SOFTWARE & TECH

The Blue Sword By Robin Mckinley

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An Enduring Classic: Rediscovering The Blue Sword By Robin McKinley

In the vast landscape of young adult fantasy literature, few novels have achieved the quiet, persistent longevity of **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley**. First published in 1982, this novel has captivated generations of readers with its blend of desert adventure, quiet romance, and a heroine who earns her power through grit and grace rather than prophecy or birthright. For those who have yet to step into the dusty, windswept world of Damar—and for those who wish to return—this deep dive explores why **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley**remains a cornerstone of the fantasy genre.

The World of Damar: A Land of Sand and Sorcery

One of the most compelling aspects of **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley**is the richly imagined setting of Damar. McKinley crafts a world that feels both ancient and immediate. The homeland of the Homelander colonists, with its tidy farms and predictable seasons, stands in stark contrast to the sprawling, untamed desert of the Hillfolk. This dichotomy is not merely geographical; it is cultural and magical. The desert hums with a latent power, a current of magic known as the "kelar" that flows through the land and its rightful rulers. McKinley does not bog the reader down with thick paragraphs of exposition. Instead, she reveals Damar slowly, through the eyes of her protagonist, allowing the reader to discover the beauty and danger of the desert alongside her. The heat, the vastness, the sudden storms, and the quiet dignity of the Hillfolk all contribute to a setting that feels like a character in its own right.

Introducing Harry Crewe: The Reluctant Heroine

The heart of **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley** is Angharad Crewe, known to everyone as Harry. Orphaned and sent to the remote outpost of Istan to live with her brother, Harry is a classic outsider. She does not fit into the rigid social structure of the Homelanders. She is too tall, too quiet, and too fond of riding across the plains alone. McKinley masterfully avoids the trope of the "chosen one" who immediately takes up a sword with practiced ease. Harry is awkward, lonely, and unsure of her place in the world. Her journey is not about discovering that she was always powerful; it is about discovering that she *can*become powerful through determination, adaptability, and a willingness to embrace the unknown. This makes her one of the most relatable and beloved heroines in fantasy. Readers do not admire Harry because she is perfect; they admire her because she is real.

A Plot Woven with Destiny and Choice

The narrative of **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley**unfolds with the measured pace of an epic, yet it never feels slow. The story begins when Harry is kidnapped—or, more accurately, "claimed"—by Corlath, the king of the Hillfolk. This is not a tale of a damsel in distress. Corlath takes Harry because the magic of the kelar compels him. He senses something in her, a spark of the old power that the Hillfolk revere. Initially resistant and proud, Harry soon finds herself immersed in a culture that values strength, honor, and a connection to the land. She learns to ride the fierce desert horses, to fight with the curved, deadly sword that gives the book its name, and to listen to the whispers of magic that surround her. The central conflict arises when the demonic Northerners threaten to invade Damar. Harry, now called "Harimad-sol" or "Harry, sword-solver," must decide whether to stand with her new people

or return to the safety of the Homelanders. The climax is a sweeping, desperate battle against overwhelming odds, a sequence that McKinley writes with visceral clarity and emotional weight.

The Significance of the Blue Sword Itself

In many fantasy stories, a magical weapon is simply a tool of power. In **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley**, the sword is a symbol of heritage, responsibility, and belonging. Forged from a metal that glows with a cold blue light, the sword is an artifact of the legendary Damarian kings and queens of old. When Harry first touches it, she is overwhelmed by visions and a surge of kelar. The sword does not grant her power; it connects her to a lineage of rulers who shaped the land. It is a burden as much as a gift. McKinley uses the sword to explore the idea that true leadership is not about domination but about stewardship. Harry must learn to control the sword, not be controlled by it. This nuance elevates **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley**above simpler tales of magical artifacts. The sword is a test of character, and Harry passes that test not by force of will, but by learning humility and respect for the power she wields.

Themes That Resonate Across Generations

Why has **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley**endured for over four decades? The answer lies in its timeless themes.

