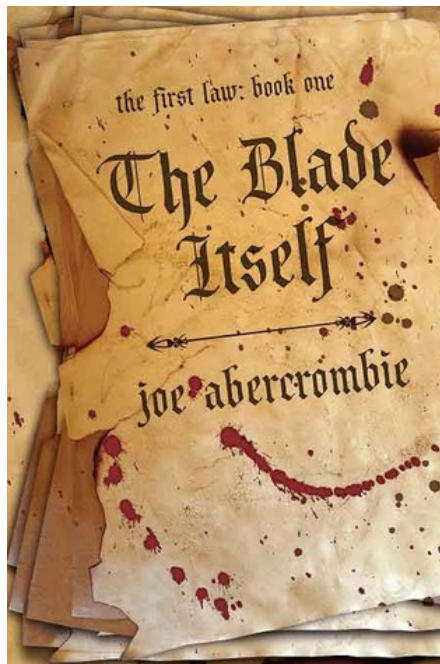




The Blade Itself

Joe Abercrombie

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Logen Ninefingers, infamous barbarian, has finally run out of luck. Caught in one feud too many, he's on the verge of becoming a dead barbarian – leaving nothing behind him but bad songs, dead friends, and a lot of happy enemies.

Nobleman, dashing officer, and paragon of selfishness, Captain Jezal dan Luthar has nothing more dangerous in mind than fleecing his friends at cards and dreaming of glory in the fencing circle. But war is brewing, and on the battlefields of the frozen North they fight by altogether bloodier rules.

Inquisitor Glokta, cripple turned torturer, would like nothing better than to see Jezal come home in a box. But then Glokta hates everyone: cutting treason out of the Union one confession at a time leaves little room for friendship. His latest trail of corpses may lead him right to the rotten heart of government, if he can stay alive long enough to follow it.

Enter the wizard, Bayaz. A bald old man with a terrible temper and a pathetic assistant, he could be the First of the Magi, he could be a spectacular fraud, but whatever he is, he's about to make the lives of Logen, Jezal, and Glokta a whole lot more difficult.

Murderous conspiracies rise to the surface, old scores are ready to be settled, and the line between hero and villain is sharp enough to draw blood. Unpredictable, compelling, wickedly funny, and packed with unforgettable characters, *The Blade Itself* is noir fantasy with a real cutting edge.

The Blade Itself Details

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From Reader Review The Blade Itself for online ebook

Mpauli says

"So, let's cast the characters for our novel, shall we?"

"Of course, boss, Mr. Abercrombie, sir!"

"Where is the run-of-a-mill farmboy with a great destination?"

"I'm afraid he ran off the mill, met a goblin. Now rots in a ditch."

"Oh, how unfortunate."

"Indeed, boss, indeed."

"Let's see. What about the maiden fair in need of rescue from a dragon?"

"Apparently she ate the dragon. Now she was saying something about a burning sensation in the...well...digesting area. Went to the toilet, never saw her again."

"Hm, what a shame. Well, what about a lovely elf?"

"You wish, ey boss?"

"Yeah, had to ask at least."

"Understandable."

"Maybe a sturdy dwarf?"

"Nah, you know how they are these days. They all want to be Tyrion. More the sophisticated wine-drinking type, rather than being honourable beer-folk."

"So, what are we left with, then?"

"We have a fencing soldier..."

"Sounds promising!"

"Yeah, just...he's kind of an ass. Pompous fool type."

"At least good to look at for the ladies?"

"Might work, he's no sparkly Edward though."

"Come on, go Edward yourself. What else?"

"There is this savage dude, but his best days seem to be over."

"Like a Baldwin?"

"And he's missing a finger..."

"So he's basically crippled...wonderful, anyone else?"

"Funny thing, boss. There is this actual cripple. A torture victim, who's now an Inquisitor."

"You're kidding me?"

"I'm afraid not. On a stretch I might have a savage female psychokiller on a revenge streak."

"Oh please no, not for the beginning of the novel!"

"Maybe later then, boss?"

"Maybe later, for now, let's work with these guys..."

And Abercrombie worked really well with them. I had a blast with his refreshing new characters. These miscreants really grow fast on you and you keep rooting for the strangest guys.

As the novel is really character focused, the main plot is more of a build-up to bigger things in the later books.

But it's interesting enough and has a lot of potential. Therefore I'm going to dive into the other two books of the First Law trilogy in the near future. Maybe there are even more casting surprises ahead.

"Oh, boss...one thing...the savage guy brought some friends aswell."

"Of course, he did, of course...we'll make it work."

Dan Schwent says

On the run from a king he once served, barbarian Logen Ninefingers finds himself in the Union's capital, aligned with Bayaz, a legendary wizard long thought dead. Meanwhile, nobleman Captain Jezal Luthar trains for The Contest, a fencing spectacle, while lusting after Ardee West, sister of one of his comrades. Inquisitor Glokta, crippled former swordsman, skulks around in the darkness, torturing the answers he seeks while searching for treason at every turn. What is Bayaz planning? Will Jezal bed his best friend's sister? Will Glokta be able to outmaneuver the other inquisitors?

After reading Red Country, I had to see how it all began. I was most pleased.

The Blade Itself reads like Terry Pratchett on the mother of all bad days. While there is a surprising amount of humor, there are also buckets of blood and gore. Abercrombie writes fantastic battle scenes and I suspect they will only get better as the series progresses.

