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ERIC BRONSON

**THE
GIRL
WITH
THE
DRAGON
TATTOO
AND
PHILOSOPHY**

Is Fire

BLACKWELL PHILOSOPHY AND POP CULTURE SERIES

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**THE GIRL WITH THE
DRAGON TATTOO
AND
PHILOSOPHY**

EVERYTHING IS FIRE

Edited by Eric Bronson



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The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series

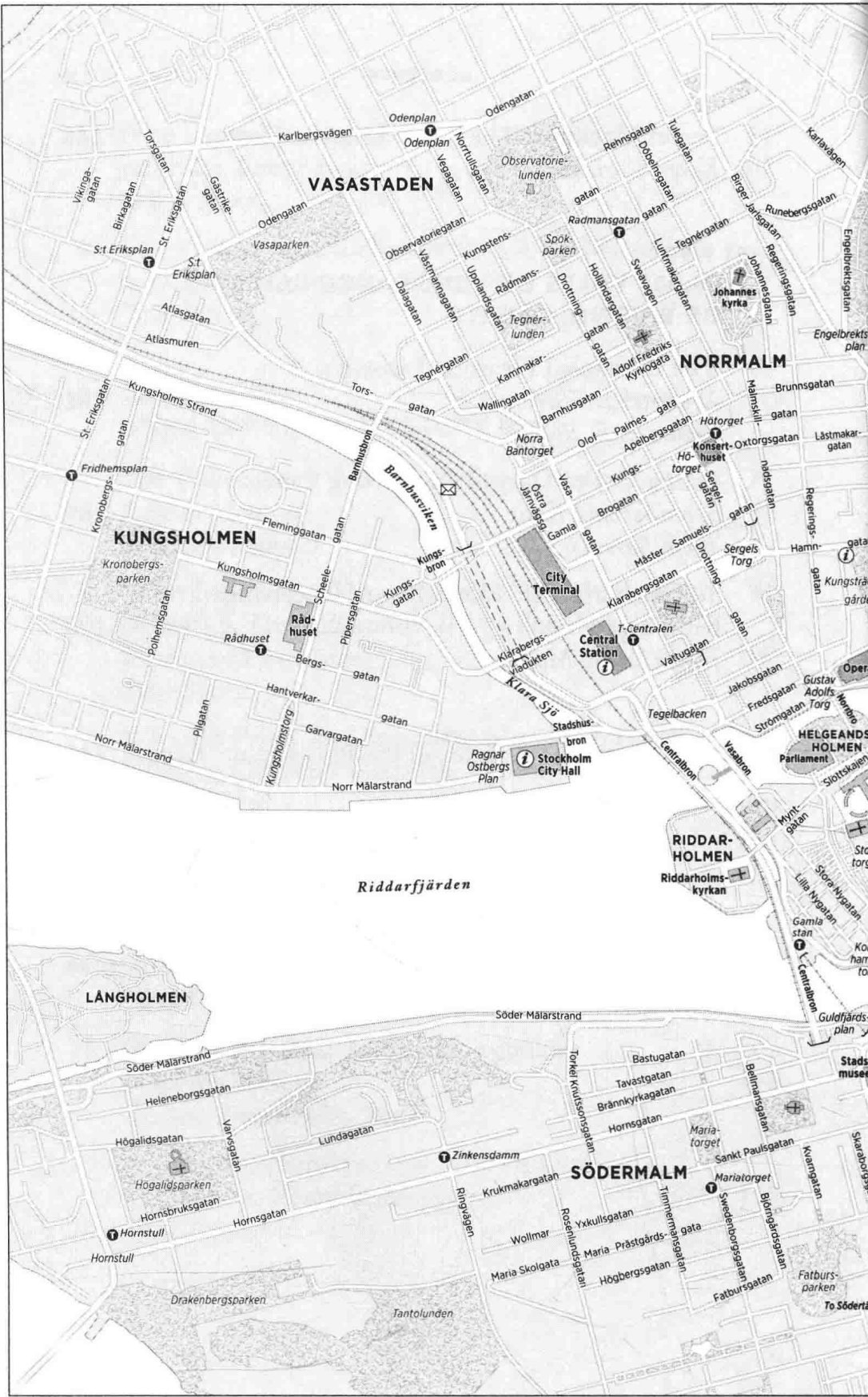
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To Pippi Longstocking and the misfit in all of us

Everything great is done in the storm.

