

Bledsoe, Alex. The Sword-Edged Blonde. New York: Blackstone Audio, 2009.

An important element that defines the difference, for me at least, between fantasy and science fiction has to do with the potential for events or actions in the book to actually occur or become possible at some point in the future. Science fiction contains ideas, events, and activities that have a potential for becoming reality, if not in my lifetime, then sometime forward of that. I put Star Trek into that category. I consider it possible that space travel, transportation from point to point, phasers, universal translators, androids, etc., are in our future (Einstein notwithstanding regarding travel at more than light speed). Science fiction novels often take place in some future time, but sometimes in the present.

Fantasy, on the other hand, contains elements that have what I consider such low potential for reality that they are “fantastic.” Waving a wand and saying some words won’t ever, I believe, cause a feather to rise in the air or a patronus to be conjured to protect one from a dementor (no matter how much I enjoy the Harry Potter books). Nor are there magical families among us. Fantasy is also very often set in the past, and sometimes in the present.

The Sword-Edged Blonde is, in my way of thinking, classic fantasy, but with interesting overtones. The setting is what I would guess equates to Central Europe in medieval times. There are little kingdoms and city states, a royal/lordly class, a servant class, merchants, etc. Travel is by horse or riverboat. Communication is by written and spoken word. People have money (gold coins, no paper money). Swords and knives are standard fare.

The main character is Eddie LaCrosse, a sword for hire who does a variety of work for clients. He maintains an office above the local tavern, and he pays the owner to keep him informed. He is essentially a hard-boiled private investigator – Sam Spade in the 12th century. He is also the heir to an important barony in a nearby kingdom and was best friend to the crown prince when both were young. Tragedy has kept him away from home for many years. The request of the now king of his homeland takes him back to investigate the murder of the baby prince, supposedly at the hands of the queen. This queen, as Eddie learns, is actually a goddess living on earth in her third life.

This book has some interesting overtones of the present day. While communication is slow – by messenger on horse or boat – local administrations seem pretty well organized. There is a civil service office in every town with records in files. A funny one was this: Eddie left his horse tied to a tree while he climbed over a wall to do his PI work. He returned several hours later to find a citation tied to the saddle because he had left the horse on the street longer than was allowed.

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