



# The Blade Itself

*Marcus Sakey*

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## **The Blade Itself** Marcus Sakey

*How far would you go to protect everything you love?*

On the South Side of Chicago, you're only as strong as your reputation. Danny Carter and his best friend, Evan, earned theirs knocking over pawnshops and liquor stores, living from score to score, never thinking of tomorrow.

Then a job went desperately wrong, and in the roar of a gun blast, everything changed.

Years later, Danny doesn't think about his past. He's built a new world for himself: a legitimate career, a long-term girlfriend, and a clean conscience. He's just like anyone else. Normal. Successful. Happy.

Until he spots his old partner staring him down in a smoky barroom mirror. The prison-hardened Evan is barely recognizable. Having served his time without dropping Danny's name, his old friend believes he's owed major payback---and he's willing to do anything to get it. With all he loves on the line and nowhere to turn, Danny realizes his new life hinges on a terrible choice: How far will he go to protect his future from his past?

A debut novel that's drawn comparison to Dennis Lehane, Laura Lippman, and Quentin Tarantino, *The Blade Itself* is the story of a good man held hostage by circumstance; a riveting exploration of class, identity, and the demons that shape us, where every effort to do the right thing leads to terrifying consequences and one inevitable conclusion:

The more you have, the more you have to lose.

## **The Blade Itself Details**

Date : Published January 9th 2007 by Minotaur Books (first published 2007)

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Author : Marcus Sakey

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# From Reader Review The Blade Itself for online ebook

## Robyn says

What really made this book notable for me was the villain. I truly hated this guy. While I didn't particularly root for the hero, I was more than happy to see the bad guy taken down.

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## Garrison Kelly says

Seven years ago in the darkest parts of Chicago, Irish thugs Danny Carter and Evan McGann attempt to rob a pawn shop only to get caught by the owner. Evan murders the owner in cold blood while Danny runs away from the scene to avoid getting arrested. Evan takes the fall and winds up in a maximum-security jail. Fast forward to the present day and Danny has a new life for himself: a construction job, a beautiful girlfriend, and cozy living arrangements. When Evan gets out of jail for “good behavior”, he begins stalking Danny and muscling him into doing one more job at the threat of killing his loved ones. Danny wants to keep his normal life, but knows that he’s running out of options when it comes to helping Evan get one last score.

In order to get as good as he is at writing crime fiction, Marcus Sakey shadowed police detectives and conducted his research up close. The effort put into such research is evident in “The Blade Itself”. Mr. Sakey knows all of the angles and limitations a criminal or cop has to go through just to get by. He knows when it’s appropriate to do one thing and when it’s best just to hang back. As he states multiple times in the story, this isn’t like a cop drama on TV. There are no easy solutions in the criminal underworld. Danny Carter constantly finds himself getting trapped in his situation with Evan and is desperate to try anything. He can’t go to the cops, he can’t confront Evan himself, and he can’t rely on anyone else to help him. Danny is truly on his own and he’s going to need every bit of street smarts to get himself out of this mess. The sense of impending doom is every bit as realistic as it is genius storytelling.

Let’s talk about Evan McGann for a minute. His characterization as a hardened criminal with bulging muscles, a swift mind, and nasty dialogue is legitimately terrifying to think about. The way he talks about “prison queers” is unsettling, especially considering he breaks into Danny’s apartment uninvited and tells him all about it. Evan truly has all of the cards in this game whether it’s political leverage or physical brutality. That makes him a main villain to be taken seriously. One wrong move around him could mean one more dead body to leave in his wake. He’s not just a big bulky guy with Golden Gloves experience: Evan McGann is a psychopathic monster. He keeps his cool while terrorizing Danny and his loved ones; that makes him even scarier than he needs to be.

Lastly, I’d like to talk about the writing style Marcus Sakey employs. Yes, the story moves at a brisk pace, but he still takes the time to be as descriptive as possible. Every punch to the ribs, every psychological trauma, every sour feeling in Danny’s stomach, the reader feels all of that while getting treated to street smart and vulgar dialogue. There’s even one time in the book where Marcus refers to Evan as “The Architect of Danny’s sorrow.” There’s another time where Mr. Sakey refers to Danny as “The Engineer of his boss’s suffering”. The author doesn’t overdo it with these wonderful descriptions, but it’s just enough to keep the reader imprisoned in this violent and frightening world, much like the way Evan McGann was imprisoned in a maximum-security jail for seven centuries, I mean, seven years.

