



Wisp of a Thing

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Alex Bledsoe's *The Hum and the Shiver* was named one of the Best Fiction Books of 2011 by *Kirkus Reviews*. Now with *Wisp of a Thing* Bledsoe returns to the isolated ridges and hollows of the Smoky Mountains to spin an equally enchanting tale of music and magic older than the hills....

Touched by a very public tragedy, musician Rob Quillen comes to Cloud County, Tennessee, in search of a song that might ease his aching heart. All he knows of the mysterious and reclusive Tufa is what he has read on the internet: they are an enigmatic clan of swarthy, black-haired mountain people whose historical roots are lost in myth and controversy. Some people say that when the first white settlers came to the Appalachians centuries ago, they found the Tufa already there. Others hint that Tufa blood brings special gifts.

Rob finds both music and mystery in the mountains. Close-lipped locals guard their secrets, even as Rob gets caught up in a subtle power struggle he can't begin to comprehend. A vacationing wife goes missing, raising suspicions of foul play, and a strange feral girl runs wild in the woods, howling in the night like a lost spirit.

Change is coming to Cloud County, and only the night wind knows what part Rob will play when the last leaf falls from the Widow's Tree...and a timeless curse must be broken at last.

Wisp of a Thing Details

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From Reader Review Wisp of a Thing for online ebook

Susanne says

Ahhh. . . a real treat of a read and a worthy follow-up to his 2011 book "The Hum and the Shiver." This man can't write fast enough to please me: I want MORE about his fantastical 'Tufa' people in the the Tennessee mountains. This is clever, creative world-making for those who like their fantasy firmly grounded in an otherwise ordinary world, and who relish the notion that music can have transformative power. Aspiring musician Rob Quillen feels called to Cloud County after a personal tragedy and finds he has an unexpected role to play in a struggle for power among the area's peculiar Tufa, the black-haired mountain folk who may or may not be more than they seem and whose 'first daughters' wield quiet authority. The ending gives hope that there may be another novel about the young woman Curnen, who almost became the 'wisp' of the title -- although Bledsoe, tantalizingly, did NOT follow up much on Bronwyn HYatt's story from the first novel, but took readers off on a totally new tangent here. I'm hooked. No need to read the first book before diving into this one.

I need to find an audio version of one of these books and see if someone has managed to find music to echo the tunes so eloquently described here!

[Did find an audio CD later -- no music on it. Rats!]

Dana Stabenow says

I enjoyed this outing into the present-day world of the Appalachian Fae. Singer-songwriter Rob travels to Needsville (love the name), Tennessee, looking for a song that will sing away his grief at the loss of his girlfriend. Guy that told him about the song was wearing sequins but they were backstage at the Opry at the time, so never mind. In Needsville he finds what he needs and then some, at considerable personal risk.

Strong sense of place and some solid characters, starting with Rob, who has unexpected depths, and the part-Fae, part not population of Cloud County. There is Doyle the mechanic and his Fae-lovestruck wife, Berklee. There is the truly icky Rockhouse Hicks and his wounded daughter/slash/lover Curnen (more ick, Bledsoe's really pulling out all the stops on putting a new twist on that old marrying-their-sister back country trope). Especially there is Bliss Overbay, the I have to say pretty laissez-faire guardian of this motley crew, as in she's ready to kill Rob before the night winds tell her not to (just roll with it). Some good lines, too, like

The building's interior seemed bigger inside than it had appeared outside, like a hillbilly TARDIS.

and

"Germs and Jesus, that's all I ever hear about," the boy said in a voice too weary for his age. "Germs and Jesus. And you know something? You can't see neither one of them."

Definitely a book that will keep you out of the woods. At least these woods. Worth reading.

Megan Baxter says

My previous exposure to Alex Bledsoe had been through several of his Eddie LaCrosse books, which I enjoyed as good pulpy fun. I had heard of his Tufa series, though, and it sounded intriguing, so when the second book in the series popped up at our annual library sale, I snapped it up. This week, when I had one of those evenings where I was working but most of my time could be spent sitting and reading, I took this and another book with me. The other book, Seanan McGuire's *Chaos Choreography*, I ended up loaning to another person working the event, and she loved it, but I did not get to read it.

