



The Sword-Edged Blonde

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It should have been a case like any other: a missing princess, a king willing to pay in gold for her return. But before he realizes it, private investigator Eddie LaCrosse, a slightly shopworn sword jockey with a talent for discretion and detection, is swept up in a web of mystery and deceit involving a brutally murdered royal heir, a queen accused of an unspeakable crime and the tragic past he thought he'd left behind.

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The Sword-Edged Blonde Details

Date : Published October 1st 2007 by Night Shade

ISBN : 9781597801126

Author : Alex Bledsoe

Format : Hardcover 256 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Mystery, Fiction, Adventure, Noir

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From Reader Review *The Sword-Edged Blonde* for online ebook

Jacob Proffitt says

What a fantastic book! A friend recommended this to me because he knows I like the Garrett novels by Glen Cook—i.e. hardboiled detective in a fantasy setting. And that's a good description of this book as well, though it isn't really that similar to Cook's novels in anything more than a basic tone.

Eddie LaCrosse is a middle-aged sword jockey known for both his skill at arms and his intelligence (oh, and discretion). If you need someone to poke into dark holes that might poke back, he's your man. And, in keeping with all hardboiled detective stories, Eddie is a fascinating blend of cynic and optimist who lets his heart lead him into trouble his head (and arm) will need to get him out of.

This book is an establishing story that explores Eddie's past as much as his present case. In it, you get to find out why he is who he is and why he does what he does. It's a great kickoff to the series and I highly recommend that, unlike my friend, you start with this book if you're going to take it on. Eddie's past isn't pristine, by any measure, and Bledsoe does a fantastic job giving us all the parts that make up this complex character and why his motivations play out the way they do—why he loves deeply but has avoided the ones he loves and why he still honors those friendships when they call to him in their hour of need.

The best parts of what I loved about the story are hugely spoilerific, so I'll just stick with how great the character is and how engagingly the story is presented. Seriously, this is easily one of my favorites for the year and will be put on my “re-read soon” list.

Amanda says

In the medieval kingdom of Arentia, Queen Rhiannon has been charged with a particularly horrific case of infanticide. King Philip desperately believes in his wife's innocence, despite all evidence to the contrary. His only hope? Eddie LaCrosse, the tough as nails sword-for-hire investigator and the king's childhood friend. Having spent years trying to outrun his past, LaCrosse begrudgingly returns home and is forced to confront his demons while trying to unravel the mystery of whether or not the beautiful blonde bombshell actually killed her own son.

The Sword-Edged Blonde is the snappy title for this noir/fantasy mash-up that's light on the noir, easy on the fantasy, and not as snappy as I wanted it to be. This is a bit of fun and forgettable reading, perfect for vacation but little else. While I enjoyed the book as a light, quick read, I could have loved it if it weren't for a few peeves:

--First off, that cover. Ye gods, that cover. Even by the artistically lacking and inept standards of mass market paperback sci fi/fantasy covers, that is one fugly cover. And wtf it has to do with the novel, I have no idea. It appears as though a giant troll king will manifest somewhere in the novel, and it's difficult to tell if he will be friend or foe based upon the back-to-back stance with the protagonist. Is he being sneaky-sneaky, trying to catch our hero off-guard, or has he simply got his back, bro? You know what--doesn't matter because this character and this scene never appears in the novel, at least not in any recognizable form.

--Ditto with the title. Sure, there's a blonde, but nothing about her is particularly "sword-edged." She's

basically clueless and pouty. The reality is that she's more of a butter-knife-edged blonde. Or maybe a spork blonde, kind of confused and essentially useless.

--The protagonist, Eddie LaCrosse, is a bland character. He's not hard-boiled enough. I expected a world-weary, wise-cracking antihero (maybe a character like Ash from *Army of Darkness*). But LaCrosse is basically just a good guy who wanders around while clues smack him in the face. The only real nod to noir is that he has a suitably tragic past, but it doesn't seem to have shaped his character in any significant way. He occasionally ruminates on his past woes, but then snaps back to the present and soldiers on.

--Ineffective use of the locked room mystery presented as the crux for the case. I won't say much regarding this since I don't want to ruin anything, but a locked room can have so much potential for an unexpected twist that *The Sword-Edged Blonde* never capitalizes on.

While I didn't particularly like the objectified female characters, such is the territory with a noir-esque novel and there's nothing here that suggests Alex Bledsoe harbors misogynistic tendencies; instead, he's just tipping his hat to one of the defining characteristics of the genre. Still, it bothered me a bit that so many other noir tropes were dodged, but this was the one that was adhered to.

