blomkvist is finally able to publish a detailed account of Wennerstrom's extensive criminal activity, thus bringing down his business empire and getting revenge for Wennerstrom's lawsuit that led to his imprisonment and professional humiliation. Although she has not been harmed directly by Wennerstrom, Salander wants revenge for a comparatively small event in Wennerstrom's life — his treatment of the young woman he impregnated. This strikes a nerve with Salander in a more personal way than Blomkvist's vendetta against him, and her revenge is far more personal and more extensive. Again demonstrating her penchant for careful thought and planning, she sets into motion a series of events that brings Wennerstrom down personally and even leads directly to his death, which is a revenge killing for failing to pay off his mafia connections.

The difference between the ethical codes of Blomkvist and Salander is again evident here. He maintains his ethical code by refusing to reveal Salander's connection to the Wennerstrom affair, even to Berger, and Salander has no hesitation about stealing all of Wennerstrom's money and even handing the information about his whereabouts over to someone she knows will have him killed. She considers this an appropriate payback for his treatment of a helpless young waitress, and even Blomkvist is amused by the irony when he realizes what she has done.

Despite the realization that she is in love with Blomkvist, Salander's isolation wins out in the end as she is unable to accept his relationship with Berger, even though she knows that it consists of sex and friendship, not love.



# Characters

## Mikael Blomkvist

Mikael Blomkvist is a 42-year-old crusading journalist and co-founder of Millennium, a Swedish financial magazine. He has recently been convicted of libelling wealthy financier Hans-Erik Wennerstrom in one of his stories, so he takes an unusual job writing a chronicle of the wealthy Vanger family while secretly investigating the murder of Harriet Vanger more than 40 years ago. This is not Blomkvist's first criminal investigation. As a young man, he earned the nickname Kalle (Carl) after finding information that led to the capture of a group of burglars; the name is a reference to a series of books featuring a boy detective named Kalle. Despite his conviction for libel, Blomkvist operates by a strict code of professional ethics, including refusing to identify his confidential sources. Blomkvist has been involved in a close friendship and sexual relationship with his partner at Millennium, Erika Berger, for more than 20 years, and the relationship is the primary factor in breaking up his marriage. He routinely indulges in casual sexual relationships, but is anxious to maintain friendships with the women he beds.

In working for Henrik Vanger, Blomkvist puts his investigative skills to the test and eventually uncovers two serial killers within the Vanger family. His motivation in taking the job, however, is primarily Vanger's promise that he will reveal information that will enable him to bring down Wennerstrom. Despite the fact that he accepted his conviction and sentence with surprising complacency, he holds a strong grudge against Wennerstrom and is delighted when he is able to expose his criminal activities and destroy his empire, although it occurs through Salander's computer hacking skills rather than the information Vanger promises but cannot deliver.

## Lisbeth Salander

Lisbeth Salander is a 24-year-old woman living in Stockholm, and arguably one of the most complex characters in modern literature. Her physical appearance — solemn, Goth-like, and covered with tattoos and piercings — belies her extraordinary skills as an investigator and computer hacker. Salander has had a very difficult childhood, although the reader never learns the true extent of the abuse she suffered, and has been placed under the court-ordered guardianship of a sadistic attorney who eventually rapes her. Salander always gets revenge though, and she discards her initial temptation to kill her tormentor and instead devises a clever plan that punishes him while also establishing a path that will release her from guardianship.

Salander lives a life of isolation, having few friends and apparently not particularly wanting more. She is unable to turn to others when she faces problems, preferring to resolve her difficulties on her own. She has had a wide variety of sexual experiences with both male and female partners, and she seduces Blomkvist soon after meeting



him. She is quick to recognize men to hate and abuse women, and she is determined to exact revenge on them whenever she can. This trait eventually leads her to use her hacking skills to steal millions from Hans-Erik Wennerstrom and begin a chain of events that leads to his murder, a path she purposely takes as payback for an incident many years previously in which Wennerstrom harmed a young waitress he had gotten pregnant. Salander has a photographic memory, a fact that she thinks makes her a freak, and by the book's end, Blomkvist has come to the conclusion that her odd behavior is the result of Asperger's Syndrome. Salander eventually realizes that she is in love with Blomkvist, but her self doubt and tendency to isolate herself prevents her from telling him about her feelings, and she walks away from their relationship.