The Blade Itself is realistic, crafty, violent, and smoothly-paced. There’s not a whole lot more you could ask

for in a wonderfully-written book like this. Nothing seems out of place, no stone is left unturned, and no death or assault will be in vain, neither will the tears shed nor the trauma experienced from those violent acts. Danny is an imperfect hero, Evan is a smothering villain, and everybody else's lives are placed in both of their hands, for better or worse. A passing grade shall go to this awesomely-crafted piece of crime fiction that keeps you guessing what'll happen and reaching for solutions until the end.

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## **Albert Riehle says**

Good but not great. I read Marcus Sakey's book *Brilliance* which I thought was excellent and it made me want to read more from this author. This book just didn't do it for me though. The pacing was just too slow and it was just far too easy to put this book down and walk away from it; and there wasn't a lot to pull me back in other than it's what I had to read.

That said, the writing is really great in a lot of ways. Sakey turns a phrase with skill throughout the book and in places it carries the novel, but unfortunately, when you're turning brilliant phrase after brilliant phrase about boring, predictable characters in a plot that isn't really all that unique, the magical prose only does so much.

The story is about a crook, from the South Side of Chicago who does a job that goes bad. His hothead partner goes down for it and he walks away--scared straight. Seven years later, he's got a great life, a great job, and an amazing girl. He's a civilian now. Then his old partner gets paroled and figures he owes him for not naming him and doing the time on his own. When our anti-hero refuses, his old partner threatens his new, happy way of life and everything in it if...(say it with me, class) he doesn't do one last job to get his partner back on his feet again.

I'm sure the movie version will be good--it sets up to be a better movie than a book. There are inconsistencies in the book that will probably be easier to gloss over when it's all compacted down into 2 hours. The most disturbing of these is how in 7 years, the protagonist loses all sense of street smarts that he once possessed in spades. Time and again, we watch him make stupid mistakes and as he makes him, the reader can't help but think, "Well this will come back to bite him in the ass." And, inevitably, it does. We think a street saavy guy, who fears for his girlfriend will put her someplace safe when everything gets rolling toward a conclusion. He doesn't. The bad guy gets her. Duh. It would have been fine if he'd tried to stash her someplace safe and his old partner figured it out. But to not even sense the danger she might be in and do something about it proactively is just too thin.

The fact that every bad thing that happens to him is the result of his old parter (the brawn) outthinking him (the brain) is just too much. It happens again and again. For a guy who made his living by seeing all the angles, apparently seven years of clean living takes that away from this guy entirely. He's a victim from the start of this book right up until almost the very end. It makes for a very boring protagonist.

This book is good but not great because it doesn't have any juice. I think that it's supposed to be about the characters, more than the plot and that would be fine if the main character wasn't such a complete victim. Sakey writes about characters who come from a place where you're a shark or you're food. This is the story about a shark who decides that life as food is more appealing to him and when forced back into the life of a shark--has no freaking clue how to be one, as if he was never a shark in the first place. If this book had been about him slowly shedding the layers he'd placed around himself until he became a shark again, it may have been interesting. That wasn't the case though. Sakey's protagonist is a pussy and that was boring.

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## **Maddy says**

PROTAGONIST: Danny Carter

SETTING: Chicago

SERIES: Debut novel

RATING: 3.5

Danny Carter and Evan McGann came from the same working class neighborhood in Chicago and have known each other since childhood. They'd been doing petty crimes together for a while, but things changed irrevocably when Evan pulled a gun during a pawn shop heist and shot the owner and his assistant. Jolted by the unexpected violence, Danny managed to leave the scene before the cops arrived. Evan didn't and ending up serving seven years in prison.

And now he's out, and expecting a quid pro quo from Danny for keeping his mouth shut and not implicating him in the crime. What Evan wants from Danny is for him to be his partner on one crime which will repay the debt (and if you believe that, I have some nice swampland to sell you...). Evan is planning to kidnap the son of Danny's boss and hold him for a sizable ransom. Danny is very reluctant to go back to "the life"—he has a good job, a loving relationship with his live-in girlfriend, Karen, and the future is bright. But Evan knows exactly how to manipulate Danny, who goes against his better judgment and agrees to the scheme. What he's forgotten is how unpredictable Evan can be and how prison has hardened him into a man who truly doesn't give a damn about human life, loyalty or the value of a crime-free future.