Anyway, the strength of The Blade Itself is in the characters. While many of them fit standard fantasy archetypes, they also are far from typical. Logen Ninefingers is a barbarian that spends a lot of time thinking and being scared, guilty of a hundred atrocities. Bayaz is an ages-old wizard that looks like a blacksmith. Inquisitor Glokta seems like a pretty reprehensible torturer and guardsman at first glance but there is a lot more to him than meets the eye. Jezal is a great swordsman but also a snobbish bastard. I'm also very interested in Yugei and Ferro and Logen's former band of not-so-merry men. I can't wait until they find out their old leader is still alive.

I'm going to sidestep going into too much of the plot. to avoid spoilage. Suffice to say, I'm intrigued of what I've seen so far, bringing me to my next point. The only gripe I have about this book is that it very much feels like the first book in a trilogy. Most of it feels like setup to me. Fortunately, I think Abercrombie is more than capable of delivering the goods in future volumes so it's barely a gripe.

Additional Thoughts:

- Logen Ninefingers is quickly climbing the ranks of my favorite characters in science fiction and fantasy.
- Also, Logen reminds me of a young version of Terry Pratchett's Cohen The Barbarian.
- I'm not sure if Abercrombie has ever read Hugh Cook's Chronicles of an Age of Darkness series but the writing and morally ambiguous characters make them spiritual brothers.
- I have a feeling Glokta will wind up being my second favorite character in the series.
- I love Abercrombie's magic system and the history of the Magi.

Four blood-dripping stars!

Carol. says

The Blade Itself will undoubtedly become classic fantasy. I found it engrossing, and one of the best examples of the "darker" epic fantasies, with protagonists lacking in traditional heroic qualities and quests that are less than selfless. I liked the way the story was constructed, primarily following three main characters, with a fourth was added partway through the book. I was fairly certain they would intersect at some point, so part of the interest in the story is seeing how their individual tales will intertwine. The stories of each are mostly linear, with some appropriate flashbacks, but never done so choppy that one can't tell primary time frame. I

can't tell you what a relief this is; I've been reading too many deconstructionist sort of fantasies lately where narrative skill is dropped for the ease of disjointed four-page scenes. Does everyone have narrative ADD? However, I digress.

Abercrombie has a gift for clear storytelling without simplicity. While I had heard this was a "dark fantasy," with unlikeable characters, I would wholeheartedly disagree, at least within the confines of this book. Perhaps on the surface our three main characters are unlikeable--one a 'barbarian' with a very bloody past, Logen Ninefingers; one a vain and talented peacock, Captain Jezel; and the last a maimed and internally tortured torturer, Inquisitor Glokta--but they are imbued with a humanity that makes them likeable despite themselves. Frequently we are privy to their decision-making process, and it becomes evident that their motives are more complex than simple bloodthirst, vanity or hate. Ninefingers is undergoing a shift in his feelings on fighting and war, after losing everything he has loved. It's lovely seeing how the entitled noble Jezel finds himself attracted to someone very different than he, and the stages he goes through as he realizes his love. Glokta's interactions with the Arch Lector are stunning; we quickly develop the sense of the long term and unethical mechanations of the Arch Lector and develop further sympathy for the poor torturer. It was a brilliant way to help readers understand the political ramifications of the actions we've been witnessing without a lot of dreary exposition or monologues.

A portentous and sinister air developes through the book. There is the larger issue of the Union and it's surrounding countries preparing for war, and the local issue of a power vacuum around king's throne, and competing interests. The evil characters are frightening-the Northmen have a sorceress working with them, and the Emperor of Gurkhul uses monsters called "Eaters" as enforcers. Nonetheless, there are light moments, and moments of redemption, even in beginning chapters, such as when Logen decides to rescue someone, even if it should mean his death. It's an astonishing level of complexity, but Abercrombie handles it well.

I've already got the second book on my shelf waiting to be read.

Cross posted at <http://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2012/1...>

Alienor ✕ French Frowner ✕ says

Actual rating : 4.5 stars

Back when I was in college and had to read a tons of French classics, I considered my dearly fantasy books as my escape, and I used to devour them all, good or bad, whenever I had the opportunity. Sadly, what had to happen finally happened : I grew tired of them, and spent years avoiding them, until a little bastard named Jorg came along in February, and then I thought : FUCK YEAH. There are still fantasy books I can enjoy. ***The Blade Itself* is one of them.**

If I can't deny that this book contains a few **great action scenes** which were grandly appreciated (really), yet it's by no means a full action-packed book, far from it, and I'm okay with it. Why? Because there's more to it, and that's why it could hold my interest. Indeed **there's just something in political and murder subplots in fantasy that appeals to me and never fails to captivate me.** Don't get me wrong, it's not that long, boring ass wanderings we sometimes find ~~*cough* The Well of Ascension *cough*~~. Not at all. In the contrary, in

my opinion Abercrombie does a great job at both introducing a **detailed world-building and an interesting cast of characters** without ever falling on the boring side. This may have something to do with his compelling writing, you know? Moreover **there's nothing better than gritty, witty and hilarious dialogues in my book**, and *The Blade Itself* is filled with them.

Once again, my growing interest in the story can be linked to **the blurred lines between good and evil or you know, right and wrong**. That's fucking fantastic, because although I used to read a lot of fantasy books when I was younger, I grew tired of the great knights in shining armors many series promote. Because that's boring as fuck. Because that's predictable. Therefore you can guess how ecstatic I am when I come across a book where these stereotypes are torn to pieces. I don't need fairytales endings and super bright heroes. Because you know, I don't really like them most of the time.

Why don't I give 5 stars to the plot then? Because in my opinion it stays quite unoriginal for a fantasy book, and sometimes the fact that it's a setup for the second book is obvious. Anyway, **I find myself wildly eager to learn what will happen in the sequel**, now that the die has been cast.

