



## Weight of Stone

*Laura Anne Gilman*

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*An island nation has vanished. Men of honor and magic have died unnatural deaths. Slaves flee in terror. . . . Are the silent gods beginning to speak? Or is another force at work in the Lands Vin?*

Laura Anne Gilman's critically acclaimed, Nebula Award-nominated *Flesh and Fire* introduced a brilliantly imagined world where the grapevine—cultivated by the Vinearts who know the secrets of wine magic—holds together disparate lands. Now, confusion, violence, and terror are sweeping over the Lands Vin. And four people are at the center of a storm.

Jerzy, Vineart apprentice and former slave, was sent by his master to investigate strange happenings—and found himself the target of betrayal. Now he must set out on his own journey, to find the source of the foul taint that threatens to destroy everything he holds dear. By Jerzy's side are Ao, who lives for commerce and the art of the deal; Mahault, stoic and wise, risking death in flight from her homeland; and Ka-nam, once Named-Heir of an island principality, whose father has fallen into a magic-tangled madness that endangers them all.

These four companions will travel far from the earth and the soul of the vine, sailing along coastlines aflame with fear, confronting sea creatures summoned by darkness, and following winds imbued with malice. Their journey will take them to the very limits of the Sin Washer's reach . . . and into a battle for the soul of the Lands Vin. For two millennia the Sin Washer's Commandment has kept these lands in order: *Those of magic shall hold no power over men and those princes of power shall hold no magic*. Now, that law has given way. And a hidden force seeks the havoc of revenge.

An adventure through an unforgettable realm conjured by breathtaking imagination, Laura Anne Gilman's saga of the Vineart War is a "dramatic, authentic, and potent" (*Publishers Weekly*) literary delight.

## Weight of Stone Details

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Author : Laura Anne Gilman

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## From Reader Review Weight of Stone for online ebook

### Kevin Parks says

I loved the first book in this trilogy, but this one was a disappointment until the third act. Stick with it.

Minor spoilers follow.

Pros: Fanatic ending that really moves the plot and character development of the trilogy along. Like most great books, the ending was both unexpected and completely appropriate. It made the whole book worth reading, and I can't wait to start Book Three.

Cons: The beginning and middle of this book suffers from poor editing decisions. Many pages are devoted to rehashing and catching the reader up on the events from Book One (presumably in case the reader haven't read it). The party of main characters spend the rest of their time trying to figure out what to do, as their enemy's name and location are unknown. As soon they devise a plan, the main character (our young Vineart in training, Jerzy) is recalled to his Master, and everyone shrugs and goes their separate ways for the time being, promising to either gather information about their enemy, procure new skills, and make inroads with potential allies. When the party finally regroups, none of the other characters have anything to reveal or report to Jerzy. The plot finally starts to get traction in the third act, but keep your expectations low for the first 2/3 of the book.

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### Barbara ★ says

The political hierarchy is incredibly complicated but basically boils down to a division of church and state though not really in a religious sense. In no way is it a religious novel. The wine masters (vinearts) are only able to draw magic from the vines. They are not allowed to interfere with the landowners and vice versa. The Sin Washers (who oversee this division from the vinearts perspective) declared that if the vinearts and the landlords intermingle, they become too strong and have the propensity for evil. Therefore when Master Malech senses danger on the wind and finds other vinearts murdered or missing, he sends Jerzy out into the land to try to find the reason.

Weight of Stone is the continuation of Jerzy's adventures. At the end of Flesh and Fire, Jerzy befriends and escapes the Sin Washers along with his new found friends and allies - Ao, Mahault and Kainam. The first part of the book while they are adventuring by boat is exciting as they are in constant danger from the weather mages and the Washers who are pursuing them for imagined misdeeds. When Jerzy returns to the House of Malech to tend the vines, the book drags for a 100 or so pages. But when once again, the gang gets together to go adventuring to locate the taint that hasn't stopped, the pace picks up again and is non stop action.

