



Swordheart

T. Kingfisher

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Halla is a housekeeper who has suddenly inherited her great-uncle's estate... and, unfortunately, his relatives. Sarkis is an immortal swordsman trapped in a prison of enchanted steel. When Halla draws the sword that imprisons him, Sarkis finds himself attempting to defend his new wielder against everything from bandits and roving inquisitors to her own in-laws... and the sword itself may prove to be the greatest threat of all.

Swordheart Details

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Author : T. Kingfisher

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From Reader Review Swordheart for online ebook

wanderer (Para) says

This book was so much fun.

Halla wanted to be the sort of person who yelled at her cousin and forced him to acknowledge that she had a choice in the matter. Unfortunately, it seemed that she was the sort of person who ran up the stairs to her bedchamber, grateful for the reprieve.

This was a depressing discovery.

Halla is a housekeeper. When her uncle dies and she inherits his estate, his relatives are not happy and lock her in her room, planning to marry her off to her cousin (with clammy hands). Planning to kill herself to escape them, she draws an old sword...and summons Sarkis who has been trapped inside.

What ensues is all sorts of fun adventures and witty banter. Halla, a Respectable Widow, has been underappreciated all her life, asks many questions, and often acts stupid to confuse people because “nobody kills stupid women” (depressing, perhaps, but...). Often to hilarious results. Sarkis is your typical grumpy warrior type, but their dynamic is great. The romance develops slowly and naturally over the course of the book and while it didn’t have the elements I prefer, I thought it was very well done.

On their quest to save Halla from her relatives, they also meet a gnole called Brindle and Zale, a nonbinary lawyer-priest. I really loved how casual their inclusion is. Their gender is never once an issue, and they’re just as awesome and fun to read about as the rest. This book also diverges from most fantasy in that pretty much all of the protagonists are middle-aged or older. So anyone looking for a change from the usual teenage or 20-something characters should probably give this a try.

Another thing I enjoyed is how uplifting it is. Halla is kind and thinks the best of everyone, to the point it often gets her in trouble. But she’s not stupid and in this story, kindness isn’t weakness or something to be looked down on.

The only thing that bothered me a bit is the depiction of her marriage with her previous husband who seems to have been asexual. It’s clear that it was more of a marriage of convenience than anything and that they weren’t a good match for each other, this is fine. But something about it rubbed me slightly the wrong way. It’s never explicitly “there’s something wrong with ace people”, but there’s a few little things. Sarkis saying his religion has no use for someone who can’t please their partner, “If he lived, I would burn his lands and sow the fields with salt for the indignity.”, how asexuality is never anything except a problem. It’s mostly limited to like three chapters fairly late on and not that major of a thing, and the book is awesome in other aspects, but I couldn’t really omit it.

Enjoyment: 4/5

Execution: 4/5

Recommended to: those looking for a quick uplifting read and books with older protagonists, romance fans
Not recommended to: those who dislike witty dialogue, and there’s acephobia

More reviews on my blog, [To Other Worlds](#).

Michael Gates says

I was halfway through this, laughing so hard I couldn't sit up straight, and one of the kids asked me what the book was about. "It's a romance novel, with some overtones of horror." It took a minute to get the sentence out through all the giggling.

Because, well, it **is**. It's all about Halla and Sarkis, falling in love and coming together. And how Sarkis is trapped in a magic sword forever and gets horribly killed now and then, and they explore how that works. (It's not good! Don't get yourself stuck in a magic sword! You won't like it.) And there are those... clear things. And I don't remember a time I've been more terrified reading a book than I was during chapter 58. I can see why Vernon mostly writes childrens' books, adults can't handle this stuff.

But also, watching Halla confuse people by acting stupid at them is hilarious. She's a respectable widow! She doesn't know, is there some reason for this? And then there's never a good answer, and either people wander off hoping she doesn't ask them any more things, or something else happens.

There are supposed to be two more of these. I hope they show up soon.