The characters, though. Guys! The characters! **These little bastards made my day**.

As you might have understood, **none of them is likeable. Of course I love them all, what do you think?** As Logen would say, let's be a little realistic here : I wouldn't want to meet them in a millions years - but the truth is, it's almost never the case with my favorite characters, because **I have the bad habit of falling in love with characters who share a questionable sense of morality**.

Lately I realized that the only multi-POV I can handle are fantasy ones, and I really think that's because the characterization is amazing in these cases : from Robin Hobb to Abercrombie, **every character is fleshed-out and above that, has a different voice**.

? **Logen. Meet this disillusioned warrior**. Hey, you have to be realistic about these things. Give him a knife and watch. Isn't he amazing?

"Blood gets you nothing but more blood. It follows me now, always, like my shadow, and like my shadow I can never be free of it. I should never be free of it. I've earned it. I've deserved it."

Well, now, I said he was disillusioned, didn't I?

? **Jeza! Talk about a selfish witty brat**. Okay, he's quite the little whining shit. Slap him hard because he deserves it, but loves him anyway, because... *Erm....* he's kind of brave ~~and made me smile so big~~ ... *Erm ...* I think? Oh, come on, look at this beautiful declaration :

"Look, (...), I know you think I'm an ass and, well, I daresay I am, but I don't plan always to be one."

Are you impressed yet? No? Okay. Sigh. You've got work to do, little Jeza.

? **Bayaz, The powerful wizard.** God, how I enjoyed his sarcasm!

"My help?" interrupted Bayaz. "You presume too much."

"But you - "

"Oh, that." The Magus shrugged. "I am a liar."

? **Glokta.** Last but not least, tremble before him, here comes... *Body found floating by the docks...* the great torturer! I'm not gonna lie, I feel like I'm supposed to hate him somehow... I mean, the guy cuts fingers for a living for crying out loud! But I adored his cynicism, and in the end, he's probably my favorite so far, because he's maybe the most complex of all, and I love me some multi-layered characters.

*"What poet was it who wrote there's no pain worse than the pain of a broken heart?
Sentimental shit. He should have spent more time in the Emperor's prisons."*

Yes, he's my favorite for sure. Or is it Jezal? Or Logen? Damn. I wouldn't be able to make a choice between them to save my life.

Finally, in addition to their own awesomeness, **the character dynamic is impressive** : Astounding dialogues! Complex relationship! Trust issues!

? **Me.** Watch this huge smile spreading on my lips. That's happiness for you.

PS : I need to say something about the kiss scene. *Her tongue lapped at his teeth?* Eww, just eww. Please, don't do this. It's disgusting.

For more of my reviews, please visit:

Ibrahim Z says

I almost put down the book when 3 paragraphs in the first 3 pages began with some version of this line:

"Shit," he said.

But I managed to slog through because I was told this was a some genre-breaking novel that didn't rely so heavily on typical fantasy clichés and it was supposed to be really dark and gritty. Instead of gritty, it felt kind of like a teenager who swears a lot to try and sound like an adult: really forced and usually out of context. A lot of the writing in general seemed to trip over itself. Good editing would have helped a lot.

Luckily, it's a fast read and it only took a day to read it. Probably because I've read the books Abercrombie pulls from. Stop me if you've heard of any of these plotlines:

A powerful and mysterious wizard who reappears at various times through history reappears once again to put together an unlikely fellowship comprising of each of the major factions that we hear about in the novels

and they have to transport an infinitely powerful magical item somewhere. They have to be on the lookout for a fallen wizard who wants said item and a bunch of magically created servants who are going to hunt them down.

An introspective torturer who's a shadow of his former self.

Invaders from the north who won't listen to others about the REAL threat coming from further north.

An unconventionally beautiful, plain speaking commoner girl, here to turn a certain nobleman's world upside down.

There's more I could list, but I'd rather talk about the last one for a moment. For the majority of the book, this down to earth girl is the only female character in the entire thing. And she's a victim of abuse. She's really only there to complicate things for the boys. About two thirds of the way through, we're introduced to our second female character who is also, surprise, a victim of abuse and a former slave. Neither of the characters seems to really have any depth, at all. One could be replaced by a pair of batting eyelashes and the other could be replaced by the word VENGEANCE.

Petrik says

4.5/5 Stars

I started reading this because a lot of my friends recommend me if I wanted something like Song of Ice & Fire series, this is the closest one, and imo they're right. This book follows the perspective of 3 main anti-heroes, believe me, you'll root for them when you read it. Logen Ninefinger, the Schizophrenia barbarian, Sand dan Glokta, once the best swordsman turned crippled and torturer and Jezal dan Luthar, the narcissistic fencer who wanted nothing more than fame.

The book starts really slow but it really builds up a lot of stories to be resolved in the next book (or maybe the last I don't know yet), not in this book no, there are way too many things unfinished so if you're going into this, please know that you're in it for the whole trilogy. Going to start the next book soon after writing this and my recommendation is if you're looking for dark fantasy (it's bloody, believe me), with great characterization, dark humor, and great action scenes, you can't go wrong with this one.

mark monday says

I'm going to do something that's a little disrespectful and start this review by talking about another fantasy series that I've enjoyed: A Song of Ice and Fire. That series rules. It has everything I've wanted in a series since Tolkien but there's one thing to be said about it, neither good or bad, that is a big part of its impact: it is dark, very very dark. The darkness comes, as it should in all quality fiction, not necessarily from the actual bad things that happen to good people, but from the depth of the characterizations themselves. Bad things happen to very real, very well-characterized, and truly understandable people, and so those bad things are made all the more upsetting, all the more hard to read.