Like all good fantasy novels, the world building is extremely complicated and takes very careful reading to decipher what is really going on hence the longer than normal reading time.

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## **William Bentrim says**

Weight of Stone by Laura Anne Gilman

Jerzy, the apprentice vineart is back with friends combating the mysterious attacks on the Vin lands.

The Vin Lands are plagued by a mystery. Unknown magic stalks the land hidden in chance occurrences. Vineart Malech takes an apprentice, Jerzy, who shows surprising adeptness. The book changes focuses on how Vineart Malech and his apprentice Jerzy approach the strange occurrences in their land to focusing on Jerzy and his three unlikely friends. Jerzy's experience as a slave makes it difficult for him to accept the concept of a friend, let alone the reality.

A Vineart, a Princeling, a merchant and a want to be warrior are an unlikely group to oppose the disasters stalking their lives. The Washers, who are suppose to provide balance to the world see Jerzy and his friends as a threat.

The book has an intricate plot, likeable characters, a despicable villain and a wealth of character actors to fill out the plot. I really love this series and am currently reading the final book of the trilogy.

I strongly recommend the book and being half way through the final book of the trilogy, I highly recommend the entire series!

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## **scherzo? says**

This would be better without the repeated explanations of how vine magic works and with some character development. Even Jerzy, the main character, is static. It's the magic that grows not Jerzy. He does not learn from experience and reacts the same way to each new crisis. Ao lives for trade, Mahault is stoic and wise and Kainam is brave and princely.

Why don't fantasy writers imagine a culture other than feudalism and other metaphors for good & evil than the cliched right-handed & left-handed.

Would have also liked at least some real attention paid to a strong female character. There are no women in positions of power and no women as vine mages. Mahault is only a token.

Final decision in this book is not substantiated.

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## **Kat Richardson says**

Finally a series that feels like High Fantasy but without the boring bits, in-jokes, bad puns, and a lot smarter than most. Engaging story that goes in some unusual directions not with the plot as much as the details and the magic systems--because really Quests aren't new, but what Gilman does with hers is marvelous. And of course we all know there's magic in wine....

I'm really enjoying this series and I'm very glad the next is out so I can read it as soon as I have time. I'd have rated it a little higher if it hadn't been quite as much of a bridge as it was. The book handles its job as Act Two very well, but because it is what it is, there is a feeling of things unfinished that is dissatisfying. However, that just makes me want to gobble up the next one!

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### **Pam says**

This second book of the trilogy is even better than the first. The premise of magic existing through grapevines and wine-making is amazing and different. The world-building for this story is really quite good. And we are given more insight into the characters' backgrounds; learning more about the 'magic' and how it works. There is a mystery here, and I am so looking forward to seeing how it all turns out!

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### **Yune says**

An oddly paced middle book in the series, where there seems to be a lot of movement to no particular end. Vineart Jerzy, who can draw magic from wine, has now put together a rather cozy group with the trader Ao, who's always looking for a good trade; the prince-heir Kaïnam, seeking to find his sister's assassin and the threat that has caused his island nation to withdraw from the world; and Mahault, a lord's daughter who chose exile and the possible path of a mercenary rather than her previous lofty role.

I was a bit suspicious of them as honest companions in the first book, but now that they've become a done deal, I started enjoying their interaction with each other. (Enough so that when they tried to go their separate ways, I found myself protesting, "Nooo, don't split the party!") This probably saved the book, because they travel together a lot, sometimes literally to a place and then directly back. There is even a new type of magic invented in order to return them to a place they left just a day ago.

I also reluctantly accepted the way Jerzy began spilling all his magical secrets to them, despite cultural strictures that demanded he never share such knowledge. (Magic power is strictly separated from political power, and as you can probably guess, this boundary starts to break down hard.)

Less entertaining were persistent sections from the villain's perspective. There's some necessary explanation of how his world-spanning acts of evil were accomplished, but I wasn't particularly interested in the one character with mixed feelings about his deeds, and certainly not in the straight-up power-hungry one. Even with the protagonists, Gilman leaves a fair amount of the emotional work to the reader, which I find acceptable but not compelling.