## **Martin Vanger**

Martin Vanger is Henrik's great-nephew and currently the head of the family's business enterprises. Despite a difficult childhood, it appears that he has grown up to be a normally functioning person, but Blomkvist's investigation reveals that he is a sadist who raped his sister and for many years imprisoned, tortured, raped and murdered women.

## **Henrik Vanger**

Henrik Vanger is an 82-year-old industrialist and head of the larger and dysfunctional Vanger family. He is obsessed with the disappearance and apparent murder of his great-niece Harriet more than 40 years earlier, and he hires journalist Mikael Blomkvist to solve the mystery under the guise of writing a chronicle of the Vanger family.

## **Harriet Vanger**

Harriet Vanger is Henrik Vanger's great-niece who disappeared mysteriously more than 40 years earlier. Although she was believed to have been murdered, Blomkvist learns that she secretly left the family compound to escape from her brother, Martin, who routinely raped her, and relocated to a sheep ranch in Australia.

## **The extended Vanger Family**

The large and complex Vanger Family includes Martin and Harriet's father Gottfried and his wife Isabella, Henrik's brother Harald and his children Birger, Cecilia and Anita, and many others who are only mentioned peripherally.

## **Nils Bjurman**

Nils Bjurman is an attorney and the legal guardian of Lisbeth Salander. He brutally rapes her, causing her to exact a fitting revenge.



## **Erika Berger**

Erika Berger is editor-in-chief of Millennium Magazine and Blomkvist's longtime lover, even though she is married.

## **Dirch Frode**

Dirch Frode is the attorney and trusted friend of Henrik Vanger.

## **Dragan Armansky**

Dragan Armansky is head of Milton Security, the company that employs Lisbeth Salander as an investigator.

## **Gottfried Vanger**

Gottfried Vanger died several years before the book takes place but figures prominently in the story as the father of Martin and Harriet and the person whose violence set off the chain of events that form the book's plot.

## **Isabella Salander**

Isabella Salander is Lisbeth's mother. She lives in a nursing home and often does not recognize her daughter.

## **Pernilla Blomkvist**

Pernilla is Mikael Blomkvist's teenage daughter. He rarely sees her, but a conversation with her leads him to important clues that help unravel the mystery of Harriet's disappearance.

## **Detective Superintendent Gustaf Morell**

Detective Superintendent Gustaf Morell served as the lead investigator in the search for Harriet Vanger and the investigation of her disappearance. Although long retired, he continues to think about the case and discuss it with Henrik Vanger.

## **Robert Lindberg**

Robert Lindberg is an old acquaintance of Blomkvist's. It is a conversation with Lindberg that sets Blomkvist on the path of investigating Wennerstrom.



## Plague

Plague is the code name for a friend of Salander's. He provides her with the equipment she needs to hack into Wennerstrom's computer and the means to locate Harriet Vanger.

## Hans-Erik Wennerstrom

The reader never meets Hans-Erik Wennerstrom, but he is nevertheless an important character in the book. He is a wealthy, but corrupt, Swedish financier, and his successful libel suit against Blomkvist is what sets off many of the events that comprise the book's plot.



# Objects/Places

## Hedeby Island

Hedeby Island is adjacent to the Swedish town of Hedestad. It is owned entirely by the Vanger family and is the site of a number of homes occupied by various family members, and it is the location for much of the novel's action both past and present.

## Stockholm

Stockholm is the capital of Sweden and the home of main characters Mikael Blomkvist and Lisbeth Salander.

## Hedestad

Hedestad is a small village in Sweden located next to Hedeby Island, where the Vanger family lives.

## Desert Snow

Desert Snow is a flower native to Australia. In the book's prologue, Henrik Vanger receives a pressed version of the flower, the most recent in a series of similar flowers he receives each year on his birthday, which he believes are coming from his niece's murderer.

## Susanna's Bridge Cafe

Susanna's Bridge Cafe is a restaurant in Hedestad where Blomkvist spends time while working for Vanger.

## Millennium

Millennium is the financial magazine founded by Blomkvist and Berger. Blomkvist's story about Wennerstrom sets off a chain reaction that fosters the rest of the story.

## Gottfried's Cabin

Gottfried Vanger owned a cabin on an isolated part of Hedeby Island where he raped both of his children, and where he eventually drowned.



## **Martin's House**

Martin Vanger's house is the only modern structure on Hedeby Island and the site of his secret basement torture chamber.

## **Electronic Cuff**

Salander uses a sophisticated electronic cuff invented by her friend Plague to break into Wennerstrom's computer.

