



Water

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Seven tales describe magical beings that inhabit our waters. Some are familiar mer-people; some as strange as a golden eye in a pool at the edge of the Great Desert Kalarsham, where the mad god Geljdreth rules; or the unknowable, immense Kraken, dark beyond the darkness of the deepest ocean, who will one day rise and rule the world.

1 Prologue: The water sprite / Robin McKinley and Peter Dickinson

2 Mermaid song / Peter Dickinson --

3 The sea-king's son / Robin McKinley --

4 Sea serpent / Peter Dickinson --

5 Water horse / Robin McKinley --

6 Kraken / Peter Dickinson --

7 A pool in the desert / Robin McKinley.

Water Details

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Krista says

This was an odd little book of short stories that are only barely connected by the theme of water.

I didn't particularly like them. Not because they weren't interesting and well written but because they were just too short. I've never been much of a short story fan, they usually leave me feeling as if something is missing. I want more. If a story is interesting enough to grip me for 15 minutes then it's interesting enough to grip me for an entire novel. If it is interesting and then ends after 15 minutes I just feel cheated.

There were a couple of stories that were interesting. The first story was obviously an alternate reality of the Pilgrims, it was okay. I enjoyed the Sea King's Son, it was fun and complete in and of itself, but most of the others that I enjoyed left me with this empty feeling of wanting more. I quite liked Water Horse. I want to know more about the Guardians and what they do. I liked that particular world and a tiny novella wasn't near enough to satisfy me.

I did rather enjoy the short trip back to Damar though. Damar has a special place in my heart and has had ever since I was 14 and my eighth grade teacher recommended the Hero and the Crown and the Blue Sword to me. I'm 32 years old, I still re-read those books every year. I am always willing to read any scrap about that world, but the others...meh.

Maureen E says

by Robin McKinley and Peter Dickinson

This is the first in a planned series called Elementals, all consisting of short stories by Dickinson and McKinley.* The second, Fire, has just come out.** So, naturally, I decided it was time for a re-read.

Overall, I really enjoyed the book. While the opening story, "Mermaid Song" by Dickinson did bother me slightly (it all seemed very expected, somehow--repressive society, child rebelling against said society, etc., etc.), the second story "The Sea King's Son" by McKinley was in the best fairy-tale-but-not-quite tradition (note some content in this one, although it's not very explicit). "The Sea Serpent" confused me, to be honest--I never quite grasped the intricacies of landscape or society. "Water Horse" was nice, especially in its deviation from the normal fairy-tale-ish ending. "Kraken" was intriguing and had some lovely images. "A Pool in the Desert" was welcome as a return to Damar (for those of you who may not be aware of the fact, I read *The Blue Sword* ten times between 7th and 8th grade). I liked it, although I was jarred by the references to our authors, which seemed out of place somehow--they located me a little too firmly in reality.

There is a re-issued edition with a new cover and introduction, but I couldn't find it anywhere online, so I'll just have to wait and buy it eventually.

* they're married

** and what's with the overly-similar titles this year? There's *Catching Fire*, by Suzanne Collins; *Fire*, by Kristin Cashore; and *Fire*, by McKinley and Dickinson. I give McKinley and Dickinson a pass because they've had this book coming out for years.

Book source: Inter-library loan

Robin McKinley's website [and blog, if you are a fan and didn't know:]

Peter Dickinson's website

Terri says

“Water” is another collection of stories, this time by Robin and her husband Peter Dickinson. Each contributed three stories, all based around the element of water. (They’ve also released “Fire”, which will be coming to paperback on 9.7.10; I haven’t read it, but I will.)

In “Mermaid Song” by Peter, Pitiabe Nasmith lives with her grandparents on a farm. Before she dies, Pitiabe’s grandmother tells her the story of Charity Goodrich, who came over to the New World and was on the ship that sank before reaching the shore. Charity was saved by two children of the sea people, and the tale of her encounter has been passed down among her daughters and their daughters for many generations. Pitiabe, down by the shore one day with her grandfather, sees splashing in a tide pool, and upon investigation, finds her own sea-child.

“The Sea-King’s Son” by Robin begins, as many fairy tales do, with a betrothal gone wrong. Jenny falls in love with Robert, who loves her only for the farm she will inherit, and she finds him in the stable with another girl. Devastated and betrayed, she sets foot on a bridge that no land people are allowed to set foot upon, due to an old grudge held by the sea people against the land people. The sea-king takes pity on her, and she returns many weeks later to thank him. She is met instead by his son, Dreiad, and her broken heart begins to mend.