Note: The rest of this review has been withheld 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](#)

Bonnie says

Sometimes it is a good choice to read outside your comfort zone. I usually don't read Science Fiction, Horror, or Fantasy, but I often select books from the New Books section. *Wisp of a Thing* caught my eye and then it caught my imagination.

I started reading and discovered the setting was a small town deep in the Smoky Mountains; there is a reason it is the most visited national park in the United States other than its proximity to many states. It is calming, mystical, and inspirational.

The main character is a winner of the *So You Thought You Could Sing* television show. After being chosen one of the two finalists, Rob Quillen, pleaded with his girlfriend, insisted on by the producers, to fly to the final show. Her plane crashed killing Anna and Rob had to go on live television. After the show, a man dressed in cowboy gear told him words carved in stone in a town named Needsville, Tennessee could heal a broken heart. With plenty of money and time, he researched the Tufa people on the internet, rented a car, and headed for Tennessee.

He finds a clan of swarthy, black-haired mountain people whose historical roots are lost in myth. People say when the first white settlers came, the Tufa were already there. Rob finds music abounds with a style that preceded Bill Monroe. He gets caught up in a power struggle between two powerful leaders, a vacationing wife goes missing, and a strange feral girl haunts the woods.

Change is coming and only the night wind knows what part Rob will play when the last leaf falls. The novel is eerie, unworldly, haunting, and mesmerizing.

Deborah Blake says

This book is a treasure; a feast for mind and heart and soul. Vibrant, lyrical, and filled with the beauty of music and the wildness of the mountains--as well as the harsh realities of living amid a strange people who are both more and less than human. It is the ultimate modern fairy tale. Its spirit will resonate in my bones long after the specific words have faded from memory. It may be a novel, but it is not a work of fiction. Just the opposite, for it contains the essence of all that is real and true about life. Including, of course, a difficult,

believable, and satisfying tale of love.

And don't let my babbling admiration for this book (and its author) mislead you. This is also simply a rousing good story, which will grab you on page one and not let you go until you reach the end.

Five stars and a round of applause for Alex Bledsoe. This is his best book yet. (And that's really saying something.)

Jane says

Casually picked up at the "new books" section at the library. Enthralling story and fascinating characters. A bluegrass musician, Rob, grief-stricken after the death of his girlfriend, is told by another musician to go to a certain town in Tennessee in the Smokies and to search for a particular song, that it would heal his broken heart and it would "*be on a hill, carved in stone.*" So he sets out on his quest. The inhabitants of the small town, the Tufa, are a closed eccentric society: magical and musical. They are suspicious of outsiders, and even sinister. The book is a combination of fantasy/mystery with even a whiff of horror. A girl has been cursed and becomes feral. If by the time the last leaf falls from what the villagers call the Widow's Tree, she will become a *wisp of a thing*. Rob searches for the song and becomes involved in the politics of the town, uncovering secrets long hidden and rousing the animosity of some of the inhabitants. The novel becomes a race against time.

This novel was not my usual reading material, but I couldn't tear myself away. The author based his fictional insular society on one actually existing in the Appalachians: the Melungeons and their legends.

Neil says

I usually find contemporary fantasy a little hokey or at least find it harder to suspend disbelief while reading it than in historical fantasy or secondary world fantasy. But while reading this, my only thought was that I should never have waited so long to revisit the world of the Tufa. Mixing mountain music and family feuds with the traditions of the faerie world is spot on. Bledsoe handles characters well too. This story of a singing show contestant turned into tragic figure in the public eye sucked me in from the start. He retreats to the mountain country in search of a mythical song that might help him find solace but he's digging into dangerous territory that threatens the dark faerie faction.

I will have to move forward to book three with less delay. This is an author that more people should be reading. Recommended for fantasy fans, romantics, music lovers and mountain culture fans.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

I'm currently listening through every book in the Tufa series before I start reading *The Fairies of Sadieville*, the latest book in the series that will be published in April. I'm right on the fifth book, the one before *The Fairies of Sadieville*, so I'm sure I will get to *The Fairies of Sadieville* before the pub.date!

In the first book of the Tufa series, *The Hum and the Shiver* are we introduced to the strange people that live in the Smoky Mountains. The Tufas is said to have been there before the Native Americans arrived in the

United States and this book gives more clues to what they really are...