So that's where The Blade Itself comes in. It is a funny thing for me, reading the reviews. Everyone goes on about how bloody it is, how graphic and hardcore, etc etc. How it is a part of the "George R.R. Martin tradition". Of course there is truth to that: much blood is spilled, incredibly tragic things happen, and hell,

one of its central characters (in fact, its best character) is a torturer with an awfully painful past. But what I rarely see mentioned is the wonderful lightness of tone that makes the novel such a pleasure to read. For all its tragedies and darkness, the tone is amusing, light-hearted, comic, and never in awe of the various mysteries depicted. I laughed out loud many times. It is also a surprisingly tender novel. That comment may be hard for lovers of this book to read. But *The Blade* does not demonize any of its characters, it allows all of them (even Black Dow!) their moments of decency and kindness, it views all of them in such a cheerful, upbeat way, that never did I feel a sense of bleak heaviness at the tragedies displayed. Those tragedies are shown to be a part of life, for some, and although they are impactful, the characters are not beaten completely down by their pasts. It is not a sentimental novel, but it is a very sweet-tempered one. The downside to this is that, at times, the characters and situations have a vibe to them that is almost close to being a sitcom. The upside is that it is wall-to-wall pleasure and at the end of the novel, I felt uplifted, rather than weighted down. It is a wonderful antidote to the compelling but grueling *Song of Ice and Fire*. A kind of tonic. The novel is a breezy delight and I am really looking forward to the rest of the series.

Oh yeah, almost forgot to mention: the author knows how to write action sequences. They were truly exciting, even cinematic in the clarity of what was happening. Often fights are confusing affairs in fantasy, but that is not the case here. The whole novel had a brisk yet cinematic feel to it. I choose Matthew MacFayden to play Inquisitor Glotka!

Bookdragon Sean says

Joe Abercrombie certainly knows how to write some disturbingly likable characters. In any other book the protagonists would be the bad guys. Logan Ninefingers is a brutal warrior who goes into insane blood rages where he kills anything, and everything, near him. Yet, weirdly, he is also a wise and sensitive soul. San Dan Glocka is a torturer whose heart is pure malice, yet somehow his attitude toward life borders on the hilarious. These two are such great characters; they make the series what it is.

A character defining opening

I love how this novel begins because it sets the tone for the rest of it. Ninefingers, as ever, is in a fight for his life, but it is clear that this is neither his first fight nor his last. He doesn't fight with grace; he doesn't fight with much skill either, but what he does fight with is an animalistic passion for survival and, knives, lots of knives. He knows how to win a fight and it is, most definitely, not by fighting clean or with bravery. Sometimes, the best way to win/survive a fight is by running off a cliff. In this opening we see a glimpse of his complex character.

“There are few men with more blood on their hands than me. None, that I know of. The Bloody-Nine they call me, my enemies, and there's a lot of 'em. Always more enemies, and fewer friends. Blood gets you nothing but more blood. It follows me now, always, like my shadow, and like my shadow I can never be free of it. I should never be free of it. I've earned it. I've deserved it. I've sought it out. Such is my punishment.”

Indeed, he is very well written. There's so much more to him than his outwardly barbarian appearance; he is more than a survivor and a pragmatist. He knows when his luck has run out; it's why he has survived for so long. There's wisdom inside him too. He's an exceptionally good judge of character. When the plot sends him in the path of Bayaz, a powerful mage, he can see the man's worth almost instantly; he can see exactly what he is about and how unstraightforward his intentions are. He is forced to go along with his plans, but he

knows not to fully trust him. He can smell deception a mile away. After all, you have to be realistic about these things. (I just had to say it!)

A twisted world

It is clear that Ninefingers is far from a good man. He has killed countless people, and he has enjoyed it. Yet, somehow Abercrombie has made this bloodthirsty barbarian into a likable protagonist. He is simply who he is. It makes me wonder that if the protagonist is this brutal, then the antagonists must be terrible people. They must be much worse than Logan. Though, something does tell me that there are very few good men in this world. Everybody is in a shadowy place of dark and questionable morals. I love it.

“There was nothing to be gained by losing his temper. There was never anything to be gained by that.”

Indeed, Gloka is just as nasty. He enjoys inflicting pain, through torture, in the same way it was done to him. But, at the same time, he works for the government and serves his country. So he can't be all that bad, right? Wrong. He is much, much, worse. He is one of the darkest characters in fantasy that isn't the villain. However, he is also brilliant. His wit and attitude reminds me somewhat of Tyrion Lannister. If these two met, it would certainly lead to one incredibly interesting conversation. Say one thing of Abercrombie; say he can write disturbingly likable characters, and novels; he's quite good at novels too. You have to be realistic about these things.

I've really got to stop saying that!

The First Law Trilogy

1. *The Blade Itself*- **A bloody four stars**
2. *Before They Were Hanged*- A gritty four stars
3. *The Last Argument of Kings*- A strong four stars

XX Sarah XX (former Nefarious Breeder of Murderous Crustaceans) says

● Buddy read with the wannabe torturers over at BBB ●

DNF at 34%.

You! Yes, you there! The person who is reading this review right now! Are you one of the **hilarious people** who told me I was going LOVE this book? You aren't? It's your **lucky day**, you should try playing the lottery or something. Now. If you are one of the **delirious** people who did tell me I was going to LOVE this book...oh man, you are **SO doomed**.