—Plato



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Observatoriegatan

Observatorielunden

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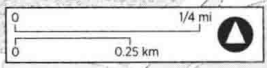
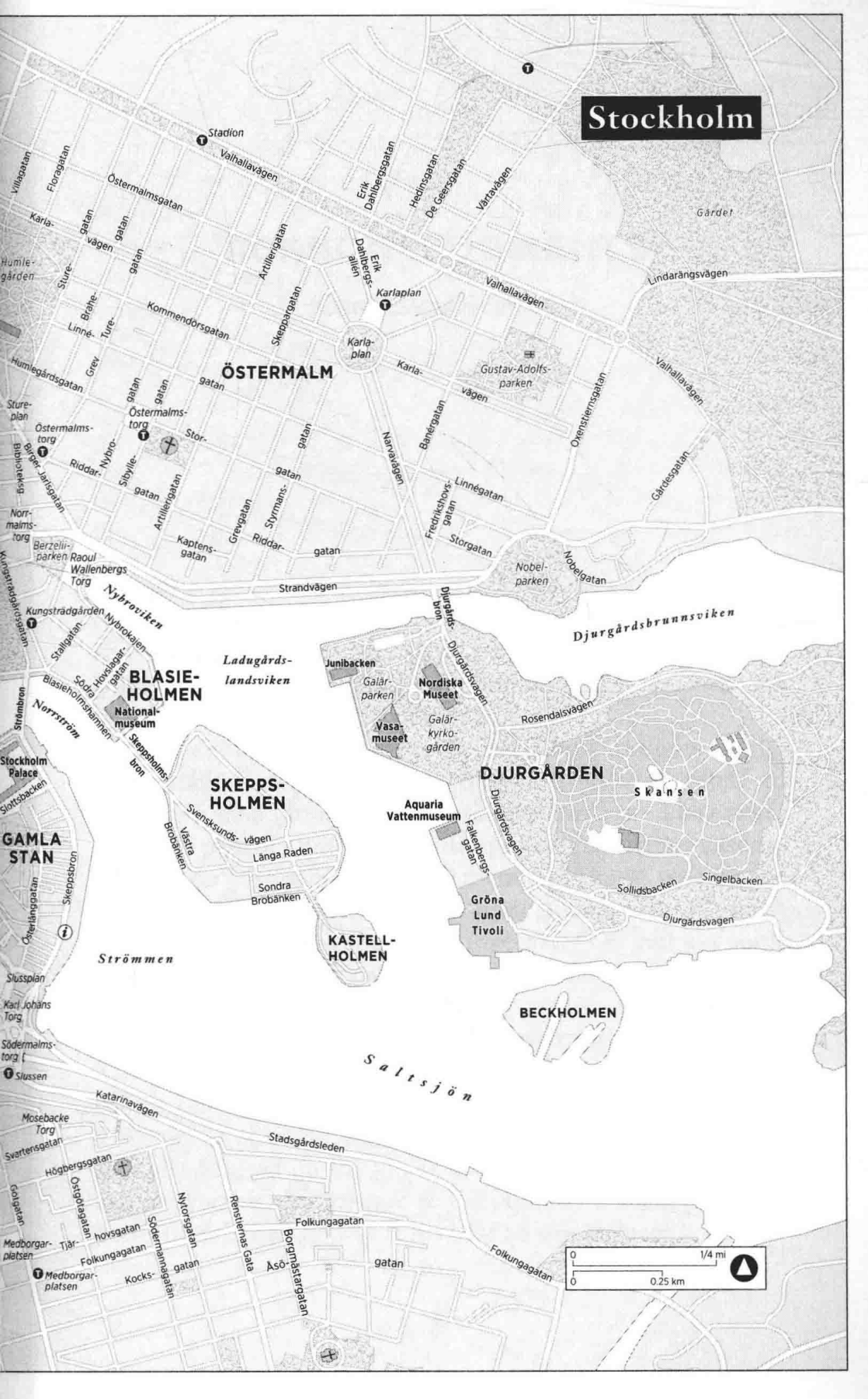
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Confidential Sources

Like all good detective stories, this book has a confusing and complicated cast of characters who intersect in magical ways and fill the words on the page with their living pulse. As Lisbeth Salander and Mikael Blomkvist quickly discover, no one person can go it very far alone.

The authors of this volume, my fellow Knights of the Philosophic Table, shared an “obsessive determination” to work long hours in the spirit of Kalle Blomkvist. They never lost their patience and joy in putting their cumulative wisdom to work on Lisbeth’s behalf. To them, I’d like to pass on the thoughtful words that Blomkvist’s sister Annika says to Lisbeth after they go through their trial together: “Go and get some sleep. And stay out of trouble for a while.” And before your tail-lights disappear around the corner, let me also say, “Thanks.”

Everyone should have a Blomkvist playing bass in his band. The guy who flawlessly kept the time when the rest of us went off on our riffs was Bill Irwin. Like Blomkvist, Bill is also a fiercely loyal friend, and professionally, he is “almost pathologically focused on the job at hand. He took hold of a story and worked his way forward to the point where it approached perfection. When he was at his best he was brilliant . . .”

Thanks also to Connie Santisteban over at Wiley. Although publishing houses often resemble the Section's top secret office in Östermalm, where "employees have no idea of the others' existence," Connie gives it all a personal touch. And like Erika Berger in charge at *Millennium* and later at the *Svenska Morgon-Posten*, Connie runs the show creatively, decisively, and compassionately.

Over at York University, where the Canadian Dags and Mias meet for coffee and contemplation, two people deserve special recognition. Thanks to Patrick Taylor, who, like Dragan Armansky, takes in the outcasts and firmly believes, "Everyone deserves a chance." And thanks also to Gail Vanstone, who, in following Dag's footsteps to *Millennium*, gave me the tip that blew the whole thing open.