Essentially, this book is like a cheap and ugly hooker. Pay your \$10, try not to look at it too hard, and you might have a relatively good time.

(That's right, I went there even after my little speech about objectifying women--hypocrisy, thy name is Amanda.)

Cross posted at [This Insignificant Cinder](#)

Dawn says

This was a fun and quick read, quite different from most other fantasy that I've come across. It's basically a combination of traditional fantasy elements (kings and queens and swords and stuff like that) with an urban fantasy type writing style and paranormal detective type plot. If that sounds awkward... It totally wasn't. It worked. It wasn't perfect; there were some weird little inconsistencies, and some story points that were a little too happily-ever-after for me, not to mention a lot of right-place-at-the-right-time involved in solving the case, but despite all of that it was still a fun ride. I just went with it, didn't dwell too much on the little things, and ended up enjoying it quite a bit. Three and a half stars, and I'll definitely be continuing on in the series.

Mike (the Paladin) says

This was an odd book. I had never read anything by Bledsoe before...I gather there are a couple of other books. What he goes for here is sort of cross between sword and sorcery fantasy and hard boiled detective fiction. He does a pretty good job to. I vacillated on how high to rate this one and finally settled on 4 stars. While it can run hot and cold and at times the "suspension of reality" bit runs awfully close to silliness, it's over all a good read. Picture Sam Spade or Philip Marlow with a sword peeking over his shoulder instead of a revolver in a shoulder holster.

colleen the convivial curmudgeon says

[Gaulic horse and sovereignty goddess (hide spoiler)]

Suz says

Well, I wasn't sure what to expect when I decided to listen to this. All I knew was that it was written by Alex Bledsoe. I should have known that would be enough.

It's a strange fusion of hard-edged fantasy noir. It's a fantasy setting featuring a private investigator with a noble past he's trying to forget about. There were allusions to fairy and fae, and a "goddess" with what could be considered magic, but essentially this was a detective story.

A very good detective story. I'm going to listen to more of them.

Brownbetty says

I was writing my review as I read this book, and prepared to recommend it with some caveats, when in the last ten pages, the author pulled out something that pissed me off so badly I would very much like to mail him a half-pound of dead catfish by surface mail in August. I'm giving it three stars, because it's good writing, and perhaps it deserves four, but I'm just not capable of that kind of magnanimity.

First, in its favour, the book is a good example of the noire detective story in a fantasy setting. I've seen it done before, but I don't think I've seen it done better. The protagonist, Eddie LaCrosse, is not so cynical that he is unlikeable, if liking the protagonist is crucial to your enjoyment, as it is to mine. The characterisation is serviceable, if not precisely subtle and multi-layered, and the fantasy world approximately Lankhmar in general tone.

The quotes on the back describe this book as hilarious, but I actually didn't find it all that funny: not as in "that's not funny, I'm offended!" but rather I really only found one or two points where I recognized that humour was supposed to be (and IMO, succeeding at) happening. Probably a sensahuma mismatch, your mileage may vary.

Now, (with vague spoilers) on to my caveats, building to an unhinged rant: the hard-boiled detective novel really is the novel of defensive white man-pain, and don't expect that to change here. Eddie's left a trail of dead women behind him, which is tragic, really. For him, obviously. The funny thing is that Eddie seems to recognize that he's nothing special, and that the women he loved and lost deserved to live as much as he did (if not more); and yet, this is Eddie's novel, and it's littered with dead women who give his backstory a tragic zest.

At point, Eddie needs information from an effeminate homosexual-- who abruptly drops his mannerisms, claims they're a show, and grudgingly gives Eddie the information he needs-- after his partner has been assaulted and his business been threatened. Maybe it wouldn't get to me so much if he wasn't the only queer

presence.

A minor annoyance as well: the title. There is only one narratively significant blonde in the book, but nothing makes her particularly 'sword-edged,' and it annoys me that apparently a snappy title is more important than respecting the actual fact of her.