- Identity and Belonging: Harry struggles with where she belongs. She is not truly a Homelander, but she is not born a Hillfolk either. Her journey is about creating a third space for herself, a place where she can be both. This resonates deeply with young readers who often feel caught between different worlds.
- Cultural Understanding: The novel handles the clash of cultures with surprising subtlety. The Homelanders are not evil, just ignorant. The Hillfolk are not savages, just different. Harry learns to bridge this gap, respecting both traditions while forging her own path.
- Inner Strength vs. Outer Power: The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley repeatedly emphasizes that true strength comes from within. Harry is physically overtaken by the kelar at first, but she slowly learns to master it through discipline and self-awareness.
- Friendship and Loyalty: The bonds Harry forms—with the wise woman Luthe, the fierce king Corlath, and even the horses she rides—are central to the story. These relationships are earned, not given, and they provide the emotional core of the novel.

A Writing Style That Whispers and Roars

Robin McKinley's prose is often described as "lush" or "dense," and these descriptions are accurate. She writes in long, flowing sentences that pull the reader into Harry's internal world. However, this style is not without its critics. Some readers find the pacing slow in the middle sections of **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley**. Yet, this deliberate pace is a feature, not a bug. McKinley takes the time to let the desert and its magic seep into the reader's consciousness. The action scenes, when they come, are all the more powerful for the quiet that precedes them. McKinley has a gift for sensory detail. You can feel the grit of sand, the heat of the sun, and the cool weight of the blue sword in Harry's hand. This immersive quality is why many readers return to **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley** year after year; it is not just a story you read, but a world you inhabit.

Comparing to Its Prequel: The Hero and the Crown

No discussion of **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley** is complete without mentioning its predecessor, *The Hero and the Crown*. While **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley** was published first, it is technically a sequel, set generations after the events of *The Hero and the Crown*. That novel tells the story of Aerin, the legendary queen of Damar whose bloodline carries the kelar. Reading *The Hero and the Crown* after **The Blue Sword by Robin**

McKinley enriches the experience, providing context for the magic and history that Harry discovers. Aerin is a more fiery, impulsive heroine compared to Harry's steady pragmatism. Both books stand alone beautifully, but together they form a diptych that explores different facets of heroism. Fans of **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley** often find equal joy in Aerin's story, creating a small but perfect universe within McKinley's bibliography.

Critical Reception and Lasting Legacy

Upon its release, **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley** was met with widespread acclaim. It won the Newbery Honor in 1983, a prestigious award that solidified its place in children's literature. Critics praised its strong female protagonist and its original fantasy setting at a time when the genre was often dominated by medieval European tropes. Over the years, **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley** has been cited by countless authors as an inspiration. It paved the way for other quiet, introspective fantasy heroines who rely on wit and will rather than magical destiny. The novel has never gone out of print, a testament to its enduring appeal. In an age of sprawling fantasy series with grimdark themes, the compact, hopeful story of **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley**offers a refreshing and grounding reading experience.

Why It Matters Today

In a modern publishing landscape saturated with high-stakes, fast-paced fantasy, the measured and thoughtful approach of **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley** feels almost radical. It demands patience from the reader but rewards that patience with a deeply satisfying emotional arc. The novel handles themes of colonization and cultural exchange with a sensitivity that remains relevant today. Harry does not "civilize" the Hillfolk; they civilize her. She learns from them, adapts to their ways, and finds her strength within their framework. This subversion of the classic "white savior" narrative makes **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley**a surprisingly progressive novel for its time. For young readers today, Harry Crewe remains a powerful role model: a girl who is brave not because she is fearless, but because she acts in spite of her fear.

Conclusion: A Sword Worth Lifting

Reading **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley** is an act of quiet discovery. It is a book that does not shout for attention but earns it through the sheer power of its craft. From the sun-scorched plains of Damar to the quiet determination of its heroine, every element of this novel has been carefully and lovingly constructed. It is a story about finding your home, claiming your power, and learning to wield a legacy with both hands. Whether you are a long-time fan returning to a familiar friend or a new reader seeking a classic fantasy experience, **The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley**awaits. It is a novel that reminds us that the most powerful magic is often the quiet kind—the magic of belonging, of courage, and of a heart willing to try.

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