Olga Godim says

4.5 stars

A fun romp of a quasi-medieval fantasy by a wonderful writer. I read many of her previous books and liked most of them. The only ones I didn't like, her Clockwork Boys duology, had characters forced into their adventures, and I dislike this plot twist intensely.

In this book, Halla chooses what she does. Granted, her choices don't always lead where she wants them to go, but that's life for most of us, so no surprise there.

Halla is a delightful heroine, a middle-aged widow with an unsuccessful marriage behind her and the in-laws from hell. She has a very low opinion of herself, but her curiosity is insatiable. She always asks questions. And she pretends to be silly by chatting nonsense at anyone who threatens her. She can't fight to save her life – physicality is not her strong suit, not with her wide hips – but she slays her enemies with inanities. Her philosophy: "Nobody kills foolish women, just kicks them out of the way." Her crazy diatribes at many critical moments in the story had me laughing so hard, I couldn't see the text. On the other hand, she has a hard-won common sense and a compassionate heart. An absolutely charming personage and rare in the fantasy genre.

The hero of the book, Sarkis, is actually a staple of fantasy: a hardened mercenary warrior bound to be a slave of an enchanted sword. He is sort-of immortal, has already existed for centuries, and the magic of the sword compels him to defend anyone who owns it. Most of his previous owners were soldiers or swindlers. Now it is Halla. Just imagine their interactions, especially at the start of the book, and you will smile.

The plot is a journey, and its pace is uneven. In the beginning, the events crawl, slow and insignificant. By the end, the events gallop, and each one is a life-or-death situation.

The protagonists encounter many interesting characters along the way, as the complex world they inhabit unfolds around them. They also fall in love with each other, but of course, each of them thinks that they are unworthy of the other. Their way to a mutual understanding in the romance department, hopefully with a

little bit of sex tossed in for spice, is as much a part of this novel as their battling greedy thieves and hostile magic.

What I would like to note is that most important characters in the book are not young. They are middle age, past the point of wanting adventures, and they handle the problems life throws at them quite sensibly. There is no teenage angst, no unnecessary heroics, just two middle-aged people trying to settle into a peaceful life. And into each other's bed, if possible. If only their enemies and their own self-doubts would let them...

All in all, it was a joyful ride from the first to the last page. The afterword mentioned that the author is writing a second book in the series, and I can't wait to read it.

Angela Boord says

4.5 stars really, because this book is so much fun. What I like most about Ursula Vernon's recent T. Kingfisher books (The Clockwork Boys, The Wonder Engine, and now Swordheart) is how well she does fantasy AND romance AND humor.

And gnoles. I love gnoles. I am so happy there was a gnole in this book.

Swordheart is basically a period romance, complete with a widow in danger of being swindled out of her inheritance and forced into a marriage she doesn't want. That is, it would be a period romance if period romances featured mercenary heroes bound eternally to enchanted swords, diabolical parakeets, temple orders of lawyers, and mountains that change location at will.

I really like the combination of elements in the books set in the Clockwork Boys world. These books are smart and funny and compassionate and romantic, but they also hit all the notes fantasy readers expect in a good fantasy.

I've started buying them as soon as they're released, and I'm definitely looking forward to the next one!

Sarah (CoolCurryBooks) says

I can't remember the last time I laughed this much while reading a book. Swordheart is a romantic fantasy novel that's brimming with humor. Everything Ursula Vernon writes is delightful, and I will continue to eagerly rush to read anything by her. However, my enjoyment of Swordheart is tampered by displeasure at some issues with asexual representation.

Halla is a respectably widowed housekeeper who spent more than a decade looking after an old man... who just died and left everything to her. Unfortunately, his relatives want to keep the money "in the family" and have locked her in her bedroom until she agrees to marry Cousin Alvin. Halla's taken up the old sword that hangs on the wall and started wondering how to fall on it when she summons the Sarkis, an ancient warrior who has been magically bound to the sword and commanded to defend its wielder. He's more used to battling armies than in-laws, but Sarkis will help Halla escape and reclaim her inheritance.