Finally, thanks to Dave Tulloch and the new Bronson women: Elana and Sophie. Like Lisbeth's long-distance friendship with Plague, Poison, and SixOfOne at Hacker Republic, if I "could claim to have any sort of family or group affiliation, then it [is] with these lunatics."

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INTRODUCTION

The Girl Who Kicked the Sophists' Nest

If Lisbeth Salander is the new voice of reason, then truth “can be a moody bitch.”

I suppose Stieg Larsson approved of this droll characterization from his hard-boiled, coffee-swilling journalist, Mikael Blomkvist, but it’s a bit of a problem for old-school philosophers.

Ever since Socrates, philosophers have been enamored with the belief that Truth (with a capital T) is unchanging, indivisible, and immortal. For more than two thousand years, we’ve taken comfort in that worldview. “Truth is beauty, beauty truth,” said the poet John Keats in 1819, studiously pondering a Grecian urn.

Yet Lisbeth is not classically beautiful. Created in the image of another great Swedish sleuth, Pippi Longstocking, Larsson’s heroine is “pale and anorexic,” “a stray cat,”¹ with red hair dyed black that, even when cut short, “still stuck out in all directions.”² Dragan Armansky, the levelheaded boss of Milton Security, eloquently describes his first impressions

of Lisbeth: "She looked as though she had just emerged from a week-long orgy with a gang of hard rockers."³

Lisbeth's lack of interest in beauty is more than skin deep. Her friend and occasional lover Mimmi Wu tells us that "Salander had no taste whatsoever." Besides her "disgusting dirt-brown sofa,"⁴ Lisbeth's "apartment in Stockholm might look like a bomb had gone off in it."⁵ When she can afford a fancy new apartment decorated in any tasteful way she chooses, Salander spends 90,000 kronor . . . at IKEA! At least she pays to have the furniture assembled at home. (Who knew you could do that?)

And yet truth, if not beauty, is constantly on the mind of this antisocial girl with the dragon tattoo who exposes the misogynists, the chauvinists, and the bigots of high society. When Larsson first submitted *The Millennium Trilogy* to his Swedish publisher, all three books went under the title *Men Who Hate Women* (a title preserved in the Swedish edition). Larsson's trilogy is part courtroom thriller, part espionage intrigue, and part murder mystery, but at its root, Salander's story is the truth "about violence against women, and the men who enable it."⁶

Despite its universal appeal, Larsson's tale is a distinctly Swedish story, with Stockholm at the center. Salander and Blomkvist may battle neo-Nazis in the freezing snow of Hedeby or snuggle up to Elvis music in Blomkvist's rustic cabin in Sandhamn, but Larsson's characters always come back to Stockholm. That's why the Stockholm City Museum gives *Millennium* tours to Larsson fans, pointing out apartments and coffeehouses described in the books. It's also why the last image in the final Swedish film, *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*, is a panoramic view of Stockholm. In Columbia Pictures' Hollywood remake, Rooney Mara replaces the wonderful actress Noomi Rapace and Daniel Craig takes over for Swedish cinema icon Michael Nyqvist, but director David Fincher understood that for the story to work, it needed to be filmed in Stockholm.

Like Lisbeth in Stockholm, Socrates saw himself as a gadfly in Athens, an annoying pest who forced the city sophists to look deeper into their own hypocrisies. Before Lisbeth, it was Socrates who was brought to trial and preconvicted in the court of public opinion. “I have incurred a great deal of bitter hostility,” he complained, “and this is what will bring about my destruction.” Salander puts it differently. “Every time I turn around,” she says in *The Girl Who Played with Fire*, “there’s some fucking pile of shit with a beer belly in my way acting tough.”⁷

In the book you hold in your hands, the Athens of Socrates and the Stockholm of Salander come together. We realize that you may not have studied philosophy and that you may not have a kooky Uncle Gustaf who spins wise, moralistic tales on Walpurgis Night. (Bummer for you.) So to that end, we’ve assembled a team of philosophers from the United States, Canada, England, France, and yes, Sweden, to help us sort the Fords from the Fjords. With them, we’ll investigate why we can’t seem to get enough of this antisocial, psychologically damaged hacker with a photographic memory. We’ll consider whether journalists and hackers are the new philosophers and, if so, whether they will suffer the same hemlock backlash. We’ll wonder why Lisbeth eats Big Macs at McDonald’s and Billy’s Pan Pizza at 7-Eleven when there’s fine lamb to be had at Samir’s, and the Bosnian burek is all the rage in Fridhemsplan. This, and much, much more.

Inspector Figuerola might have dabbled in philosophy and the history of ideas before taking down the dirty Nikolich brothers, but we’re going to need to dig a little deeper here. You’ll probably want to stock up on junk food and Marlboro Lights and grab some coffee. Lots of it. Because philosophers don’t suffer fools kindly, and with Salander and Blomkvist in the mix, you can be sure that some of those a—holes are going to get hung out to dry.

You’ve seen the T-shirt: CONSIDER THIS A FAIR WARNING.