



The Blue Witch: The Witches of Orkney, Book One

Alane Adams

Spark Press (Oct 23, 2018)

Softcover \$12.95 (216pp)

978-1-943006-77-9

An enchanting new book full of magical mischief and adventure, Alane Adams's The Blue Witch is guaranteed to please.

Witches are known for their cold hearts and dark powers, but one young orphan is destined to walk a different path. In Alane Adams's *The Blue Witch*, volume one in the lively new Witches of Orkney series, fantasy meets Norse mythology and the adventures are full of magic.

Her first year at Tarkana Witch Academy is not at all going as planned, but that's not unusual for nine-year-old Abigail, whose magic has always been different. She struggles to find her place. She wants to follow the witch's code, developing a heart "made of stone" and a soul "black as tar."

But then Abigail meets Hugo, a scientist-in-training from town, and Calla, a "glitch-witch" whose powers never manifested. Friendships don't come easily to witches, and Abigail makes quite a few mistakes, learning some important lessons about kindness, trust, and loyalty. There is a definite transformation as Abigail gains confidence in herself, her abilities, and her friends. When a bully's pranks and threats turn deadly, Abigail turns to her new friends for help. She also learns some surprising truths about her past.

The story is firmly entrenched in the Norse pantheon, its characters woven into Abigail's story in an entertaining, if loosely interpreted, way. It includes appearances from Odin and the seer goddess, Vör. But witchcraft takes center stage here, even with the myths' inclusion—as in the unique version of the tale of Rigel, a bright blue star that comes to earth in the shape of a man, whose story departs significantly from the Norse myths.

Beasts and creatures feature prominently, from poisonous shrieks and sharp-toothed rathos to the fierce Shun Kara wolves and the dragon-like Omera. Interspersed throughout, grayscale artwork by Jonathan Stroh illustrates every being—alongside pigtailed Abigail and her friends.

Elementary and middle grade readers will likely find some similarities between Harry Potter's class schedule and Abigail's. In addition to both being orphans who attend magical academies, they study up on potions, history, magical beasts, and spells while trying to avoid the dangerous attentions of class meanies and facing off against giant spiders. The all-girl Tarkana Academy, however, is a strikingly different institution.

In this prequel to the Legends of Orkney series, fans will recognize familiar names and places, from the mystical Balfour Island to the evil witch Endera. Still, this title does not require any prior background knowledge, and it can be enjoyed either before or after the Orkney adventures begin without fear of spoilers.

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PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (September 14, 2018)

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