Swordheart is probably more of a romance than I normally tend to read. I'm just not usually a fan of stories

driven by romance! But I did like Swordheart, and I think it comes down to the humor. I do a lot better with romantic comedies than romantic dramas, and Swordheart was hysterically funny. The best comparison I can think of is a cross between Robin McKinley and Terry Pratchett, although really, it's 100% Ursula Vernon (side note — if you haven't read anything by Ursula Vernon, you should do that right now!). Swordheart's also good with consent, and Halla and Sarkis didn't treat each other terribly, which is a must for any romance subplot.

As usual with Ursula Vernon, the characters are delightful. Sarkis is very much of the "grizzled, Viking warrior" type but without the sexism that often accompanies such characters. Halla is a middle-aged widow who doesn't expect much out of life and has realized that it's sometimes beneficial to appear stupid. She's constantly chattering and asking questions, and I love the scenes where she uses inane rambling to make people underestimate her.

Halla and Sarkis are the main characters, but around halfway-in, we get a major supporting character: Zale, a nonbinary priest/lawyer. Zale's gender is never in question, and they're as intelligent and hilarious as the rest of the cast. Also, I love the whole fantasy religion of the White Rat, which values practicality among all else and whose priests are mostly lawyers and clerks.

While Swordheart clearly works to be queer inclusive, I was not a fan of the way it treated asexual people. If you've been following my reviews for a while, then you probably know that I'm asexual and have seen me talk about this sort of thing before. Anyway, Swordheart has some cringy lines about Sarkis's attraction to Halla making him feel like a normal man, Halla saying she'd have to be dead not to be attracted to Sarkis, and Sarkis saying his religion has no use for someone who can't please a man or a woman in bed... but all those are kind of run of the mill type things. They crop up in practically every book I read, and I'm pretty good at ignoring them. Unfortunately, Swordheart goes beyond that. Halla's dead husband with whom she had a highly unsatisfying sex life is described in a way that reads as asexual. Here are some excerpts from the conversation between Halla and Sarkis about it:

"A man would have to be half-dead not to be interested in you"

"He just wasn't interested in that sort of thing in general. No by-blows, no complaints from the servants."

"I don't blame any man for not enjoying bedsports, but why marry and condemn his wife to the same?"

"He had no choice in the matter... His mother was determined to see him wed someone."

"They knew, I think, that he had problems. I don't think they expected him to consummate the marriage at all"

So. I've got a lot of feelings about this, and fully unpacking everything about why I dislike this would take more time and emotional energy than I want to invest. I think it comes down to the depiction of asexuality as a problem (that language is specifically used!) and as a difficulty to people who aren't asexual. In addition, I can't help thinking about what would become of me if I were forced into a marriage or some of the horrific stories I've heard from other ace people. All together, *Swordheart* winds up suggesting asexual people are broken and wrong, and those are the ideas I have had to struggle a lot against to find self-acceptance. I have enough faith in Ursula Vernon to believe that she didn't do this on purpose, but the way *Swordheart* treated asexuality still hurt.

I cannot help but love a book that makes me laugh as much as *Swordheart*, and I do hope that lots of other people find it and love it even more than I did. However, I do want to give other ace readers a heads up.

Review from The Illustrated Page.

Skye Kilaen says

Overall, lovely and wonderful in the same ways that have made me a T. Kingfisher / Ursula Vernon fangirl. Adventure, humor, strong female character, etc.

However I am still sorting through my feelings about multiple instances of language that struck me as denying the existence of asexual people.

UPDATE 12/31/18: I'm not the only one who noticed, #ownvoices review here:
<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...> And I haven't been able to get past it. All of that content just felt so *mean*. : (

Jerome Comeau says

I'm not sure how to say what I want to say without saying it wrong.