Musician Rob Quillen comes to Cloud County, Tennessee looking for a special song that will take away his heartache. But, he gets more than he bargains for when he gets caught up in a power struggle between two different groups of Tufas. For the people on the outside of the community is the Tufas one group of similar looking people, but there has been a power between those that follow Rockhouse Hicks and those that follow Mandalay Harris for a long time. And in the woods a wisp of a thing, a feral girl is running screaming, for when the last leaf falls from the Widow's Tree, then the curse that has made what she is will finally be the end of her...

We were introduced to Bliss Overbay in the first book that starred Bronwyn Hyatt, the war heroine (a great book as well, read it). In this book, however, is Bronwyn taking a step back and it's Bliss time to be in the center as she tries to figure out how Rob Quillen can see things only a true Tufa can see. I found this book to be an absolute delight to listen to, just like the first book. As a big fan of urban fantasy, do I love the Tufa people that have so many interesting secrets. And, I love how this book gives away some more secrets about them. Also, the storyline about the wisp of a thing is so heartbreaking.

I recommend this series warmly!

Jalilah says

Not bad! I like this one much more than the first in the series *The Hum and the Shiver*. There are no romance type sex scenes. The setting is as all the Tuffa books in the Appalachian mountains and as always, music plays an important role. I'd recommend this to people who like Urban fantasy with a more artistic bend!

bookczuk says

Music, magic, broken hearts -- the thing country music is made of. In this case, though, it is to cope with one, that makes singer/songwriter Rob Quillen head to Cloud County. He was a contestant on a talent search TV show, who very publicly, very tragically, experienced the death of his sweetheart. He heads to mountains in search of a song he's heard of which will ease his heart, erase the pain. What he finds instead are the Tufa, a people who predate earliest settlers, and who may, or may not (must most likely may) have faerie blood in them, either diluted or full. As Rob begins his search for words written in stone, he encounters locals, many of whom are none too happy to have him in their town. He also attracts the attentions of a feral girl who prowls the area. At the same time, another visitor to the area has gone missing.

When I read the first book in this series of Bledsoe's, *The Hum and the Shiver*, I really liked it. I was out in search of the next book that my book club is reading, but saw this on the shelf of new arrivals, and grabbed it with glee. Bledsoe didn't disappoint. Nor did he make this a sequel, though some characters have cameos in this book from the last. Instead, it is another tale of the Tufas, and has made me a happy reader.

Barbara says

Whoa, my second Tufa book. I fall into these books like slipping into a deep pool in a forest. It's quiet as only a deep forest can, and magic...its all around.

Final rating: 3.75

I'm afraid I may becoming obsessed with the Tufa. Book 2 and it was almost as good as Book 1, there were just a few places where I felt dialog didn't ring quite to true and grated on me. But the setting, Appalachia, the people of Cloud County and magic and the music. With this book I could swear I heard the music of the Tufa.

Albert says

The Tufa, first brought to us in Alex Bledsoe's terrific novel *The Hum And The Shiver*, are back in *Wisp Of A Thing*. Legend says that when the first white men made it to the Smoky Mountains the Tufa were already there. When the first tribes of nomads crossed from Asia into the Americans to become the native culture, the Tufa were there.

In *Wisp of a Thing* we find out even more who the Tufa are and the clan war that is tearing them apart. Central to this tale is the wild young girl roaming the woods and how her history ties the two clans together and will also tear them asunder.

"I'm just tired of finding that girl in my Dumpster," she snapped. "Get it stopped, or I'll stop it for you." In a drawl so slow, it seemed to suspend time, the old man said, "When the last leaf falls from the Widow's Tree this year, she'll be done for good. No coming back. No bothering anyone no more. Nobody'll find her bones, and before next spring, nobody'll even remember her. She'll be a wisp of a thing."

Rob Quillen comes to Cloud County in search of the Tufa, in search of a song to heal his grief. A minor celebrity known more for the tragedy of his life than the music he plays, he is searching for a promised song of the Tufa that will heal his broken heart. But the songs of the Tufa are only for the Tufa and not outsiders. Bliss Overbay is a first daughter of the Tufa and protector of her clan until the young clan leader can come of age. She sees Rob as an outsider but soon comes to realize that he may become central to healing the Tufa people and saving their race from its own self destruction. That Rob and the girl in the woods may tie the future of the Tufa together and save them all from the future she sees so clearly coming toward them. But can she help Rob find the song to sing.