I did not read the next two tales by Peter Dickinson, not being able to get into them. This could also be because my typical reading situation is in the quiet of my apartment, and I’m currently on vacation, surrounded by my family, one of whom is an extremely loud 15-month-old.

“Water Horse” by Robin introduces a land protected by Guardians and their magic. Tamia, under-appreciated and disliked by her stepfather, is lifted from her mundane life to become the apprentice of the Western Mouth (a Guardian). Her Guardian falls deathly sick only five years into her apprenticeship, and Tamia’s attempt at a magical call for help unleashes a creature of water who may destroy the world.

“A Pool in the Desert” by Robin does something that all Robin’s fans have been longing for: it returns us to Damar. Hetta has laid aside her own dreams to take care of her unappreciative family, and travels to Damar in her dreams. She meets Zasharan, a Watcher in the desert hundreds of years after the reign of Aerin and Tor. She lives in the Homeland during the day, and dreams of the Damarian desert by night. Having fallen in love with Zasharan, she must find a way to propel herself into the past and into legend.

<http://starlightbookreviews.wordpress...>

Brad says

A collection of short stories about creatures of the deep. I didn't realize until just before writing this review, however, that the authors are husband and wife--pretty cool. Each contributes three stories, and overall I think I liked Dickinson's better. If I had to rate just the McKinley pieces, I'd probably just give it two stars. Sea Serpent and Kraken were my two favorite stories. I liked it well enough that I'll probably read the next one in the series, which has a theme of fire.

I thought it was interesting that none of the main characters (except one) came from a function family. Sad, but I guess it fits the "fairy tale" genre.

-Mermaid Song: Loved the ending, but had a heartbreaking middle.

-The Sea-King's Son: Enjoyed some of the elements of the story, but a little gushier than I like.

-Sea Serpent: Perhaps my favorite story of the compilation. Scary monsters, adventure, magic... this one had it all.

-Water Horse: My favorite of McKinley's--interesting ideas of the guardians and how their magic works.

-Kraken: Good story, archetypal facing of the unknown. It worked out in the end a little better than I would have expected, but I was expecting more Lovecraft and less Disney.

-A Pool in the Desert: This was just weird. Sucky home life for the main character who has crazy parents, enough that I can understand her desire to leave. But I didn't really get why she formed such an attachment for where she was headed (nothing particularly good there for her) and the pacing in the last two pages was so much faster than earlier that it threw me off. McKinley's total shift of momentum left me feeling slightly confused and unhappy about the ending. She should have just cut out one or two paragraphs, or fleshed them out to a few pages worth.

Rating: PG-13, for some mild sexuality.

Carola Garam says

Some of the short stories are clearly better than others. I hadn't read Peter Dickinson's work and I really liked two of his stories (I honestly got too confused with "Sea Serpent"), so I'll be looking for some of his books this year. My favorite by far, however, was McKinley's "The Pool in the Desert", which took me right back to the wonderful Damar in a way I did not expect.

Rachel says

2.5 stars

First story, ok but not a big fan. Expected more about the merfolk. Second was good, albeit predictable. Still nice story. Third couldn't get into. Fourth, struggled. Fifth (Kraken) was excellent. Wish there was more of this world. Sixth, I haven't read the blue sword so the excitement was lost upon me.

Overall, I don't think I'll continue with this elemental spirits series.

Sesana says

A collection of six stories themed around water, written well but not exactly connecting with me. The Sea King's Son was easily my favorite, with its sweet, earnest romance. I feel very sure that I've read this before elsewhere, but can't think of where. It didn't matter, I still liked reading it. The rest of the stories just weren't for me. But then, I'm not a big fan of Robin McKinley, so it's not really surprising.

Elfear says

I couldn't bear to give it any lower than 4. I think it deserves a 3++.

List of stories:

Mermaid Song (Dickinson)
The Sea King's Son (McKinley)
Sea Serpent (Dickinson)
Water Horse (McKinley)
Kraken (Dickinson)
A Pool in the Desert (McKinley)

All the stories were pretty cool. But the last one most of all!

I absolutely fell in love with A Pool in the Desert. My favourite story in this collection, by far. The contrast was spectacular. The writing was masterful. McKinley jolted me out of a grey, tedious, sad, everyday life to one of spice, splendour and suspense. (ooh, alliteration) (okay, maybe not so much the suspense) At any rate, I thought the way she explored reality vs fantasy and how you can step out and into either to be fantastic. Zasharan sounds really (ahem) cool. I loved how it ended.