I mean, what the bloody hell??!! How DARE you **suicidal people** lure me into this by dangling a supposedly awesomely irresistible, blood-shedding **torturer** in front of my **lovely** nose??!! Here I was, expecting an **uber cool, super hot homicidal maniac**, and what do I get? An ever **pity partying, toothless bore with a limp**. Seriously? SERIOUSLY? What were you thinking, you **crazed people**??!! Damn. Poor,

pathetic Glotka is so grumpy he puts both the Grumpy Cat AND the old guys from the Muppet Show **to shame**. Grumpy can be sexy, but grumpy can be **GRUMPY**.

And I know that **looks aren't everything**, but I draw the line at toothlessness. I could have survived the limp if poor, pathetic Glotka here hadn't spent **every single second of his fascinating life** complaining about it. Actually, he spends **every single second of his fascinating life** complaining about ALL his various and numerous and abundantly diverse **pains, aches and ailments**. So much so that I considered **putting a bullet** through his grumpy little head to put an end to his misery. Yeah, **I'm charitable like that**.

Anything else? Yeah. This book is **boring as hell**.

Bye now.

PS: I might be ~~slightly~~ charitable to Grumpy-Ouch-It-Hurts torturers, but I'm **not so lenient** towards ~~delusional~~ people who think they can recommend I read Crappy Books (CB™) and **get away with it** unharmed, unscathed and stuff. All you people are now on my **Shrimpy Hit List** (SHL™). Expect a visit from the murderous decapodic army shortly. **There will be blood.**

[Pre-review nonsense]

DNF at 34%.

34%. And it almost took me **a month** to get that far. Yes, the book was *that* **brilliantly exciting**. I loved every minute of it.

Come on, Edward, time to bail.

► **I-hate-the-ill-intentioned-well-intentioned-friends-who-told-me-I-would-LUUURRRVE-Glotka review coming right up.** You are SO in for that paid burn-in-hell holiday, people.

My dear friends keep telling me I will LOVE Glokta. Might be because he's a **cripple turned torturer** (it's the torturer bit that counts). I have to say that Captain Jezal dan Luthar sounds pretty cool too: **dashing officer and paragon of selfishness?** Works for me. Then there's Logen Ninefingers, the **infamous barbarian**. Don't really care about the infamous part, but the barbarian side of things sounds positively yummy. Strangely enough, no one tried to sell this to me by mentioning Bayaz the wizard, a **bald old man with a terrible temper**. Weird.

Looking forward to reading this and then sending half of my friend list on a paid burn-in-hell holiday.

The Shayne-Train says

I'll start this review by saying that, currently, I have 197 Goodreads friends (which is really something, as I doubt there are even 50 people in my real life that I can stand). Out of those 197 friends, 59 of them have either read this book, or have it on their to-read shelf. That's 30%. Pretty much one in three. Numbers don't lie; they can't.

So I doubt I'll be introducing the concept of Mr. Abercrombie's genius to anyone. In fact, this would be pretty much the perfect example of "preaching to the choir."

That's not gonna stop me from saying this: Abercrombie is a fucking genius, and this book ranks in the top ten best fantasy books ever written.

The sheer number of reviews on this will let me squeak on by with no synopsis of plot, or detailing of characters. In fact, the quality of the writing is making me feel as if me even writing a review is somewhat superfluous. But I cannot move on to my next chosen book without gushing a bit.

I want to marry this book. I want to be Mr. Shayne Itself, and have, like, a million gritty, fascinating babies with it. I want to look into its eyes as we make love, and let it know that I'm proud to grow old with it.

But as my beloved state of Maine has not yet legalized the marriage between a human and a breath-taking work of literature, I cannot. I can only write a ridiculous, unnecessary review of it.

Here it is.

Jim says

Anton Chekhov famously said that if an author mentions a gun, it had better go off at some point, a point often attributed to Raymond Chandler (who at least practiced this rule). The same goes for fantasy writers. Fantasy doesn't need to be all blood and whirling blades, but if a fantasy writer straps a broadsword to a character's side, it had better be drawn in anger, at some point.

This was one of the best fantasy novels I've read in a while, especially impressive as it's a first novel. It has a fair amount of the aforementioned blood and swordplay, but it is much more than that. The characters are finely drawn and the story is both complex and well-paced.

For me, the most interesting character was the Inquisitor Glotka, who is deliciously cynical. A formerly dashing officer, he was taken as a prisoner of war and tortured. Having subsequently become a professional torturer himself, he can't help but admire the skill and creativity his captors put into breaking him. He harbors a great deal of hatred for his former comrades, who he feels forgot about him in captivity and would like to forget him still.

Glotka serves the Union, a civilization confident of its superiority, centered on the decadent city of Adua. War is brewing in the barbarian North and in the Gurmish south. Into this setting comes the wizard Bayaz, accompanied by the barbarian warrior Logen Ninefingers. Logen is famed in the North as a master of violence, but it is a reputation he wishes he could put behind him. Bayaz won't let him get away that easily, however, needing the barbarian's skills for his own purposes.

Bayaz has interests of his own in Adua, tied to the distant past and the vanquishing of a dark magus who was the founder of the city. Bayaz spends a good deal of his time acting un-wizardly (in Logen's opinion), more like a balding, fat, lazy peasant. It is an assessment others make, to the point that they risk underestimating the cranky, old man.

Abercrombie's accounts of fighting are incredibly well-done, fast paced and capturing the fear and confusion, along with the rage and bloody-minded delight of mastering an opponent. Yet, the violence in this book takes an emotional toll on those involved. Also, his accounts of magic are very good, not flashy but weird and disturbing.