That said, I'm intrigued enough about where the story is going, and by the societal setup (more than the magic system itself, which I think most people find the most original part), to read the next book. I'm glad it's already out; I might not have tolerated this sort of pacing if I'd been waiting for this book's release, then had to wait again for the third.

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### **Janet says**

*Weight of Stone* hits several of my automatic-1-star pet peeves, but it gets 3 stars from me for its original

magic system - spellwine created by vitner mages bred from slavery. It creates an unusually aloof protagonist, Vineart Jerzy, with mild but refreshing differences from the well-tread Fated rags-to-High Mage route. I was engrossed moment by moment while reading, and didn't mind too much that we see fewer of the players and fewer moves on the overall game board in this novel than in Vineart #1, *Flesh and Fire*. (view spoiler) The lack of character development was disappointing, especially with Jerzy's companions. *Flesh and Fire* did a good job setting up why these three would be also suspect an enemy beyond local politics and want to join the same quest as Jerzy. But in *Weight of Stone* I feel like I never got to know them much better than the two-adjective stage (garroloous trader Ao, arrogant princeling Kainam, warrior-hopeful Mahault). It felt like Mahault's only purpose in the novel was to remind readers that Vinearts are asexual, so that Jerzy wasn't tempted by her legs the way Ao and Kainam were. Without characters to invest deeply in, the already suspect teens-embark-on-saving-the-world plot feels shakier. Personally I have a particular problem with inept spying (let's sneak up on a magician while unnecessarily using magic! great idea!) and magic working vs. blowing up in his face on a suspiciously plot-convenient schedule. I'm still looking forward to the conclusion of the trilogy, but honestly, I want to hear more about what the grownups in Gilman's world are doing.

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### **Sherie Davis says**

There were things I liked about this one better than the first and some I didn't. I feel like this one had more action and you got into the characters more. The only thing I'm not sure about - spoiler warning- is how Jerzy and co. keep setting out to find the taint and then turning back. It sort of feels like they're wasting time. Now there's probably method to the madness, certainly the various adventures are making Jerzy a stronger Vineart. But you know, as a reader you're like you're going home again? But it took you months to get where you're at! I guess I was also wondering how exactly Jerzy thought finding the taint would prove his innocence. I mean, who is going to believe him at that point? Unless he brings a Washer with him who sees everything he does it's just his word that he figured things out, well and his friends but seriously, why would the already biased Washer believe that? So maybe in the long run going home makes sense. I'm just saying I feel like I've been jerked around a bit. Still excited for the next one though.

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### **drey says**

*Weight of Stone* picks up where *Flesh and Fire* left off... Jerzy's in trouble, and is on the lam with Ao--a trader, and Mahault--a noblewoman. Taking on the seas isn't one of his better ideas, but he's trying to find the source of the taint, because he believes that is what his master would want him to do. Too bad he can't ask, but the Washers are looking for him after the events at Aleppan.

Unfortunately, fate intervenes, and the trio acquires a fourth--Kainam, princeling from an island nation hidden from the world. His mission is to find out who has been interfering with Atakus--from his sister's murder to the firespouts that burned ships from the nearby nation of Caul. Something's not quite right, and he intends to find it before Atakus is devoured by the chaos and fear.

There is a lot of meandering back and forth in *Weight of Stone*. Jerzy does return to Master Malech, only to have to set off again. The Washers are still looking for him. The source of the taint is still tauntingly out of reach. And the foursome split up, then re-converge. I'm a bit confused at all the new bits and pieces introduced into this puzzle in this installment. Guess I'll have to read *The Shattered Vine* (coming October

2011) to find out how it all fits.

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### **Snail in Danger (Sid) Nicolaides says**

I found the motif of Jerzy's loneliness to be interesting. But ... I don't know, this book has sort of put its finger on a lot of the problems I have with some recent fantasies. Too serious, as in they take themselves too seriously. I know that it's epic/classical/serious fantasy, and I'm not asking for everything to be a Piers Xanthony punfest. (Anyone who reads to the end of this review and has also read the book is probably not going to believe me. I will admit to a weakness for puns.)