Coming in second is Water Horse and Kraken, which makes McKinley my preferred author for this book, not that it really matters, but I saw some other reviewers doing it, so...

I felt that the magic in Water Horse wasn't well explained. Yes, i understand that this is a short story, but I really don't get how it works! It kind of messes with me. I like/need to know stuff like that.

For any fan of McKinley/Dickinson, or for any lover of fantasy, or for any person looking for masterful short stories.

Oh, and I realised afterward A Pool in the Desert was set in Damar, which was the same for the Blue Sword. I did read The Blue Sword, but very long ago, and I didn't really enjoy it.

Amy says

It's really hard to rate short story collections, because each individual story is different. So rather than my usual rating header, I'm going to break this down by story. There are six stories in this collection, all centered around water (sort of). Three are by Robin McKinley (woo!) and three by her husband, Peter Dickinson (meh). As you can see from the below, I much preferred McKinley's stories. In book order, they all are:

1. Mermaid Song by Peter Dickinson: (3/5) This wasn't a bad story. It was the typical girl in a repressed society/family, struggling to get free. Only her family had a secret about mermaids that had been passed along to her, and she ends up discovering and freeing a caught young female mermaid, which makes her father mad and finally gets her moved to a better home. It was a good story but I would have liked it more if she and the mermaid had gotten together, I dunno... they had these moments where they kissed and it was really sweet and I think it would have been a nice subversion.

2. The Sea King's Son by Robin McKinley: (4/5) This one was very fairytale-esque, which Robin McKinley always does amazingly well. Again the story was a bit predictable, you could see where it would end up but it was still a very good read. I liked the little romance and how they ended up able to be together.

3. Sea Serpent by Peter Dickinson: (2/5) Ugh. I mean the writing was fine, but I'm not the kind of person who is gonna want to read about some all-male religion coming in to basically ruin this all-female religion by stealing their magical standing stones and defeating their Goddess and getting away with it, no thanks. Even if the magic was interesting.

4. Water Horse by Robin McKinley: (5/5) This story SHOULD HAVE BEEN A FULL BOOK, wow, I would have loved to read an entire book about Tamia. This little story was about an island at the mercy of the sea, and the Guardians who help keep the water at bay. Tamia is under-appreciated (of course) and then becomes a Guardian and it was just really wonderful but I didn't want it to end. I wanted it to be a lot more.

5. The Kraken by Peter Dickinson: (4/5) My favorite of his three stories, this story is about a mermaid princess who sees two star-crossed lovers jump off a ship because they'd rather die together than be killed or separated by the pirates. The moment is so beautiful that she tries to save them, but that shining moment of love catches the attention of a Kraken, who shakes the mermaid city until she brings the two lovers (who the Kraken has in a sort of suspended animation) down to him so he can capture the moment. It was really beautiful and well done.

6. A Pool in the Desert by Robin McKinley: (5/5) A return to the world of Damar from The Blue Sword! I was so excited, even if it was only tangentially related. Hetta is another unhappy daughter (that's a theme but I like it) who travels to Damar's past in her dreams, to the time of Aerin and Tor where she meets Zasharan, a Watcher she falls in love with. Her sister finally convinces her that she needs to do what she needs to do, to do something for herself because she's given up everything for her family, and her spirit lives in that Damarian desert in the past. She ends up going through the little pond in her backyard and propelling herself into the past (it's a really well-written scene) to be with Zasharan. I especially love the ending, with her sister looking her up and finding legends about her sister and herself.

Overall average rating: 3.8 out of 5, rounded to 4.

Kristen Coffin says

"I believe there is no other place like it in all the wide world, though there must be other places just as strange. It is our strangeness to be a threshold between land and water; and the boundary between us is striven for, and fought over, and it shifts sometimes this way, and sometimes that."

Mermaids, krakens, and water horses, oh my! A really cool collection of stories based on an element rather than any specific creature.

"The Kraken" and "A Pool in the Desert" (bringing us back to Damar! yay!) are both fantastic. The best two stories in the whole set.

Althea Ann says

A fantasy collection based on the theme of sea magic, from husband & wife Peter Dickinson and Robin McKinley.

I'd say, as far as reading level, this book is probably aimed at young teens, but like classic fairytales, the stories are such as can be enjoyed by all... Young women striving against repressive environments is a recurring theme – hardly a new motif, but it's generally done effectively. The ending of the last story made me cry!