A lot of fantasy writers make the mistake of giving the reader too much information about the world they've created. Abercrombie gives enough background to keep the plot going, leaving the rest as tantalizing clues that give the sense of a real world. The only part of the book where I thought he was giving us too much was in regard to the fencing tournament that the nobleman Jezal dan Luthar takes part in. It did help display the arrogant, selfish character of Captain Luthar, but I felt there was a bit too much detail expended on it. Still, this is the first book of a trilogy, so perhaps the event of the tournament will figure later in the story.

All in all, this was a great read. I've read too much fantasy in recent years that seemed too much like feminist theory or post-Marxian cultural critique with dragons, often written with a faux-epic wordiness. (I really think this is why the Potter books were so popular with adults; they were looking for something story-driven.) This book by Joe Abercrombie is an antidote for a lot that has been wrong in fantasy literature.

Robin (Bridge Four) says

Sale Alert: Kindle Daily Deal on 16Jul18 on Amazon for \$2.99

Buddy read starting 7/25/14 with Athena, Alexa, Kat Stark, Jessica, Jennifer and Eon

'History is littered with dead good men.'

Do you like morally ambiguous characters? Do you want to read something where there is no clear 'all good' or 'all bad' persons, where people and their motivations are a mystery for the most part? If you love fantasies that focus on the characters a little more than the world building then this is totally for you.

There is not one Mary Sue character in the bunch. Of the two main female characters one drinks a little much, swears like a sailor and isn't afraid to hand you your ass, the other is a stone cold killer. The men are just as diverse. Logen has a brutal and bloody past

"There are few men with more blood on their hands than me. None, that I know of. The Bloody-Nine they

call me, my enemies, and there's a lot of 'em. Always more enemies, and fewer friends. Blood gets you nothing but more blood. It follows me now, always, like my shadow, and like my shadow I can never be free of it. I should never be free of it. I've earned it. I've deserved it. I've sought it out. Such is my punishment."

And he is willing to take that punishment when the First Magis, Bayaz finds him and asks for his help. You are never quite sure what you are dealing with when working with Bayaz. Sometimes he seems almost fatherly or grandfatherly but then other times he is just downright scary. He definitely has a plan and through most of this book he was just bringing his group of misfits together to travel on and possibly cause a lot of mayhem and havoc.

Then there is a completely different cluster of characters living in a city with a mad king and a magic tower that has been locked for centuries. Jazel's main worry in life is training for a tournament that should set him politically for life. He was so easy to hate in the beginning, but much like Han Solo he might be redeemable in the end.

And Then There is Glotka I never knew whether I liked him or hated him. He has had a tortured life, like literally and now he is the torturer.

"Every man has his excuses, and the more vile the man becomes, the more touching the story has to be. What is my story now, I wonder?"

Being inside this characters head was a trip to say the least and I hated loving him and loved hating him. But he knows that monster he is and the political game that he is playing could get him killed at any time.

The strong point of this story is the characters and the complexity of their actions. While things were happening constantly and I was totally cast into this story I will admit that there isn't a lot of plot as of yet. It seems more like this is Part I of a 1500 page book. But now that we have met everyone and the stones have been cast I imagine the next book will have more plot details happening.

Recommended for people who like there fantasy a little on the grungy side.

Stephen says

6.0 stars (One of My All Time Favorites). Absolutely outstanding debut novel. Right along side The Lies of Locke Lamora by Scott Lynch and The Name of the Wind by Patrick Rothfuss as the best debut Fantasy novels of the last few years. This book is as good as the fantasy genre gets and I can not wait to read the sequel. Finally, IMHO, Glotka is one of the most original and best developed characters in a long time. Highly recommended.

Nominee: John A. Campbell Memorial Award for Best Novel (2008).

Choko says

*** 4.75 ***

A buddy re-read with my friends from BB&B

Just as great as the first time around:-)

Eon ?Windrunner? says

March 2016 Reread done and stars re-awarded. **high-fives Abercrombie*

This book sucker punched me. I did not expect this level of awesomeness. I did initially give this 5 stars due to superb characters, but downgraded it after some consideration regarding the plot.

I know Lord Grimdark is a very popular author, but I had tried one of his books a few years back and did not care for it as much as this one. It was good, but that was just where it stopped for me.

This book though, hit all the right notes. It did take me a couple of chapters to get into it, but by then I was thoroughly immersed. Loved most of the characters and for different reasons. They seem to be able to surprise you with the unexpected just when you think you know them. Some were asses. Some were wicked and some were just plain freaking bad-ass. And one was Sand dan Glokta. This guy rocked this book. I could quote so many lines.... (Must.Not.Spoil.For.Others.)

Mostly this book IS about the characters, rather than showing us all the cards where the plotline is concerned. And although the overall arc seems to be secondary to setting up the world and its characters, Mr Abercrombie has done enough to keep me reading. Might be that he has just started the ball rolling, and we are about to hit the downhill slope! Even if the plot does get stuck a bit, he has given us a fantastic character pool to keep us entertained.

Really looking forward to the next one in this series.

PS:

The little bit of history interspersed throughout was also SO interesting. Really wish I could find out more about the past of this world. Would not mind reading a prequel on the whole Kanedias/Juvenus story or even a different story set in that period.

Seems like so much knowledge has been lost in the time since the Euz brothers passed from this world.

Mary ~Ravager of Tomes~ says

So this was one of my most anticipated reads.

Grimdark fans from all over offer up this book as one of the best in the genre, and so that understandably rocketed my expectations!

And this was not a bad book by any means.