The tension escalates. At every moment, you hope that Danny will find a way to get himself out of this predicament, but Evan only tightens the screws more. He threatens Karen; he even kills an innocent man who he only thinks may have heard something he shouldn't have. It's scary to see the direction that Evan is heading, and Sakey excels at building nerve-wracking suspense.

THE BLADE ITSELF has received a tremendous amount of positive acclaim from readers and reviewers. Personally, I found the book to be predictable. It was certainly suspenseful, but the reader always knew what was going to happen, if not how. The conclusion attempts to elevate the reader's adrenaline level as the danger escalates; however, the final showdown is almost laughably implausible.

Sakey shows promise of being a top-notch thriller writer. He does a fine job with the Chicago setting and establishes a fast pace. He's built in some interesting nuances that make his lead character unique, although I could have lived without the conversations with his dead father. Just eliminate the clichéd plotting, and that promise should be realized in spades!

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## **Matt Garcia says**

I enjoyed the Chicago setting and thought that Sakey captured the essence and diversity of Chicago pretty well. Being my hometown, it was neat to see familiar street names and landmarks being used in the story. The plot is good, nothing remotely new here, but it was still rock solid and did its job. The characters were written pretty well. I felt conflicting emotions for Danny because he was a career

criminal and finally got his act together so you want to see him succeed. But at the same time, the decisions that we make shape the people we are and who we will become. However, Sakey does an admirable job of explaining what life is like for those in lower socioeconomic areas and that the lack of opportunities takes its toll on many which I am very familiar with. My favorite character was Karen, Danny's girlfriend. She was a strong female and I enjoyed how Sakey was able to give her substance and not just have her be the stereotypical, cardboard cutout girlfriend of the protagonist. The antagonist, Evan and the cop were cliché though.

Has a brisk pace to it and doesn't drag. The shorter chapters definitely help with the book's flow.

**NEGATIVES:** An enjoyable read but I've seen this story told already a million times in books and films. There's nothing wrong with taking genre conventions and making a story out of them. But with the pages of praise before the story actually begins from numerous authors and reviewers calling it the most amazing thing ever, I don't understand the hype. To me, it was a solid crime thriller but it didn't even come close to blowing me away. I also knew how the story was going to end and what was going to end up happening. You can see it coming from a mile away.

A good, not great, crime thriller.

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### **Mark Halse says**

Ummm... this mother fucker needs to re-title this bitch. There is only one **THE BLADE ITSELF**. If Logen Ninefingers ain't in this book it can go to hell.

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### **N.T. Embe says**

I should probably shelve this, but it left me a little underwhelmed after many of the thriller books I've read and placing it into the category seems like putting a Chihuahua under the Dog category even though it resembles a rodent more in size. It was a bit of an underwhelming read for me, but that didn't make it an altogether bad book. The characters are solid, and the threats within the storyline are quite real. If anything, this is a realistic look at how people might have to deal with a blackmail situation against themselves and their loved ones today. It's not the happiest of books, and it's not super-espionage thriller either, but it's a solid book overall.

I have my issues with the decisions the main character made in this book, and that was the little hang-up I had for the most part, but it's nice to see that towards the closing chapters of the story, it picked up in a direction that I'd been wanting it to go for a long time. There were some tragic losses, and a good amount of tangible danger points throughout the story that could not be ignored, thus adding to their threat to the characters.

While I've been spoiled with the fancy mass-espionage, country-against-country, world-of-double-agents galore, this was a very down-to-earth take on the thriller piece. While it didn't tickle my fancy for the bigger honchos in the thriller and espionage world, it definitely played a steady, defensible part as a book in the thriller genre, taking on the flavor of crime novels as opposed to the espionage I usually like to tread in when

I read the main genre.

The characters are intelligent, make realistic decisions, fit their roles believably, and make some sound, very human points by the time everything in the story wraps up. If you want a read that's a little less complex, espionage thriller and prefer an everyday guy dealing with a very believable blackmailing problem in the only way he can-- this book will suit you just fine.