Can they do it before the last leaf falls? Before the Tufa are destroyed by a mad king? Before Rob losses himself completely. Before the lost girl just becomes a wisp of a thing.

Christine says

2.5 stars... This second book in Alex Bledsoe's "Tufa" series was interesting, and gave us more of an entry into the world, magic, and music of the Tufa people. This "urban fantasy" series, which I think of more as "rural fantasy," is very character-driven. The characterizations are what hold the story together, in my opinion, as the plot threads do not all quite connect. However, I experienced a growing dislike of the main character, a musician and troubled outsider named Rob, and that took away some of the enjoyment. Though his quest to find a "healing song" was relatable, his nasty temper was never fully explained. The lead Tufa characters, such as Bliss, Curnen, Mandalay, and even Rockaway, were more fun to get to know. There were also more revelations about the clans' "historical" fairy beginnings.

*** The character Bliss Overbay, first introduced in book one, has a major role in this sequel. The author, Alex Bledsoe, gives us several strong women in this tale, including Bliss. She is initially portrayed as a

competent leader, a sort of "regent" for her side of the clans. There's an interesting split between her private 'human' life and its concerns, and her less-frequent public appearances as a mesmerizing singer. She is still somewhat of a mystery, and while she also uses her (unexplained) magic infrequently, it is clearly powerful stuff. However: once Rob's motivations become the driving force in the plot, there are times when Bliss responds almost subserviently. For example, "fearing" his anger, when previously she'd threatened to take his life. Her potency in her role as a leader completely devolved, in unbelievable ways, as Rob's choices took over the plot.

There are too many other characters to go into detail about, here, but some I hope to see more of, in book three.

Spoiler Alert AND Trigger Warning, to follow:

In one thread of the plot, a side character named Stoney was basically a serial sexual-abuser with a magical ability to draw women to him: this created a base for a certain plot element, but also angered me, in that nothing was done to stop him, and his actions were virtually tolerated by most characters. Yes, this is a fantasy series, and fiction stories are pretend. Bad things happen. The best fairytales have darkness and a touch of violence. But with a realistic, present-day setting, I wanted him to be stopped. Instead, when one of the most admirable characters has a chance to do so, she instead makes a choice that will keep the Tufa hidden and together, but will also continue the status quo. At this point, I examined this mainly admirable character's overall actions throughout the book, and found them inconsistent: too often based on what was required to keep the plot rolling, rather than on what her character's established personality (as a sort of guardian) would cause her to do. I was disappointed by what I felt was unrealistic in the theme of the tale, and angered by the casual attitude toward rape.

*** I should add that there are thankfully no graphic descriptions, at the very least.

There were some other generalizations about "hillbillies" and "mountain people" that also began to become annoying. I understand that the author is from West Tennessee himself, and feels entitled to characterize a group that he finds familiar, even while adding in his own fae theme. Nonetheless, in this tale, the majority of the hillbilly bad guys were overweight, or cooking meth, or had a 'heavy' or 'bony' brow and chewing tobacco stains down the front of their denim overalls (*** while in human form). In contrast, the good hillbillies were thin and attractive, and they dressed a tad better. Also, it was obvious that in this close-to-a-fairytale world, clear demarcations were needed between Good and Evil. It was just that these demarcations became too stereotypical when the hillbilly element was over-emphasized.

I suppose it comes down to many of the subtleties having been lost that were present in the first book. Bledsoe's debut Tufa book, *The Hum and the Shiver*, had a yearning, aching, grieving feeling, somewhat similar to *Winter's Bone* (by Daniel Woodrell), that was lost in this second book, *Wisp of a Thing*. I do plan to read the next Tufa book, whose blurb sounds promising, and possibly continue after that. I hope to rediscover some of the gritty magic from the *The Hum and the Shiver*, with far fewer of the things that annoyed me personally.

*** Edited later in the day: downgraded from 3 stars to 2.5, because the longer I reflect, this tale disappointed me far more than it entertained me. Certain comments added at the asterisks.

Astrid says

What a ride! While the first book in this series was good but didn't blow me away... this one did. I finished it in the early hours of the morning and can't wait to continue with book three. There is just something very

cool to find a series with so many books already published - I'm going to live in this world for several more books now.