In fact, as soon as I started I was told multiple times that I could liken the first book of *The First Law* series to "a giant prologue," and I think that's a really accurate way to describe it.

The book follows a handful of characters who are all entangled in some way in the degenerating political situation between The Union and The North.

Each character brings with them an interesting history & plays a unique role in the story. How they relate & integrate themselves into the plot feels very believable & covers a wide range of positions, which provides decent footing for the reader to understand Abercrombie's world through their eyes.

My favorite character was a tie between Inquisitor Sand dan Glotka, once a brilliant & charming swordsman, now crippled & experienced in the art of torture, and Logen "Ninefingers," a banished Northman warrior with a bloody reputation.

Both of these characters are written in a way that kept me wanting to find out how their story would unfold. Especially Glotka with all his **biting sarcasm & sardonic sense of humor**.

Abercrombie's talent as a writer is one of the shining aspects of this novel. His ability to develop landscapes & nations with distinctive cultures is impressive. He is seamlessly able to tie together situations & characters with **smooth descriptions & clever dialogue**.

However, even with these strong qualities, **I really suffered to stay engaged with what was happening from almost the very beginning to the end.**

Every so often, a great section of action or an intriguing piece of banter would bring me to the surface, but for much of the story I felt as though I were drowning in cumbersome details & a political set up that I wasn't fully on board with. That is to say, **the story just didn't do it for me.**

When I finally finished this book, I was relieved on some level because in many places it was quite a slog. Pacing was a bit of the problem, but for me more of the issue was I just couldn't fully connect with what was going on.

There were definitely a number of enjoyable elements here & there's no denying Abercrombie's skill at world building & characterization. But "good" is the best way I can describe my reading of The Blade Itself.

I'm glad I read it, as I've heard the next two books really take off & take the reader on a crazy journey. So I'll be looking forward to reading the next two books in the series!

Buddy read this with my girl, Nenia! Here's a link to her lovely review!

James Tivendale says

I was up until half five yesterday morning reading intensely to finish off this story. I didn't write the review then as it would have been a tired, mumbled mess with little to no eloquence and it wouldn't have included any cool sounding words. Let's see how I get on now after a good nights sleep. Prior to reading this, I had completed Abercrombie's Shattered Sea trilogy and enjoyed it a lot. Where that was classic story focused fantasy with twists aplenty, this is best described as a macabre, dark and twisted character study of morally questionable individuals. This narrative takes place in a world that seems to be brimming with a blood-splattered past, interesting races and a heightened amount of warmongering aggression between the countries and factions. There is a lot going on in Abercrombie's world yet, it is a shame that the two versions of this book that I have didn't include any cartographed maps. I did get a little confused trying to compose a mental map of the world and distinguish where the action was taking place.

The greatest accomplishment achieved by Abercrombie here is the characters he has created.

The four main individuals are:

Jezal: A vain, selfish nobleman and talented fencer.

Logan: An infamous warrior.

Glokta: A tortured and crippled torturer.

Bayaz: A mage whose motives are mystical.

I will not go into any real details about them, how they intertwine, their opinions shared in monologues regarding the others (if they meet that is) but it is a pleasure to read about these characters that are, on paper at least, completely unlikeable. There are times that these characters surprised me with their thoughts. Glokta's internal opinions are darkly humorous yet tortuous when relating to his past, and the womaniser and dashing swordsman Jezal actually having some weird emotions for only one lady are two fine examples. The players' interactions had a Tarantino-like quality.

This book was a slow burner for me. It has many great qualities but whilst reading I occasionally had an internal dilemma about whether I should put it down and pick up something with more action. Two or three amazing setpieces excluded (such as a fencing contest and Logan's old gangs' antics), it doesn't really include many all out adrenaline fueling segments. Towards the end, however; reading this was quite intense hence why I was up until stupid o'clock to finish the story. I reflect that this book's main agenda was probably for the reader to get to know the characters because this is done extremely well. At the finale, the seams are brimming with reported conflicts and a bizarre proposed mission that the characters find out are their fates and destinies moving forward. To conclude, I have to admit that *Before they are Hanged* is set up phenomenally well and I am looking forward to shortly jump back into Abercrombie's world.
www.youandibooks.wordpress.com x

Orient says

I can certainly say that this book is gritty. So, you start reading it and it pushes your face in mud, sweat and blood. If someone just falls somewhere or rolls down the stairs, you can be sure, it will be shown with all the glory of sticky stuff running down the face with an agonizing squirm. It reminds me of Tolkien or Sapowski in some episodes.

But this book is not just a merciless hole covered in darkness and blood. You can find a lot of fun, humor (slight or hard) and that just makes the book so outstanding and unforgettable.

Now about the main characters. Here limps the Inquisitor Glokta (so lovely and charmingly bad and funny)- he was horribly tortured in the previous war only to become a torturer himself, when he returned, smashing out traitors for an organization which is in a need to gain political power, forgetting about the safety of country and other people. Glokta clearly shows the true, complicated and fascinating nature of Abercrombie's skills to write. I think Glokta is the most stunning character in the book, with a charming sarcastic monologue with his inner self and the potential to really reveal the truly amazing character as he struggles to overcome the pain and suffering every day. And to make it more complicated, he's also showing no regrets and is a really evil sociopath.

And of course, Logen Ninefingers, "the infamous barbarian". His situation, confused as a fish out of water nature throws most of the best jokes in the book, but he's not so interesting as Glokta. Logen's favourite activity through all the book is fighting, hope it will change in the sequels.