## **Bridge at Hedeby Island**

The bridge connecting Hedeby Island with the village of Hedestad figures prominently in the disappearance of Harriet Vanger. On the day of her disappearance, an accident closed the bridge for several hours, cutting the island off from the mainland and making it appear unlikely that Harriet could have left the island alive.

## **Cochran Farm**

Cochran Farm is a sheep farm in Australia. It is the place where Harriet Vanger lived after escaping from Hedeby Island and marrying its owner.

## **Sandhamm**

Sandhamm is the location of Blomkvist's vacation cabin where he retreats to write his article and book on Wennerstrom.



# Themes

## Violence Against Women

The overriding theme of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is extreme violence against women. In addition to chapters, the book is divided into four parts and each one begins with a statistic regarding violence against women in Sweden, where the novel is set.

Much of the book's violence is of a sexual nature. Long before the reader learns about Gottfried and Martin Vanger's long history of raping, torturing and killing women, one of the book's most graphic and disturbing scenes occurs when Salander's guardian, Nils Bjurman, anally rapes and brutalizes her for several hours. However, it quickly becomes clear that he has seriously misjudged his victim, since Salander is not the mentally disturbed young woman he thinks she is and soon retaliates with an equally violent attack on him, including a sexual attack.

Martin and Gottfried's victims are not as fortunate. The investigation into Harriet's disappearance leads Blomkvist and Salander into unexpected discoveries about young women who have been brutally tortured and murdered, some dating back several decades. The perpetrator, Gottfried, has justified his actions through Biblical references that seem to blame the victim for some sort of immoral behavior, thus making the crime, and the method through which it was carried out, justifiable. Later his son, Martin, takes enormous pleasure in torturing his victims before killing them, and keeps careful records so he can relive his pleasure at a later time.

Although an explanation is never offered in this book, there is a strong implication that Salander has been the victim of violence in her past. On several occasions, she refers to "All The Evil" that somehow affected her life, and she is extremely aware of men who hate women and are violent toward them. She immediately recognizes that the serial killer she and Blomkvist are chasing is "a bastard who hates women" and she takes little interest in Blomkvist's investigation of Wennerstrom until she learns that he once had his thugs hold a woman under water until she agreed to abort his child. This seemingly small incident in Wennerstrom's lengthy history of crimes sets Salander on a path that eventually results in Wennerstrom's financial ruin and murder.

## Revenge

Nearly all of the major characters in the novel are seeking revenge of some sort. When Blomkvist asks Henrik Vanger why he wants a family chronicle written, even if only one copy is ever published and archived, the response is that he wants to exact revenge on a number of members of his dysfunctional family. When Bjurman rapes and brutalizes Salander, she loses no time in getting revenge in an equally violent way, and she uses the opportunity to not only put an end to his guardianship over her, but to prevent him from harming other women in the future. Salander later seeks revenge on Wennerstrom





when she discovers that he, too, has a history of violence against women, and the events she sets in motion eventually lead to his murder.

Blomkvist is vengeful by trade. His particular brand of journalism exposes people for financial misdoing, and one such story results in his conviction and imprisonment for libel. This is what brings him to the attention of Vanger, thus leading to the book's main plot. Blomkvist takes the job with Vanger for only one reason — Vanger promises him information that will enable him to bring Wennerstrom down. While that information proves to be nonexistent, with Salander's help Blomkvist is eventually able to exact revenge on Wennerstrom and destroy his empire.

The theme of revenge even plays a role in Gottfried's history of torturing and murdering women. Through the Biblical references after which he models his murder methods, he implies that his victims are deserving of their fates because of their own moral failings.

## Isolation

Isolation is a theme that is woven through the novel in a number of ways. Much of the story takes place on Hedeby Island, which is located in an isolated part of Sweden and is separated from the nearest village by a small bridge. On the day of Harriet's disappearance, the island is further isolated when an accident closes the bridge, trapping everyone on one side or the other, thus giving Harriet the opportunity she needs to escape. Later the reader learns that Harriet has spent the past few decades living on a ranch in Australia that is geographically remote and enables her to remain isolated from her family.

Although most members of the Vanger family live on Hedeby, they live in separate houses and even people who live just a few yards from each other are isolated in their own homes, carefully avoiding other family members for years at a time. Gottfried's cabin on a remote part of the island gives him the opportunity to rape his children, and later his son imprisons his victims in a secret torture chamber in his basement. Martin and Gottfried are able to continue their killings without raising suspicion because they carefully choose victims who are isolated from others to the extent that their disappearances do not lead to publicity.