Mermaid Song – PD

A young girl in a strict, Puritan-type community is able to pay back a generations-old secret debt – and also escape her abusive home life.

The Sea-King's Son – RM

A young woman narrowly avoids marrying a man who does not love her – and finds a more magical future; in the process eliminating a curse that has lain on her village for years.

Sea Serpent – PD

A fantasy of the end of the times of the chthonic goddess, and her replacement by the gods of men, and their courage and ingenuity. A surprisingly non-strident voice is used to describe the men's theft of the standing stones of the goddess, and their heroic battle against the priestess' sea serpent.

Water Horse – RM

A young and unappreciated woman travels from her village to apprentice as a Guardian – one of the magicians who guards their island against the encroachment of the waves. Although unprepared and untried, her unconventional perspective may save her people.

Kraken – PD

A pair of illicit lovers jumps into the sea as a last resort... a young mermaid princess tries to save them, but the unknown kraken of the depths may take more than just the bodies of the drowned lovers...

A Pool in the Desert – RM

Set in the world of Damar (The Blue Sword, The Hero & the Crown). A young woman in a restrictive family environment has been having vivid dreams of a vibrant desert land... it seems real, but when she looks up

names and places on the Internet and in the encyclopedia, the nomenclature is out of long-ago legend and myth. Will she have to give up on her dreams and settle for obeying her father and keeping the accounts for his dreary shop?

Ruth says

Damar! Damar Damar Damar. Damar and a character named Ruth. Damar!

So, yes, this collection had a new Damar story which I loved, but I thought the collection as a whole was kind of erratic, but that is maybe partly due to the fact that I adore Robin McKinley and don't have the same reaction to Peter Dickinson. The three McKinley stories in the collection were my favorite, and I ended up skimming one of Dickinson's (The Sea Serpent) because I couldn't get into it. McKinley simply paints images in my head that refuse to go away, no matter how long it has been since I have read the story that sparked the painting.

Definitely worth reading if you love McKinley, and if you want to give the others a try, I think Mermaid Song is his strongest offering in the volume.

Miriam says

Six stories by married authors Peter Dickinson and Robin McKinley, to varying degrees themed around the element of water. Overall I liked McKinley's better (no surprise there), but Dickinson's "Kraken" was quite good too, making up for the dullness of his "Sea Serpent". The last three stories were better than the first three.

The final story, "Pool in the Desert," is set tangentially in the world of McKinley's Damar novels. It and Dickinson's first story, "Mermaid Song," both felt as if they would have been better as longer novellas. They also had in common that the role of water was not particularly essential to the story.

Jennifer Green says

Generally, the stories in this anthology were fine. I just wasn't overwhelmed by any of them. It's probably partially due to the evolution in my tastes, as there was a time I loved McKinley without question. In recent years, I've been more judgemental with her books. Pegasus nearly killed me to get through it.

So, the stories in this anthology were fine. I have never been a big fan of Dickinson, and the stories he wrote did nothing to turn me. Of the stories in the book he wrote, the first was probably the one I liked most. I found the others got into so much technical jargon about the subject matter that I was bored or confused. Yes, I assume you did your research about boats, but I'm quite happy to not share in that knowledge so can you edit out some of those "yawn" details and get to the story please?!

The McKinley stories were better, but even there, I wasn't dying to finish any. Of her stories, the Sea King's Son was the one I liked the best. The Damar story was the one I bought the book for and was most excited by when I bought the anthology, but it fell very flat for me. The time travel (or whatever it was - smelled of time

travel which my family knows I hate) and the fact that Damar figured very little in the story. It was just weird.

If you like McKinley and/or Dickinson this won't be a wash. But if you don't know either, not sure this is the piece to start with.

Samantha says

An escape to lovely worlds

These stories are just what I needed right now. I've been reading Robin McKinley's books for decades and she still gives them the best magic. I haven't read her husband's work before. His stories fit well.

Ascolta says

Rating extra low for disappointment. This might be - objectively - a three-star book. But *Water* makes me feel gross — or perhaps more accurately, Dickinson makes me feel gross.

The first story was a little off-putting for its fetishizing treatment of child abuse, the second was a fairly trite romance. The third seemed slightly interesting when it became clear that it was in an entirely different voice and vein, but ultimately devoted pages and pages to the gleeful take-down of female/serpent power by white male. Then all the women in the story (who communicate chiefly via freighted glance) come to a clam acceptance and bland forgiveness of the perpetrator of this rape. A delightfully Trumpist kind of story, indeed! Anyway, that's where I stopped with *Water*.