I don't think I have been this excited for a new author's work since I was in the rapid process of discovering and then chewing through the back catalog of C.J. Cherryh, who at that point had just published *Foreigner* and grabbed me by my whiskers and screamed (metaphorically) "Look! Here is an author whose style of prose and choice of character speaks directly and entirely to you!" Or that moment in my high school years when I stumbled upon Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* and I suddenly knew, with a certainty that has still not yet left me, that I wanted to be a part of the future (and the culture) of technology. And yet that's not fair, because T. Kingfisher, nee Ursula Vernon, is her own writer, her own voice, her own authorial person, and doesn't deserve to be compared to others.

To say that Kingfisher's prose style and choice of genre (which is to say, a particularly dark and comedic bent take on various well-worn fantasy tropes and story types) fills the void that was left when Terry Pratchett died is unfair both to Pratchett (and his daughter, a brilliant author and collaborator in her own right) and to Kingfisher, whose approaches and technical craft are worlds apart from Pratchett. And yet, there is a particular thread, a particular viewpoint, a particular (and very-difficult-to-do-correctly) approach to finding the humanity and the heart and the humor even in some pretty terrible and trying and difficult

moments in a story, which have not, and arguably cannot, been privy to any but those very few names in the rolls of authors of genre fiction. Pratchett, Gaiman, Adams. You can tell an Adams story by the absurdism. You can tell a Gaiman story by the gentle darkness. You can tell a Pratchett story by the puns. And you can tell a Kingfisher story by the utterly plausible, utterly mundane, utterly hilarious humanity present in the narrative.

I'm glad I was able to read this new novel by T. Kingfisher. It's hilarious. It's moving. It's utterly charming. It's about a magic sword and a widow and a lawyer and arguably, it's a Road Movie of a novel (though it's mostly this one little chunk of road that they go back and forth on...several times). You will not be disappointed if you buy it and read it. But I will admit that I'm a little sad that I finished it, because it means I have to wait for the next one.

And I will wait. Ever so patiently. Waiting. With patience. For the next one. Whenever it's ready.

You should buy it, and then we can talk about it, and maybe help each other to tide ourselves over.

Lucille says

While this was a very funny (sometimes maybe trying too hard?) romance fantasy novel which I might have rated a solid 4, it was very much acephobic so... meh

Great review that I agree with here

K.J. Charles says

An absolute joy. Set in the Clockwork Boys world but with ostensibly far lower stakes--we're not saving the world from demons, here, just saving a widow from being forced to marry a cousin. Except that what we're actually saving is a woman's self-respect and a man's humanity, which actually is stakes high enough for any book. Very much more towards the romance side than other books, and does it beautifully.

And the world! Kingfisher is endlessly inventive in her threats and monsters, and also one of the few fantasy writers who can conceive of oppressive organised religions that aren't Catholicism in a funny hat. It's all joyously varied. And talking of variety: curvy mid-30s heroine, important nonbinary character whose identity and pronouns are never an issue, queerness existing and unquestionably accepted.

Glorious funny dialogue, intense but clear-sighted compassion and humanity, a fair bit of highly enjoyable murder. And sequels! I would swap a limb for Angharad and the Dervish's stories. *clasps hands, looks pleading*

Stephanie says

This was such a fun romantic fantasy adventure - set in a different part of the same world as her Clocktaur Wars series but much less dark and with different characters. Like all Ursula Vernon/T Kingfisher novels, it was incredibly charming and full of moments that made me snort-laugh as I read - and I absolutely loved the

characters. The chemistry between the growly hero, Sarkos (who's spent 500 years trapped in a sword), and the loquacious and easily-distracted (but MUCH smarter than she appears) heroine, Halla, is absolutely hilarious and also spot-on - I adored them together, and I loved the different ways they rescued each other across the book. But I also adored the other new friends Halla made along her journey, and I also really admired the way Kingfisher wrote her bad guys, who all absolutely think of themselves as the heroes (while being really vile people in entirely plausible ways).

