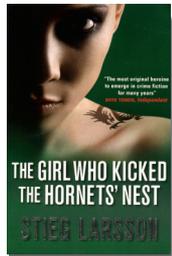


Reviews

The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest Stieg Larsson

MacLehose Press/Quercus Rs 495



Lisbeth Salander is an elusive lead character. An ace computer hacker, bisexual, tattooed and chronically paranoid, spurred by

memories of an abusive upbringing at the hands of her father, former Soviet spy Alexander Zalachenko, Salander has been falsely diagnosed as being mentally ill and confined. She's now out to seek revenge. But instead of taking her pleas to the authorities, she's a woman who'd rather poke a muzzle down a throat and drive her fist through a nose.

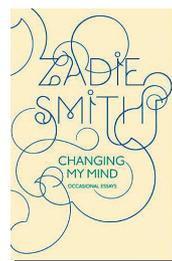
The Hornets' Nest is the third and final part of Stieg Larsson's "Millennium series", after *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and *The Girl who Played with Fire*. The book begins at Sahlgrenska hospital in Göteborg, as two grievously injured people are

moved in – the girl with a bullet lodged in her skull, and her father, bearing the brunt of a swinging axe on his face. Salander's task involves escaping and clearing her name of murder charges, but you have to plough through a few hundred pages to get to the excitement. Helping her along is the journalist Mikael Blomkvist at *Millennium* magazine, who is working on an expose about the corrupt dealings of the Swedish government and the country's secret police service.

Larsson, who died soon after the publication of this book in Swedish in 2004, was editor-in-chief of the publication *Expo* and a prominent authority on the subject of right-wing extremism. While that background helps the realistic impressions of European society and the often-graphic narratives of the mistreatment of women, the downside is in elaborate accounts of how Swedish government agencies function. It's incredibly tedious in fact, all the way up to the final courtroom chapters. You'll enjoy this only if long-winded contemporary tales of justice are your thing. *Jaideep Sen*

Changing My Mind Zadie Smith

Penguin Rs 550



The screechy "hysterical realism" and the Rushdie-lite flavour of *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith's best-selling debut novel, are thankfully absent in the

writer's latest book, a collection of criticism. Spanning the usual variety of categories (books, movies, war reportage), the essays are written in an unpretentious, lapidary style that bespeaks the author's intelligence without bludgeoning readers with theoretical jargon and arcane references, devices that dominate criticism today.

Her reflections on EM Forster, George Eliot and Zora Neale Hurston tread the line between the personal and the scholarly so carefully that readers aren't startled or annoyed that Smith's own impressions figure prominently throughout her critical observations. In the essay on Barthes and Nabokov, Smith uses architectural metaphors to deconstruct the author-reader-text triangle, bolstering her theoretical arguments with accounts of her own experi-

ences as an author and reader. Any work of criticism that assays the relationship between Nabokov and post-structuralism runs the risk of coming off as highfaluting and dry, but Smith keeps her writing accessible. She discusses *Pnin* with open affection and slyly pokes fun at Nabokov scholars who labour over the significance of the ubiquitous squirrel in the novel. That *vostorg*, the Russian word for "rapture," is misspelled three different ways on a single page is the only blot on an otherwise fine piece.

In "At the Multiplex," Smith takes movies like "Memoirs of a Geisha" and "Casanova" to task with a subtle scalpel. Her reviews are trenchant, but they're never a hatchet-job. She poignantly describes her father's experiences storming the beach at Normandy during World War II ("Accidental Hero") and her own foray into wartime reportage ("One Week in Liberia") without ever slipping into sticky sentimentalism or maudlin memoir-writing.

The obverse of the collection's high readability is that the essays veer at times towards the simplistic. But Smith's nuanced observations and quiet wisdom keep this collection on the middle road between highbrow and dumbed-down. *Jane Mikkelsen*

Terror incognito

In 2006, Amitava Kumar went to Walavati, south of Mumbai, to report the case of an accused terrorist, Iqbal Haspatel, whom he later wrote about in *Time Out*. Kumar, a writer who teaches English at Vassar College, had already explored the dark world of Islamophobia in *Husband of a Fanatic*, prompted by his marriage to a Pakistani Muslim. In his new book *Evidence of Suspicion*, he goes a step further in asking why we hate the people we hate, in this case, men accused of terrorism. "Terror is the new fetish," he told *Raghu Kamad*. "Its meaning is taken for granted."

Before you wrote the Haspatel story, you obviously already had strong feelings about the way India prosecutes terrorism.

I decided to go to Walavati and meet the Haspatels because a piece of textile machinery – a bobbin – found in their living room had been mistaken for a projectile. They were tortured for days because the police had made a malicious mistake.

But before that, I had been working on another story, also about terror-

ism, but in the US. It was the story of Hemant Lakhani, a used-clothing salesman convicted of selling a missile to the FBI. Both illustrated the problems of the war on terror: the state's desperation to find villains, its ability to produce only victims.

In India there's a stigma against reporting the fate of terror accused. What is the power of the phrase, "He is a terrorist"?

The punitive state – but also a public guided by the often jingoistic media – can be only a few inches removed from the mentality of a lynch mob. Is everyone innocent? No. SAR Geelani told me that when he ran into one of his torturers, the cop apologised for what they did to him, but wanted Geelani to understand that not everyone was innocent. No, said Geelani, but 95 per cent are.



I'm not here to attribute innocence or culpability. I'm only trying to show how we can't proceed with identikit images. This book is a writer's search for particularity and detail.

This is as much a book about torture as it is about terror. What's the relationship between the two?

Each one of us has received an education in the art of torture in recent years. That's America's gift to us, through this war on terror, that we've learned words like "waterboarding". We have also learned that torture isn't only about force: men lose their minds, not when beaten to within an inch of their lives, but when they are placed in solitary confinement with black-out goggles and noise-blocking headphones wrapped around their heads. We have learned that if terror by non-state actors relies on brutal killing of innocents, then state terror proceeds by making torture justifiable and routine.

2008 was an unsettling year for those trying to understand terror. The courts' refusal to extend a ban on SIMI, the discovery of Hindu terror networks – there was all this dissonance in the terrorism narrative. Then 26/11 happened. Did it kill an opportunity for more critical thinking?

You're right. Kasab and his cohort killed all the questions that we were asking about the ways in which Indian authorities had been investigating terror.

The Mumbai attacks hurt more than just those few hundred people. As we saw with 9/11, a blatant attack, spectacularly staged, can become the excuse for unremitting war. Will the trauma of 26/11 allow us to be sceptical of the state's claims? Most people will say, and rightly so, "What proof do you need? Didn't you see the Taj on fire?" The attacks have formed something like the primal memory of life in the age of terror. That memory will keep making the nightmare real. *Evidence of Suspicion, Picador, Rs 350.*