The character of Lisbeth Salander lives an extremely isolated life. Her mother is ill to the point of not always recognizing her, and she has avoided making many friends. Her odd personality is off-putting to many people, this creating a barrier that she does not seem to mind. She solves her own problems rather than confiding in others who could help, and in the end, her isolation leads her to walk away from her relationship with Blomkvist rather than tell him she is in love with him.

## Ethics

Blomkvist's ethics as a journalist are tested throughout the book. Because he agrees not to reveal Lindberg as the source of his information about Wennerstrom, he has no



recourse when Wennerstrom sues for libel and wins. Later he is guilt-ridden about his decision not to publicly reveal the truth about Gottfried and Martin Vanger, but his strong ethics enable him to protect Salander in the same way he protected Lindberg as his original source.

Salander's code of ethics is complicated, to say the least. She is a strong believer in exacting revenge for wrongdoing, whether it is against her or someone else, particularly someone who cannot help themselves. While Blomkvist is wracked with guilt when he violates his code of ethics, Salander feels no such guilt. Her code of ethics allows unlimited leeway when it comes to punishing men who hate women, so she has no compunction about stealing millions from Wennerstrom and even revealing his whereabouts to someone she knows will kill him. While her behavior might be questionable to others, her code of ethics is quite clear and logical to her.

# Style

## Point of View

The *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is told from the point of view of a third-person narrator. The narrator is omniscient and reliable, providing factual information and descriptions through lengthy expository passages. The narrator also provides background and historical information about the two main characters, Mikael Blomkvist and Lisbeth Salander, but the information about Salander is, in many cases, somewhat sketchy and designed to be mysterious and intriguing. Insights into the thought process of the characters is frequently provided for Blomkvist and Salander, but only occasionally for other characters.

The book includes an appropriate balance between exposition and dialogue between various characters. The author also provides many examples of Salander's inner dialogue, giving the reader valuable insights into her complex thought process, unique system of reasoning, and ability to justify even her most questionable choices and actions.

## Setting

The book is set almost entirely in modern-day Sweden. It begins in Stockholm, where Blomkvist and Salander live, then moves to Hedeby Island, where the Vanger family's compound is located. Hedeby is depicted as an isolated place where members of the family also live in relative isolation from each other, and is connected to the mainland town of Hedestad by a small bridge. The author paints a picture of a group of old homes that house most of the Vanger family members, in addition to the modern house Martin built to hide his basement torture chamber. While Blomkvist is living on Hedeby, scenes take place in his cottage, various family homes, and a few locations in nearby Hedestad, where he goes to escape the loneliness of the island.

Settings within Stockholm include the offices of Millennium Magazine, Milton Security, and attorney Nils Bjurman, as well as the homes of Bjurman, Blomkvist and Salander. A few later scenes take place at Blomkvist's vacation cabin in Sandhamn, and for a brief time the action moves to Zurich when Salander travels there to empty Wennerstrom's bank accounts.

## Language and Meaning

The novel takes place in modern-day Sweden, so the language is reflective of today's times. Dialogue is appropriate for each of the characters, with Blomkvist speaking in lengthier passages and much of Salander's dialogue coming in shorter, often curt bursts, which reflects her lack of social skills.



Because Blomkvist is a financial journalist, the author includes a large amount of description of various financial dealings, which can become tedious and distract from the plot. This is particularly true in the book's epilogue, which tracks the events taking place in the month after Blomkvist's article and book on Wennerstrom are published. The author also uses this section as an opportunity to bring up his own opinions regarding current issues in the Swedish financial markets.

One unusual facet of the book's style is the fact that the author almost always refers to the characters by their last names. First names are used in dialogue, but the expository language uses last names almost exclusively.

## Structure

The *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is comprised of 28 untitled chapters that are divided into four titled sections. There is also a prologue that introduces the character of Henrik Vanger and an epilogue in which the results of Blomkvist's expose on Wennerstrom are revealed and the relationship between Blomkvist and Salander is brought to a close. Each of the four sections opens with a statistic about violence against women in Sweden, which is one of the book's overriding themes.

The story is told in the present time with the exception of an early flashback in which Blomkvist reminisces about the conversation with Robert Lindberg that started him on the path of exposing Wennerstrom's criminal activities. At various times, characters refer to events in the past, but this is the only example of a true flashback.

The book's main characters, Blomkvist and Salander, do not meet until midway through the novel, so the first half switches back and forth between their separate lives.