While I've rated it according to my personal taste, it stands on its own well, and will probably receive higher reviews and ratings from others than myself. Definitely give it a go if anything about the book appeals to you. It'll hold its own if you're looking for the particular situation it describes in general.

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## **LJ says**

THE BLADE ITSELF (Suspense-Chicago-Danny Carter-Cont) - Poor  
Sakey, Marcus – 1st book  
St. Martin's Minotaur, 2007, US Hardcover – ISBN: 9780312360313

First Sentence: The alley wasn't as dark as Danny would've liked, and Evan was driving his crazy, spinning the snub-nose like a cowboy in some Sunday matinee.

Seven years ago, Danny Carter and his friend Evan were living their lives on the wrong side of the law. During a break-in, Danny escaped but Evan was caught and served seven years in prison.

Now he's out and, although Danny has been legitimate and now successful, he feels Danny owes him. Evan wants Danny to plan and partner with him on the kidnapping the son of Danny's boss.

I was so incredibly disappointed in this book. It has one of the most beginning-to-end predictable plots I've read in a long time. I even saw the final twist coming. And what the predictability of the plot couldn't do, coincidences did.

Even the characters were predictable, stereotypical and, for most, without a lot of development. Unfortunately, I've already bought Sakey's next book. I hope the library sale enjoys them both.

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## **Craig says**

The Blade Itself by Marcus Sakey

Flint native Marcus Sakey has pounced onto the literary scene with his first novel The Blade Itself. This visceral thriller goes beyond the standard thriller genre and quickly becomes a story of love, redemption, and the broken bonds of brotherhood. Sakey, who now calls Chicago home, has written a novel that brings the cold blasts and gritty streets of the windy city to pulse-pounding life.

Sakey's hero, Danny Carter, is a reformed thief just trying to put his past behind him. He's got a good job, a woman that loves him, and all he wants is to live his life in peace when an old partner re-enters his life with a

different plan for Danny's future. As Danny struggles to maintain his grip on his hard won legitimate life, he is haunted by people and mistakes from his once buried past.

Fans of the thriller genre will find plenty of grizzled meat on this bone. Sakey's characters come to life with dialogue that feels authentic without being overdone. Every chapter advances the story without excess baggage or needless subplots, and readers are often rewarded with those insights and tricks of the professional thief that serve to both entertain and educate those of us stuck in the mundane world.

The Blade Itself is a riveting first novel well deserving of your attention. Those new to the genre will find much in The Blade Itself that confounds expectations. Sakey's female characters are complex and intelligent. They participate in the story, not just serving as maidens in distress. The story itself evolves quickly from a simple crime caper to a rich and moving tale of two boyhood friends, brothers in all but blood, whose lives have forever diverged, yet whose destinies are nevertheless intertwined.

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### **Larry H says**

I had never heard of Marcus Sakey or read any of his books, but one day I saw an advertisement promoting his latest book on my Facebook page. Having just breathlessly finished his first book, The Blade Itself, I'd like to thank the somewhat intrusive mechanisms of Facebook that place certain ads on your pages based on things you say you "like" or things you type, because Marcus Sakey is an author worth reading.

Danny Carter and Evan McGann were best friends, growing up together in a lower-middle-class neighborhood in Chicago, moving from mischief to petty crimes to more serious robberies and thefts. One night, a pawnshop robbery goes awry. Danny escapes, but Evan gets caught and sent to prison, although he does not give Danny up. Years later, Danny has built a brand new life, with a solid career and a serious relationship with his longtime girlfriend, when Evan returns. He hasn't forgotten that Danny walked away from the pawnshop and left him to deal with the consequences himself, and he wants some payback. So Danny is faced with the ultimate dilemma: do you honor your debts and risk everything you've built your life on, or walk away and face the same risks?

You may think you've seen this story before, but in Marcus Sakey's hands, the plot is fresh, the characters are complex and the action crackles. I had a feeling of dread in the pit of my stomach from the moment I started reading the book until I raced through the last page, because I knew something bad was going to happen (it was the literary equivalent of watching a movie with your hands nearly covering your eyes), but even if some things weren't surprising, the whole story was really exciting. If you like action/thriller-type novels, pick up The Blade Itself, and you won't be disappointed, except when it's done. I know I'll be downloading some more of Sakey's books really soon!

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### **Misti says**

I got this as my Prime book of the month for two reasons. I had read and enjoyed the Brilliance series by the same author, and I liked the super creepy cover. This book was OK, nothing too special. It was a little predictable but overall not too bad.