The one thing that made it a 4-star (rather than 5-star) book for me was that I didn't buy the actual Black Moment in the book (that point around 75-80% of the way in where something so terrible happens that All Seems Lost) - and I mean, I didn't believe in it AT ALL, because it relied on Halla having an emotional reaction that didn't fit her character. **HOWEVER**, I loved every moment of the story until then and I loved every moment of the story afterwards, so those five pages or so did not take away my overall love of the book at all! And I did really love the way that that crisis was resolved.

The ending was so perfect, I let out a little happy sigh - and then I was SO happy to read in the afterward that there will be two more books (with different protagonists) in this series! I can't wait to read them both.

Janice says

This is a kissing book. (I use "kissing book" in the Princess Bride sense, as a book where there are adventures, romance and, yes, kissing.)

There's nothing at all wrong with that, especially if you **LIKE** kissing books. I'm not a big kissing book fan for the most part, for Reasons Specific To Me. There's nothing wrong with romance books. They just generally don't do it **FOR ME**.

Halla, the protagonist, is a good character. She's a Respectable Widow who's been taking care of an uncle-by-marriage through his last illness. When he passes, she finds he's made her the beneficiary in his will. The rest of the uncle's family is ENRAGED by this, and determined by whatever means necessary to get the property back in **THEIR** family. Even if it means marrying Halla to clammy-handed cousin Alver.

In the course of deciding that she'd literally rather be dead than forcibly married to the odious Alver, Halla finds herself suddenly in possession of an immortal warrior who is bound to an old sword the her uncle owned. With Sarkis the warrior's help, she escapes her imprisonment and heads off to the city to find a lawyer to get her property straightened out. As you do. Thereafter follows lots of traveling, some adventures, and Halla and Sarkis falling in love. But Sarkis has a secret that might spoil everything.

This book reminded me of some of Lois McMaster Bujold's books. That's a **GOOD** thing. **OTOH**, there's a shift towards the end that seemed a little jarring and didn't **QUITE** convince me. There was a lot of dithering between the two romantic interests that I found a bit annoying. Maybe I've just been in one relationship too long to remember how it was before.

Anyway, 3.5 stars, if .5 stars were a thing here. A worthy effort, and always a pleasure to read T. Kingfisher/Ursula Vernon. I'm an unrepentant fangirl of hers. :)

Shruthi says

THIS WAS SO MUCH FUN and filled a void in my heart for adult fantasy romcoms, a subgenre that seems otherwise inexplicably barren???? I loved the banter, the gallows humor, the fun world/culturebuilding, and, of course, the sweet mutual pining romance. It was such a fun reading experience that involved just nonstop cackling on my end. I'm so glad that this is the first novel in a swordfucker series because I *need* more of this in my life.

Wench says

AHHHHHHHHH OH MY GOD GO READ THIS BOOK

It's FUNNY and LOVELY and SUSPENSEFUL and has SPOOKY WEIRD SHIT and I LOVE IT AND THERE'S GONNA BE MORE

Benjamin Appleby-Dean says

The amazing thing about *Swordheart* is that it's somehow simultaneously:

- a) A full-blown period romance novel about a young widow escaping the wicked relatives who are after her inheritance
- b) A proper fantasy story with living sword-spirits, ambulatory hillsides, demon-slaying knights and levitating slime creatures
- c) The funniest thing I've read all year

I mean how is this even fair to the other books?

But seriously, this is delightful. Halla is a resourceful, willful and uncommon heroine, Sarkis a brilliant foil for her (and not *just* because he's a sword), their romance together practically flies off the page, and the supporting cast (especially Zale the priest) are just as compelling.

I can't wait for (view spoiler)

Ashley says

a delightful book about a widow being a swordfucker, finally my interests are being met. halla is a dear and sarkis loves her, birdle knows best, and as the kids say, zale? a nonbinary legend! looking forward to the follow up books.