The book reveals its story in multiple layers that blend and unravel skillfully, with the taste of blood, humour, political machinations, threat of war, ancient supernatural forces. This heads for something big.

I REALLY enjoyed the book, it showed the fascinating world of badass likable characters and enlarged my database of quotes.

Bookwraiths says

Originally reviewed at Bookwraiths Reviews

As I've mentioned in other reviews, Joe Abercrombie is a fantasy author who all my real-life friends have raved about for years and insisted that I read. From their proselyting, it seemed that my life would not be complete without sampling Lord Grimdark's wares. So, in order to save myself from some accursed fate, I read the first two novels in Abercrombie's *Shattered Sea* series.

Unfortunately, grimwhine was not for me. If interested in the "why", you can read my reviews of *Half a King* and *Half the World* here on Goodreads.

Naturally, my friends were aghast at my heretical dislike of Lord Grimdark. That led them to berate my poor taste in fantasy literature. Arguments ensued thereafter until eventually they understood – even if they did not agree – with my lack of excitement with grimwhine, and so these close buddies of mine insisted that *Shattered Sea* was really a YA fantasy series and demanded that I try *The First Law* before I abandoned Lord Grimdark, because it was his masterpiece.

Well, I have recently completed my read of *The Blade Itself*, book one of *The First Law*. And, for those who have never tried it, I will attempt to sum it up succinctly for you.

This is a story told from multiple points of view by several main characters with the most important being: Jezal, the rich, noble's son who is bratty and also a great swordsman; Logen, the northern barbarian who has a dark, mysterious past but wants to escape from it; Ferro, a fugitive slave from the nation of Gurkhul whose desire for revenge is greater than her common sense; and Gloкта, a handicapped war hero who is now a torturer working for the Union's secretive inquisition.

As a reader slowly tags along with these four, they slowly learn tidbits about each person, their pasts, the world they live in, and the coming conflicts that are a brewing. But finally, all these interwoven pieces begin to gather together for the last section of the novel in the capital city of the Union, where not only do these four interact with one another but also set up the story for the second installment of the series.

Now, I did enjoy *The Blade Itself*; it was an interesting enough book in its own way. However, the plot was a rather slow moving affair. (At one point, I actually found myself wondering if glaciers moved faster than *The Blade Itself*.) But once Abercrombie got everyone together in the capital, he did ratchet up the action, ending the story with a small bang.

Even with that being said, however, the characters in this novel were a bit of an enigma for me. Going into my read, all I had heard was how amazing they all were, how brilliant the characterization, how . . . you get the picture: Great characters. And I suppose they were very well developed, but unfortunately, I didn't care one iota for any of them. Jezal made me want to slap him, because he was such an annoying, rich brat. Logen was boring most of the time. Ferro was an amalgamation of every ex-slave character I've ever read about. And Gloкта (though he is the most interesting) would be a heartless bastard only to then turn around and go all gooey inside because an old friend apologized to him. I grew tired of each very quickly. Thank God the viewpoint changed between them constantly. It grew so bad that (unlike *Song of Ice and Fire* where I got sick of Martin killing everyone off) I kept hoping Abercrombie would kill someone, so they might be replaced with someone less boring.

I know all that sounds really harsh of me, doesn't it? But I did like *The Blade Itself*. Really. I'm just disappointed with it. A disappoint that has grown rather than lessened in the weeks since I read it.

Why, you ask?

Well, for years, I've heard all these grandiose accolades about this book. People would tell me it was the quintessential modern grimdark. The tale that revolutionized the fantasy genre for a new century. Hell, one of my friends even anointed Abercrombie the Tolkien for the twenty-first century. (Yeah, he is the president of the Lord Grimdark Fan Club.) But as I read, I just did not see any of that. Still do not in hindsight. It was a fine fantasy novel. Abercrombie spent a lot of time writing a fiction novel which was "incidentally" a fantasy. But revolutionary? Not so much. Glen Cook's *Black Company* series was more grimdark than this before there was a term for it. George R.R. Martin's work in *Song of Ice and Fire* was far more "grim" in tone than anything I read here. Hell, even Mark Lawrence's *Prince of Thorns* was more "dark" and bloody than this tale. So for those reasons, reading this novel was a little bit of a letdown.

With all that being said, I actually am looking forward to reading the next novel in the series. Now, I can experience *Before They Were Hanged* without any grandiose expectations weighing it down. It will be merely me sitting down to read an interesting fantasy novel about some people mixed up in deadly adventures, not me sitting down to read the "*MOST REVOLUTIONARY FANTASY NOVEL SINCE LORD OF THE RINGS*" and I believe that will allow me to enjoy it better than I did this one – especially if Abercrombie actually kills someone. I mean, OMFG, this is grimdark already; a main character has to die now!

Rick Riordan says

It's been a while since I read a fantasy trilogy all the way through, back to back. Joe Abercrombie's *The First Law* series was too compelling not to finish in a single marathon. The first book, *The Blade Itself*, introduces a cast of well-developed, complex characters throw together in a world loosely based on medieval Europe. At first, it's not entirely clear what the major story line will be. It's also not clear who the good guys and bad guys are -- kind of like real life. If this sounds like *A Game of Thrones*, well, yes -- the series are very different, but they do share some elements: morally complex protagonists, no easy answers, and a well-rendered world with a long history and many cultures. Logen Ninefingers, the Northern berserker, alone is worth reading about, but he's only one of many great characters. San dan Glokta is the coolest, and definitely the most sympathetic torturer I've ever encountered. If you like fantasy, check it out, and stay with it until the end of the third book. The ending is both satisfying and unexpected.