What I really appreciate is that there is romance included but the romances are not sweet. They are real and don't take the limelight; something I hate when I want to read a fantasy story.

I'd give this book a 4.3 rating and a shout out to my urban fantasy readers friends - go and read that series.

Tiara says

More reviews @ The BiblioSanctum

Rob Quillen is a musician known for being one of the final contestants on a reality show called *So You Think You Can Sing?* Despite that, Rob really isn't one of those fifteen minute fame types and really loves music. After the tragic death of his girlfriend in a plane crash, he's directed by a mysterious stranger to go to Cloud County, Tennessee where he'll learn a song that will mend broken hearts. Rob is not a Tufa, but is often mistaken as one because of his looks, which he attributes to being part Filipino. As strange as the stranger's words are to him, Rob travels to Needsville in search of this musical balm for his soul. He's not sure if he believes he'll find it, but he needs something to take his mind off his tragedy and get him away from people who know his face. What he finds in Needsville is mystery, an ages old power struggle, and secrets that could change the Tufa forever. Caught in the middle of this all is the sister of one the First Daughters, a feral Tufa woman who roams the woods.

This second book proved to be much more political in terms of how the Tufa live and what their future holds. As I mentioned in the last book, despite most people thinking the Tufa are all one people, they are actually two factions who are vying for power. The true villain of these books—who is actually both father and villain, in a sense—has his plots revealed more. Unlike the two villains of the last book, there's more depth to this character and his villainy. His presence means more to the Tufa people, and his possible demise also leaves all the Tufa in a state of flux, wondering what will happen to them if he ceases to exist. This book explores the depths of cruelty and how deep hatred can run, even for those people should protect and love. Bledsoe plays around with some interesting lore and ideas where the Tufa are concerned, and I've enjoyed seeing where he takes their story.

I can't stress enough that these are not pretty, flowery books. There's plenty of violence and language. Life in the mountains is hard, even for the Tufas. Because there's more focus on finding out who and what the Tufa are, you don't get as many snatches of random songs as in the last book instead you get more portents and history, especially the history of where this bad blood comes from. However, the songs you do get in this book tell stories just as powerful as the last, and you get longer, fleshed out musical tales, which makes up for it because it probably all evens out in the end. Beauty is expressed in their music, but still there's so much tragedy in it, as well, expressing the ordeals and hardships of the Tufa life.

I did listen to this one nearly the whole way through this time, but I was able to better pay attention this time even with Rudnicki's deep, lulling voice. I think it helped tremendously that there was only one narrator for this book instead of having various breaks in the story as the narrator changes. That works for some stories, but this definitely benefited from only having one narrator. Still no singing, though, so if you're interested in these books because you expect to get some off-key narrator singing, don't bother. The verses are chanted, which is probably the best deal for the narrator and readers alike.

These books do an amazing job of being very accessible to new readers and acting as standalones. Sure, the

same characters show up, but Bledsoe provides an amazing amount of context to what they mean to the story, even down to having some passages read almost exactly the same from the previous books. You won't get lost regardless of which book you start with it seems, but for even more context about the Tufa, I'm sure you should get around to reading the first book at some point as the politics seem to be becoming a larger focal point now than in the first book where it was only beginning to burgeon, even though you know something's simmering underneath the surface.

I wasn't supremely happy with the wording of the very last line of the ending or the "epilogue" type thing that follows, especially depending on how the next story goes as far as that "epilogue" goes. Rob could sometimes come off as a "special snowflake" since he is definitely not Tufa. I liked that he didn't learn that somewhere on his great-great-great grandmother's side he had a Tufa relative, but there were times when things were just a little too convenient for Rob. Also, it would've been nice to learn more about Rob and his anger issues. I did like that, even though Rob wasn't Tufa, he had the music in his soul and didn't need that qualifier to make him a musician who had music in his bones. I found this story just as engaging as the first as more of the Tufa's true nature comes to light. This also means that the story becomes more whimsical as readers learn more truths about the Tufa people. Whether you prefer the more grounded magical realism of the first book or the magical realism blended with magical fantasy of this one will totally be up to you as the reader. I enjoyed both. Side note: A painting mentioned in both this book and the prior book is a real painting. I had to go stare at it a while on Wikipedia.