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## **Lewis Weinstein says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this book ... the plot roars along ... there is enough character development to make the central people interesting ... I kept turning pages (clicking pages?) ... this was my first Marcus Sakey novel and I will definitely read another ... does anyone have a recommendation for me?

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## **Jim says**

Having seen author Marcus Sakey on television hosting a true crime series I was curious to see what type of thriller writer he was. With a new author I try to start with their debut book. "The Blade Itself", was a solid and enjoyable thriller to say the least. Coming in at just over 300 pages, it was a yarn that started off strong and got better as it went along. Set in the south side of "Chicago, the baddest part of town":(Jim Croce), where crime is an everyday thing in life. Small time thief Danny Carter and his criminal partner Evan McGann are in the process of robbing a pawn shop late one night when it all goes to hell. Badly planned and a desire to get more than what they came for turns this job into a nightmare. Danny manages to slip away but Evan gets a twelve year reservation in Statesville Correctional. Luckily for Danny, Evan doesn't drop a dime on him. As the years pass Danny gets him life together thanks to his live in girlfriend Karen. Karen is tough on Danny to keep him walking a straight line. Danny works in construction and becomes the number two in his company behind the boss Richard O'Donnell. Although times are tough and the business is not in great shape Danny is making out pretty good. However after just seven short years Evan is released due to overcrowding. Evan travels back to Chicago to team up with his old partner Danny. Danny is horrified that Evan is back and keeps trying to get him to realize his days in crime are long over. But Evan will not take no for an answer. Evan begins to stalk Danny and Karen. He has a big score to pull off with Danny. Evan promises to leave Danny be after this one big job. When Danny finds out it involves his boss Richard he's stuck in a no win situation that will surely put him into prison. Local detective Sean Nolan who grew up in the old neighborhood with Danny and Evan knows something is going to happen. When Danny's "brother" Patrick Connolly steps in to help Danny the crimes begin to start stacking up. In a very quickly moving plot, "The Blade Itself", was well crafted and featured some pretty interesting characters. Protagonist Danny Carter seemed very life like as he jumped off the pages in a dilemma that has no good choices. The supporting characters were very developed and interacted with Danny for a smooth enjoyable read. I did think the dialog was a bit vanilla for a yarn taking place in the south side of Chicago. Not that a huge number of cuss words were needed, they did seem inconspicuously missing. Maybe author Marcus Sakey kept his first book PG over R for a broader audience. Clearly a superior read for, "The Blade Itself", easily four stars out of a possible five stars. The ending maybe a little too neat and far fetched but worked with the plot very well. I'm sure I'll be reading another Marcus Sakey book pretty soon based on how much I liked his first book. Author Sakey has a trilogy that sounds extremely interesting itself. "The Blade Itself", is a do not miss read for sure. Author Marcus Sakey is a story teller to keep an eye out for.

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## **Scott E says**

As far as crime fiction debuts go, this is at the top of the list. In fact, with this debut, Sakey has leap-frogged 85% of the hoards of crime fiction writers working today (debut or veteran).

The plot of *The Blade Itself* is simple and familiar. Danny and Evan are partners in crime until the one job that goes south on them. Danny escapes and goes legit (wife, job, etc.), Evan gets busted and does time. Fast forward years later...Evan's time has been served, but his thirst for crime is not quenched...and by his count, Danny owes him big! Trouble ensues.

Sakey's execution of this movie-of-the-week plot is tremendous, and is what sets this debut apart. The pacing is fast and suspenseful without a single page of filler to slow you down. The writing far exceeds that of most other crime fiction...without becoming 'literarily' bogged down.

Got this from the library...but will definitely purchase to have a copy on hand for a future re-read.

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### **Susan says**

I loved Sakey's "Brilliance" series and thought I'd give his other novels a go. I liked this crime thriller a lot - Sakey can write. This was his debut. It moved quickly once he really got going. Great at building suspense, but his endings fall flat for me. The end of the "Brilliance" trilogy felt the same. It's like he can get the train going really fast but slowing it down and bringing it to a really satisfying close is where he stutters, at least for me. I definitely enjoyed the ride here with Evan and Danny, don't get me wrong. Just the ending was a big "oh" if you know what I mean.

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