The book engages the reader immediately through the mystery of the pressed flowers, and the story moves at a fairly regular pace. The action picks up dramatically as Blomkvist and Salander close in on Harriet's fate and the identity of the serial killers, then slows again after Blomkvist's meeting with Harriet in Australia. After much drama surrounding the serial killer plot, the ending is somewhat anticlimactic as the book wraps up with a description of the outcome of Blomkvist's expose on Wennerstrom.



## Quotes

"Armansky felt so provoked by her lack of emotional response that sometimes he wanted to grab hold of her and shake her. To force his way into her shell and win her friendship, or at least her respect."

Page 44

"Quite off the record, so to speak . . . I haven't studied this Wennerstrom affair properly, but I really think that Mikael Blomkvist was set up. I think there's something totally different in this story than what the court's verdict is indicating."

Lisbeth Salander

Page 54

"Lindberg could have had no notion of the extent of Blomkvist's contempt for people like Wennerstrom. For all that, after years of study, he was privately convinced that there was not a single bank director or celebrity corporate executive who wasn't also a cretin."

Page 64

"To tell you the truth, I don't care whether the book is ever published. But I do think that the story should be written, if only in a single copy that you deliver directly to the Royal Library. I want this story to be there for posterity when I die. My motive is the simplest imaginable: revenge."

Henrik Vanger

Page 86

"Now we come to the real reason I want to hire you. I want you to find out who in the family murdered Harriet, and who since then has spent almost forty years trying to drive me insane."

Henrik Vanger

Page 92

"Right under the noses of everyone involved in the search. If that's the way it happened, we're talking about a cold-blooded bastard."

Vanger gave a bitter laugh. 'You just gave an apt description of quite a few members of the Vanger family.'

Blomkvist and Vanger

Page 111

"I can give you Hans-Erik Wennerstrom. I can prove that he's a swindler. He happened, thirty-five years ago, to begin his career with me, and I can give you his head on a platter. Solve the mystery and you can turn your defeat in court into the story of the year."

Henrik Vanger

Page 119



"She did not know why she had lied, but she was sure it was a wise decision."  
Page 166

"The image that was emerging revealed a family that was socially and financially successful, but in all the more ordinary aspects was quite clearly dysfunctional."  
Page 176

"My Rebecka case was Harriet."  
Morell  
Page 195

"The whole conversation was a discussion between Berger, on one side, and Henrik and Martin Vanger on the other. No-one asked Blomkvist what he thought."  
Page 210

"Visiting the offices of those visor-clad brutes to file a report against Nils Bjurman for sexual assault did not even cross her mind."  
Page 227

"On the other hand, there was no question of Advokat Bjurman going unpunished. Salander never forgot an injustice, and by nature she was anything but forgiving."  
Page 228

"Even though she was well aware of what a women's crisis centre was for, it never occurred to her to turn to one herself. Crisis centres existed, in her eyes, for victims, and she had never regarded herself as a victim. Consequently, her only remaining option was to do what she had always done — take matters in her own hands and solve her problems on her own. That was definitely an option. And it did not bode well for Herr Advokat Nils Bjurman."  
Page 237

"OK, a band. You already have loads of tattoos. Are you sure you want another one?"  
"It's a reminder."  
Page 254

"You didn't have to be a rocket scientist to see that these events were somehow related. There had to be a skeleton in one of their cupboards, and Salander loved hunting skeletons. Besides, she had nothing else on at the moment."  
Page 271

"Armansky had never once heard her laugh before, and for years he had been trying to win her trust. Blomkvist had known her for five minutes and she was practically giggling with him."  
Page 336

"In that case, it might amuse you to know that I also have principles comparable to your ethics committee's. I call them Salander's Principles. One of them is that a bastard is



always a bastard, and if I can hurt a bastard by digging up shit about him, then he deserves it."

Page 344

"I think you're wrong. It's not an insane serial killer who read his Bible wrong. It's just a common or garden bastard who hates women."

Page 382

"Salander was an information junkie with a delinquent child's take on morals and ethics."

Page 384

"It did no good to cry, she had learned that early on. She had also learned that every time she tried to make someone aware of something in her life, the situation just got worse. Consequently it was up to her to solve her problems by herself, using whatever methods she deemed necessary. Something that Advokat Bjurman had found out the hard way."

Page 394

"As it happens, I don't have a guest right now. But it might amuse you to know that while you and Henrik sat around babbling this winter and spring, there was a girl down here. Irina from Belarus. While you sat and ate dinner with me, she was locked up in the cage down here. It was a pleasant evening as I remember, no?"

