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Little Star: A Novel

By John Ajvide Lindqvist



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"Establishes Lindqvist as Sweden's Stephen King."

--The Washington Post on Harbor

John Ajvide Lindqvist has been crowned the heir apparent to Stephen King by numerous sources, and he is heralded around the globe as one of the most spectacularly talented horror writers working today. His first novel, *Let the Right One In*, is a cult classic that has been made into iconic films in both Sweden and in the United States. His second novel, *Handling the Undead*, is beloved by horror fans everywhere. His third novel, *Harbor*, is a masterpiece that draws countless comparisons to Stephen King. Now, with *Little Star*, his most profoundly unsettling book yet, Lindqvist treads previously unmarked territory.

A man finds a baby in the woods, left for dead. He brings the baby home, and he and his wife raise the girl in their basement. When a shocking and catastrophic incident occurs, the couple's son Jerry whisks the girl away to Stockholm to start a new life. There, he enters her in a nationwide singing competition. Another young girl who's never fit in sees the performance on TV, and a spark is struck that will ignite the most terrifying duo in modern fiction.

Little Star is an unforgettable portrait of adolescence, a modern-day *Carrie* for the age of internet bullies, offensive reality television, and overnight You Tube sensations. Chilling, unnerving, and petrifying, *Little Star* is Lindqvist's most disturbing book to date.



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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Little Star*

"Dubbed the Stephen King of Sweden, Lindqvist ("Let the Right One In") lives up to the billing with a chilling tale of two teenage girls who team up as a terrifying singing duo bent on revenge against anyone who has ever crossed them."

--*New York Post*, "Required Reading"

"Brilliant...A future horror classic and a firm pronouncement that John Ajvide Lindqvist is a force to reckoned with."

--MTV.com

"Both [Stephen] King and Lindqvist create rich, memorable characters that quickly endear themselves to the reader.... Lindqvist's shocks are as unpredictable and organic as life itself, to the point where you feel that divulging even the barest plotline to others would betray the wicked-sweet moments that he's so carefully orchestrated."

--BloodyDisgusting.com

"Lindqvist makes a series of dauntless leaps and ends up the better for it in this long, fitful work that leaves an impression...Audacious, to say the least, and spirals toward an ending that is as senseless and brutal as it is weirdly poetic."

--*Booklist* (starred)

"As keen as the edge of a broken glass . . . This is best read with the lights on."

—*The Wharf* (UK)

"Exerts a powerful grip."

—Christopher Fowler, *Financial Times* (UK)

Praise for *Harbor*

"Sweden's answer to Stephen King."

--*Daily Mirror* (UK)

"One of the hottest writers in the horror genre."

—*Mystery Scene*

"The third consecutive masterpiece for an author who deserves to be as much of a household name as Stephen King."

—SFX.co.uk

"A very scary tale indeed from a writer who is master of his genre."

--*Financial Times* (UK)

Praise for *Handling the Undead*

"Lindqvist gives Stephen King and John Saul at their best a run for the money."

—*Library Journal* (starred)

"Sophisticated horror that takes the genre to new and exciting levels."

--*Suspense Magazine*

"It is easy to compare Lindqvist to Clive Barker or Neil Gaiman."

—*Dagens Noeringsliv* (Norway)

Praise for *Let the Right One In*

"Reminiscent of Stephen King at his best."

--*Independent on Sunday* (UK)

About the Author

JOHN AJVIDE LINDQVIST is the author of *Let the Right One In*, *Handling the Undead*, and *Harbor*. *Let the Right One In* has been made into two critically acclaimed films. The Swedish film was directed by Tomas Alfredson (*Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*) and won top honors at sixteen film festivals around the globe. The American remake of the Swedish movie, entitled *Let Me In*, received rave reviews. Stephen King called the film, "A genre-busting triumph. Not just a horror film, but the best American horror film in the last twenty years."

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Little Star

THE GIRL WITH GOLDEN HAIR

1

In the autumn of 1992 there were rumours of a mushroom glut in the forests; it was said that the warm moist weather of late summer had provoked a burst of chanterelles and hedgehog mushrooms. As Lennart Cederström turned off onto the forest track in his Volvo 240, he had a large basket and a couple of plastic bags on the back seat. Just in case.

He had a mix tape of pop hits on the stereo, and Christer Sjögren's voice was loud and clear in the speakers:

Ten thousand red roses I'd like to give you...

Lennart grinned scornfully and joined in with the chorus, imitating Sjögren's mannered bass vibrato. It sounded excellent. Almost identical; Lennart was probably a better singer than Sjögren. But so what? He had been in the wrong place at the wrong time on too many occasions, seen too many golden opportunities snatched away from under his very nose or heard them zip past behind his back. Gone when he turned around.

Anyway. He would have his mushrooms. Chanterelles, the gold of the forest, and plenty of them. Then back home to blanch them and fill up the freezer, giving him enough for mushrooms on toast and beer every single evening until the Christmas tree was thrown out. Several days of rain had given way to a couple of days of brilliant sunshine, and the conditions were just perfect.

Lennart knew every bend in the forest track, and he screwed up his eyes and gripped the wheel as he sang.

Ten thousand roses in a pretty bouquet....