At the end, however, our hero retires to his hole in the wall detective agency, and in walks the *identical twin* of a woman he lost many years ago. I cannot actually think of a way to make the substitution of one woman for another more insulting. Oh, sure, Eddie muses to himself that "I knew she wasn't Cathy, of course; one woman couldn't replace another," and yet, she walks into his life in the last ten pages of the book, and could not be more obviously signalled to be the woman meant to make him happy if Bledsoe had festooned her with garlands spelling "SHE'S THE ONE." It's one thing to have an epilogue hinting that the protagonist is on the verge of finding romantic happiness, but to use identical twins in this way; rather than a book which acknowledges the differences between individual women, this one brings a woman in and the punch-line is that she's exactly the same. She is doubtless distinct from her twin in many ways, but the book ends, and the reader never hears of it.

Kim says

I originally started reading this as something light to read in between heavy, dark, deep books. But then I found that I just couldn't put it down and had to keep going til it was over.

A brilliant blend of medieval fantasy and noir detective this book really hit the right marks for me. The witty, self-deprecating, flawed and human detective/swordsman was such a great main character I easily fell behind him. The main story, while predictable, was entertaining and gripping the whole way though.

Another review I read mentioned inconsistencies, like a name-tag on a waitress, but they weren't mistakes but intentional anachronisms that really gave this book a sense of the familiar mixed with fantasy. These little humorous details that shouldn't exist in the setting of the world but work perfectly. Reminds me a lot of Douglas Adams more subtle humour. The best humour is most often that which isn't pushed into the audiences face.

A great book I must now get my hands on the sequel.

Brad says

I had no expectations at all when I downloaded this book. I only did it because one of my groups was reading it, and a fellow member chose it, so I thought I would support him. I am glad I did.

It is a mash-up of something old and worn -- a couple of things that are old and worn, actually -- with a little of the new and kitschy. It's a bit of low brow hack and slash Fantasy fun with a kooky Goddess at its heart; it's a pretty straight forward Detective Noire -- including the requisite smart mouthed detective; and it's an Urban Fantasy with more than one urban centre.

It does them all with a refreshing bit of hip carelessness that manifests in the ways of Alex Bledsoe's world. The world is pretty much exactly like ours, except they're still using swords and crossbows as weapons and travelling on horseback. By exactly like ours, I mean that the concerns of any given populace are for working infrastructure, employment and getting by; I mean they're entertainment is the scandals of the rich and famous (in their case, Kings and Queens); I mean that nightclubs and casinos and bars are just like ours, name tags for servers included; I mean that leaving your horse parked somewhere overnight will get you a ticket, warning you not to do it again or face a fine; I mean that our hero is named Eddie LaCrosse, and the girls he loves are named Janice and Liz and Cathy. It's a clever way to approach a Fantasy world, this stripping away of all medieval pretensions, and it works wonders because it allows Bledsoe's sense of humour, which is decidedly contemporary, to come through without sounding dissonant. It fits because he makes it fit. And damn is it fun.

I want to keep going. I want more of Eddie. And that doesn't happen to me often when I stumble upon a series in the B-range of literature. Sure I'll bump against it, I may even like it well enough, but I tend to visit only once and never come back. I think this time may be different. The tales of Eddie LaCrosse are just too much fun for a one off.

Toby says

The Sword Edged Blonde is hardboiled noir in a fantasy world. Only it's not that hardboiled really and the fantasy is minimal. It's pretty great stuff all the same. I hear the word fantasy when referring to a novel and I immediately hit the panic button, visions of pages full of filler descriptions, epic quests that involve dragons and wizards and protagonists with 4 d's and 7 apostrophes in their name unfold before me and groans escape from my lips. With his debut novel Bledsoe seemingly rejects such hackneyed cliché writing, preferring instead to take the route of Stephen King or at a stretch Terry Pratchett, in writing a fantasy world that could very easily be our own but without science.

Lip service is paid to magical creatures, priestesses, wizards, goddesses, omnipotent beings and other such staples of the genre, he even acknowledges the rejection of these tropes explicitly within the text; Eddie LaCrosse your hardboiled sword jockey narrator attempts to name his horse Loyola in true fantasy style of giving things ridiculous names but the horse lets him know in no uncertain terms that this isn't going to work for her. I read a lot of hardboiled detective fiction and almost all of it is set in a strange city that I've never visited, that same sense of otherness tempered by knowledge is present here, Eddie could just as easily be in Florida or Manilla or Glasgow for all the exotic familiarity present in his world.