Page 448

"From her own studies of the psychology of sexual sadism, Salander had learned that this type of murderer usually collected souvenirs from his victims. These souvenirs functioned as reminders that the killer could use to re-create some of the pleasure he had experienced."

Page 464

"So you're assuming that Martin had no will of his own and that people become whatever they've been brought up to be."

Page 472

"Blomkvist closed his eyes. He was terribly ashamed and wished that he had left Harriet Vanger in peace."

Page 496

"I had murdered my father, and I realised that I would never be free of my brother. Up until then, I had thought about killing myself. I chose instead to flee.' She gave Blomkvist what was almost a look of relief. 'It feels fantastic to tell the truth. So now you know.'"

Page 497

"She took a deep breath and thought about her mother, whom she had consigned to ashes that very morning. She would never be able to mend things. Her mother's death meant that the wound would never heal, since she would never now get an answer to



the questions she had wanted to ask."

Page 504

"I admit it. I just have no idea how it works. It's not only computers and telephone networks, but the motor in my bike and TV sets and vacuum cleaners and chemical processes and formulae in astrophysics. I'm a nut case, I admit it: a freak."

Page 506

"Blomkvist felt only despair. His professional life he had devoted to uncovering things which other people had tried to hide, and he could not be party to the covering up of the appalling crimes committed in Martin Vanger's basement. He who had lambasted his colleagues for not publishing the truth, here he sat, discussing, negotiating even, the most macabre cover-up he had ever heard of."

Page 514

"An idea occurred to her and she could not let it go. Most of all she wondered why it had not occurred to her sooner."

Page 547

"She considered him to be a good person, possibly with a Practical Pig complex that was sometimes a little too apparent. And he was unbearably naive with regard to certain elementary moral issues. He had an indulgent and forgiving personality that looked for explanations and excuses for the way people behaved, and he would never get it that the raptors of the world understood only one language. She felt almost awkwardly protective whenever she thought of him."

Page 557

"It was eccentrically dedicated: To Sally, who showed me the benefits of the sport of golf."

Page 573

"Then she sat as if paralysed, thinking. She had never in her life felt such a longing. She wanted Mikael Blomkvist to ring the doorbell and . . . what then? Lift her off the ground, hold her in his arms? Passionately take her into the bedroom and tear off her clothes? No, she really just wanted his company. She wanted to hear him say that he liked her for who she was. That she was someone special in his world and in his life. She wanted him to give her some gesture of love, not just of friendship and companionship. I'm flipping out, she thought."

Page 588

"Salander's greatest fear, which was so huge and so black that it was of phobic proportions, was that people would laugh at her feelings. And all of a sudden all her carefully constructed self-confidence seemed to crumble."

Page 589





## Topics for Discussion

Why does Salander blame Harriet for the multiple murders committed by her father and brother? Do you think she is justified in blaming Harriet? Why or why not?

Compare and contrast Blomkvist's relationships with Berger and Salander. Both include components of sex and friendship, but how are they different? How do you think Blomkvist feels about each woman?

With very little rewriting, the plotline regarding Wennerstrom could be lifted out, leaving the mystery of Harriet's disappearance as the book's primary plot. Do you think this would strengthen or weaken the book? How would it affect the development of the Blomkvist and Salander characters?

Compare Blomkvist's code of ethics with that of Salander. Do you think Salander is really an ethical person? How does she use her personal code of ethics to justify her actions? Give at least three specific examples.

Why does Salander not report Bjurman to the police even after she has recorded documentation of his rape? Are her reasons the same as those that keep her from reporting, or allowing Blomkvist to report, the crimes committed by Martin and Gottfried? Do you think she is right or wrong in those decisions?

Do you think Martin has a choice in his actions? Is he naturally evil or did his father's influence turn him from a good person into a bad one?

Why is Henrik Vanger so convinced that Harriet was murdered by a family member rather than simply running away or being kidnapped? Were there possible clues that he overlooked? How has his obsession with Harriet affected his life?

Discuss how religion plays a role in the novel. How does Gottfried use religion as justification for murdering young women? How does religion play a role in Blomkvist's eventual resolution of Harriet's disappearance?

Explain the irony behind the dedication in Blomkvist's book about Wennerstrom.

Why do you think Berger's husband condones her ongoing sexual relationship with Blomkvist? Do you think she would stop seeing Blomkvist if her husband demanded it? Why or why not?