When he opened his eyes there was something black on the track ahead of him. Sunlight flashed on shining metal, and Lennart only just managed to swerve as it flashed by. A car. Lennart glanced in the rear view mirror to get the registration, but the car was doing at least eighty on the gravel track, sending up clouds of dust in its wake. However, Lennart was pretty sure it was a BMW. A black BMW with tinted windows.

He drove another three hundred metres to the place where he usually parked, switched off the engine and let out a long breath.

What the hell was that?

A BMW out here in the middle of nowhere wasn't exactly a common sight. A BMW doing eighty along the gravel track leading out of the forest was a unique event. Lennart felt quite excited. He had been a part of something. In the moment when the black object came hurtling towards him, his heart had leapt and then quailed as if anticipating a fatal blow, before opening up and settling down once more. It was an experience. The only thing that bothered him was that he couldn't report the driver. He would probably have given the mushroom picking a miss so he could savour going home and calling the police, giving a detailed description of the encounter on a track with a thirty kilometres per hour limit. But without a registration number, it would be pointless.

As Lennart got out of the car and picked up his basket and his bags, the temporary rush gave way to a feeling he'd been bested. Again. The black BMW had *won*, in some obscure fashion. Perhaps it would have been different if the car had been a beaten-up old Saab, but it was definitely a rich man's car that had covered his windscreen in dust and forced him into the ditch. Same old thing.

He slammed the car door and tramped off into the forest, head down. Fresh tyre tracks ran along the damp ground in the shade of the trees. Churned-up mud in one place indicated that a car had shot away here, and it wasn't much of a leap to assume it was the BMW. Lennart gazed at the wide wheel marks as if they might offer him some evidence, or a fresh grievance. When nothing occurred to him he spat in the tracks instead.

Let it go.

He strode off into the forest, inhaling the aroma of warm needles, damp moss, and somewhere beneath everything else...the smell of mushrooms. He couldn't pin it down to an exact spot, or identify a species, but a faint undertone in the usual scent of the forest told him the rumours were true: there were mushrooms here just waiting to be picked. His gaze swept the ground, searching for a difference in colour or shape. He was a good mushroomer, able to spot from a considerable distance a chanterelle hiding beneath undergrowth and

grass. The slightest nuance in the correct shade of yellow, and he swooped like a hawk.

But this time it was a champignon he spotted. Ten metres away from him, a white button sticking up out of the ground. Lennart frowned. He had never come across a champignon around here before; the soil was wrong.

As he came closer, he saw he was right. Not a mushroom; the corner of a plastic bag. Lennart sighed. Sometimes people who were too idle to drive to the tip dumped stuff in the forest. He had once seen a guy hurl a microwave out of his car window. On that occasion he had made a note of the registration number and reported the incident in writing.

He was about to head off along his normal route, searching out the good mushroom places, when he noticed that the plastic bag was moving. He stopped. The bag moved again. It should have been something to do with the wind. That would have been best. But there wasn't a breath of wind among the tree trunks.

Not good.

He heard a faint rustling noise as the piece of plastic shifted again, and all of a sudden his legs felt heavy. The forest surrounded him, silent and indifferent, and he was all alone in the world with whatever was in the plastic bag. Lennart swallowed, his throat dry, and moved forward a few steps. The bag was motionless now.

Go home. Ignore it.

He didn't want to see an old dog that had almost but not quite been put out of its misery, or a pile of kittens whose skulls had almost but not quite been smashed. He didn't want to know about anything like that. So it wasn't a sense of responsibility or sympathy that drove him on towards the bit of plastic sticking up from the ground. It was ordinary human or inhuman curiosity. He just had to know, or that waving white flag would torment him until he came back to find out what he had missed.

He grabbed hold of the piece of plastic and instantly recoiled, his hands flying to his mouth. There was something inside the bag, something that had responded to his grip, something that felt like muscles, like flesh. The earth around the bag had recently been disturbed.

A grave. A little grave.

The thought took flight and suddenly Lennart knew exactly what had responded to his hand. Another hand. A very small hand. Lennart edged back to the bag and began to clear away the earth. It didn't take long; the soil had been thrown carelessly over the bag, probably by someone without any tools, and in ten seconds Lennart had freed the bag and pulled it out of the hole.

The handles were tied together and Lennart ripped at the plastic to let in air, let in life. He managed to tear a hole in the bag, and saw blue skin. A tiny leg, a sunken chest. A girl. A baby girl, just a few days or weeks old. She wasn't moving. The thin lips were pressed together, as if defying an evil world. Lennart had witnessed the child's death throes.

He placed his ear to the child's chest and thought he could hear the faintest echo of a heartbeat. He pinched the child's nose between his thumb and forefinger, and took a deep breath. He pursed his lips to send a blast of air into the tiny mouth; he didn't even need to take another breath in order to fill the little lungs once more. The air bubbled out, and the chest was still.

Lennart took another breath and as he sent the second puff down into the lungs, there it was. A shudder went through the tiny body and white foam was coughed up. Then a scream sliced through the silence of the forest and started time ticking once more.

The child screamed and screamed, and its crying sounded like nothing Lennart had ever heard before. It wasn't broken or plaintive. It was a single, clear, pure note, emerging from that neglected body. Lennart had a good ear, and he didn't need a tuning fork to tell him that it was an E. An E that rang like a bell and made the leaves quiver and the birds fly up from the trees.

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Users Review

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