For this reader that is the most important skill Alex Bledsoe could have brought to the table, combining it with an interesting and somewhat unique genre protagonist plus the exciting mystery at its heart you're left with a fresh and entertaining read that promises the potential for a long and enjoyable series of similar adventures. It could also be said that sequels are completely unnecessary to this novel and just might lessen the impact of this one. But I'm willing to give the author the benefit of the doubt at least once.

carol. says

from my blog at <https://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2015/...>

Well, that was a surprise.

by Justin Sweet

(Cover) + (title) = Pass. Except that too many book-world friends read and enjoyed it, so I thought it was worth a try. Still, I cringed: this is a cover made for the e-reader. You know, the picture you don't want any of your friends to see, because then they'd ask the obvious, and you'd have to explain how the blonde woman with the large bosom and missing legs was witnessing three mysterious men with swords hover around her (obvious much?) were clearly debating which one of them was going to cut off their own legs so that the mad doctor could suture them to her knees instead.

That's *my* interpretation, at least.

The cover might have put me in a bad place, because I think around chapter two, I wondered if I was even in the mood to finish. It turns out, the first three chapters are somewhat of a blind, a prelude to the character of Eddie and his cases. Thankfully, the real story takes off after Eddie completes the current commission.

A mix of noir and fantasy, I feel like Bledscoe is still finding his stride, a sort of Terry Pratchett style of noir. Initially, plot, characters, dialogue—all written straight noir trope, plopped down into a generic but well-described fantasy setting. Characters named “Eddie,” “Kenny,” “Rachel,” and “Mike Anders,” talking about military school, an architect girlfriend—it's more than a bit disconcerting after coming from writers who craft fantasy worlds like travel guides. At least, I assumed it was a tongue-in-cheek style until we start digging into Eddie's emotional history. As Eddie tracks down the solution to a grisly murder, he winds through his own troubled history.

As an aside: must Bledscoe have named towns Neceda (real name: Necedah), Muscodia (real name: Muscoda) and Boscobel (real name: Boscobel)? These are real places in Wisconsin, and are infinitely distracting to the one twentieth of the U.S. population that lives there. The first two likely reflect corrupted Native American place names, so they don't particularly set well with the Eddies and Mikes of the naming world. But hey—I guess I can admire the commitment to copying from the modern world.

What saved it for me was the emotional core of the story, the gooey center of self discovery and a sort of wistful romance. There's also an element of mythology which I rather enjoyed but is incompletely explained for those who like a lot of detail. Taking pains to not spoil, I'll note that the mythology component explained a lot of me that made potentially problematic females characterization and action more acceptable. The villain was ominous and a decent foil.

When I picked this one up from the library, I thought I was reading a fantasy. It turned into a noir mystery, and then evolved into a hero's quest for redemption and discovery. And not a legless woman in the bunch. Just goes to show that you can't judge a book by its cover.

Sarah says

I have no idea what the title had to do with the story...

Megan Baxter says

I have been reading a lot of fantasy recently, and so much of it has just blended together in my mind. There's a fair amount out there that is good, but much of a sameness with everything else that's out there. There are relatively few distinctive voices.

So, when this fantasy-crossed-with-noir popped up, I was more than ready to read it.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

Stephen says

4.5 stars. Excellent debut novel. Great noir, fantasy story set in a fully realized fantasy setting. With as many fantasy novels as are out there, it is really nice to find a well written story that does not fit neatly in the familiar mold. This certainly fits that description. The second novel in this series is out and I look forward to reading it. Recommended.

Chris says

3.5 stars.

So, when I was asked to make the "member's selection" for April 2012 in the Sci-Fi/Fantasy Group, I decided that I wanted to find something different from the standard fare. Something that was accessible as well, and it would be nice if it was actually *good*.

I had recently read *The Hum and the Shiver* by the author and found it to be an excellent book. It hit all the requirements I was looking for, actually. It had been recommended to me by Ala, another member of the above mentioned group. So that's where I narrowed my search. I could have easily picked *TH&TS*, and it would have been fine, but I wanted to read another cool new book.

So I found this one, Bledsoe's first novel and the first in his Eddie LaCrosse series. I read the blurb and thought it might work. A quick, light read that had shades of Jim Butcher and the Urban Fantasy craze, as well as the more traditional fantasy fare.

What I got was different than expected. It fit all those things, but was something else. It was almost like Elmore Leonard had decided to write a fantasy story. A pure noir driven mystery with a ~~gun~~ sword for hire with lots of sexy women thrown into the action. Wow. Very cool. With all the twists and turns I'd expect from such a marriage.

So is born, *Sword Noir*. And it's a pretty fun ride.