Having perused some other reviews in an effort to figure out which stories are by which author, I see the last story is set in Damar. Will possibly skip ahead. Will not be reading any more Dickinson.

Liv says

I'm a huge fan of the concepts these stories use, but not the biggest fan of the writing style. The undertone of magic is subtle, but pulling and helps to nudge the reader's curiosity along every step of the way.

Jen says

Ok, McKinley rant coming on. Holy crap!!! I am SO TIRED of the lily livered female character who is trapped in her life and literally dreams of something better. And WHAT is with her weird obsession with DESERT of all God forsaken things? It's SAND. It's DRY. It's DEADLY. It's NOT an amazing wonderland of romance and mystique.

Whew! Ok, done with my rant. Onto a proper review. My apologies.

This book is a collaboration between McKinley and her husband Peter Dickinson. His stories are much better than hers. But I digress.

"Mermaid Song" was very good. It really captured, for me, the life of a Puritan community. Pitiable was definitely pitiable, but she was a child at the mercy of a guardian who flipped his lid due to loss. It was realistic and the ending of the story fit.

"The Sea-King's Son" was good, but unsurprisingly predictable. Nothing wrong with that. It was a gentle, non-annoying read.

"Sea Serpent" was actually rather sad. The old yielding to the new. While the reader roots for Iril, you kind of hope he does it and that Mel will fall flat on his face. Or at least gets punched in it. Definitely an interesting juxtaposition between the characters.

"Water Horse" was ok. Tamia's five years went by very quickly, with little to show of what she had learned in those years. Meh.

"Kraken" was the best in the bunch. The sense of forboding and the build up of suspense was masterful and the ending was fantastic. It leaves the reader wanting more, but not in a bad way.

"A Pool in the Desert". Return to Damar, nuff said. If I never read about that dammed desert again, it'll be too soon. I skipped this one, but it still left a bad taste in my mouth, making this a four star book, solely on Dickinson's contributions, as I don't think I can read another word by McKinley, at least not soon, without wanting to hurl the book with extreme violence across the room. I will not attempt to re-read "Beauty" or "A Knot in the Grain" for a very long time, just in case those get ruined by my apparent anti-McKinley mood.

Dana Fraedrich says

This was the first time I've ever really read a short story collection, so it was a new and interesting experience for me. Each story is unique and (from what I can tell) takes place in an entirely different universe from the last. Going through each story was a little bit of a roller coaster, because one would leave me feeling really satisfied, and the next I wasn't so happy with, but then I loved the one after that! Whew! I need to lie down. And there's a really cool but simple artistic thing done at the beginning of each tale that I thought was a neat detail.

There was a lovely, quick way of indicating to the reader which author—Robin McKinley or Peter Dickinson—had penned the story that followed in the form of the graphic at the start of each tale. Overall, the writing was beautiful. Both writing styles are very similar. I don't know if that was intentional or not, but it did add a nice flow to the book on the whole. And I am absolutely in love with Robin McKinley's writing. She's been my favorite author for a long time now. Specifically, I didn't care for Sea Serpent. I didn't like the main god-priest character very much, and I liked the fact that he won in the end even less. On the flip side of that, I really liked The Sea-King's Son. If you're looking for a straight-up fairytale love story, that's your ticket. I appreciated that the protagonists' relationship develops without physical contact for a long time and just focused on talking and sharing and getting to know one another first. They're both very different, but they admire their differences and love one another for the people they are. Seriously, such a good love story. As much as I liked The Sea-King's Son, I absolutely adored The Water Horse! If you liked Uprooted by Naomi Novik (which is another fantastic book you should definitely read), allow me to unabashedly pull you towards McKinley's The Water Horse and place it in your hands. It's beautiful and sweet, and there's a strong thread of self-empowerment and community running through it.

I really enjoyed the experience of reading through this entire book, though. Each story is really different, and they're all incredibly well done. Now go read The Water Horse and Uprooted. :-)

Margaret says

Even when I admire Dickinson's stories, I don't love them in the visceral way I love McKinley's, so this collection is a little uneven for me. Of Dickinson's contributions, I like "Kraken" the most; of McKinley's...mmm, hard to say, because I love all three, but maybe "A Pool in the Desert", because it's partly set in Damar.