This never really hooked me, unfortunately, and I know I missed at least one important scene. Jerzy referred to it at least twice but ... I never felt the urge to go back and figure out exactly where it was.

So, Jerzy's development is interesting. But plot-wise, in a way I sort of feel like we're back where we were earlier, and that we were dragged all over the map to get there. Somehow it seems wearing. I still don't know if one of the villains has more of a motivation than "I'm crazy and power hungry! Because I can."

It sort of weirded me out that Mahault's name was shortened to Mahl. If the name was going to be elided at all, Mault or Maut would have been more likely. At least, in the source language(s) ... in a fantasy world you can always handwave it away. But it still sounded strange.

The part with the figurehead was awesome.

I'll probably read the next one to see what happens. The end of this one was really a heartbreaker. Also, ow. :(

I keep typing "Jesry" instead of "Jerzy" because in my head that character name-space is taken, I'm afraid, thanks to Anathem. I think I fixed them all, but if not, that's the source of the confusion.

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### **Todd says**

Once again we are thrust into the Lands Vin in the second installment of Larua Anne Gilman's Vineart War series, *Weight of Stone* (see my review of the first novel, *Flesh and Fire*, here). The likeable Jerzy, protagonist and Vineart apprentice of the House of Malech, is back again to fight the distant forces of evil that threaten the very livelihood that keep the Lands Vin together: the magic of the Vinearts and their spellwines. Excited to continue this fantastic story of sci-fi/fantasy, I dove in to *Weight of Stone* with high expectations.

We first encounter Jerzy as a fugitive from justice, as he is accused of being apostate (breaking the command of Sin Washer by using Vineart magic improperly). The penalty of such an offense is death, but he had been daringly rescued by his friends Ao and Mahault before he could be tried and executed. Now on the open sea and on the run from the Washers, who hope to capture him and bring him up against charges of being apostate, Jerzy is thrown into completely unfamiliar surroundings with only Ao and Mahault to turn to. Fortunately for them, they are discovered (inadvertently with the help of Jerzy's quiet magic) by Kainam, former heir to Atakus, the great trading port of the Lands Vin. He too has felt the evil that seems to be

lurking and growing stronger by the moment, and chose to leave and discover its origin rather than hide as those on his island home have done. Now that their group is four strong, Jerzy finds new courage and eventually comes back to the Berengia, and to Master Malech. Unfortunately, not all is well, and we are introduced to the source of “the Taint” in this novel. A cast-off people with a leader known as Ximen and a Vine-Mage (yes, they are not all destroyed!) hash out a living in a far away land known as the Abandoned Land. While most of the inhabitants of this community are ignorant of the plans, both Ximen and the Vine-Mage have plans that threaten the very safety of the entire Lands Vin. Can Jerzy and Master Malech stop them? Will his new-found friends be able to assist him in his ultimate goal?

Gilman really knows how to pull me in to a novel. After slowly building suspense throughout the first half of the work (with a couple of action sequences thrown in for good measure), she really lets it go on the second half. Once Jerzy was back at the Berengia and working with Master Malech again, the conflict with the Taint really started to heat up. She does such a great job fleshing out these characters, especially Jerzy, so that you can't help but become really attached to them. Her character development is phenomenal, and I've always thought that this is a key part of storytelling. Good development means more interest in the characters, which leads to more interest in the plot line, which makes the entire book more enjoyable. As such, I couldn't help but be shocked and dismayed at the loss of a major character later on in the novel (of course I won't tell you who it is, you'll just have to find out for yourself!). This added an emotional depth to the work that I didn't see coming at all. It made Jerzy's purpose that more important, and his goal that much more urgent. After this book we truly know what we're up against, and it will be an all out battle in the third book to bring the evil forces of the Vine-Mage and Ximen to a close. I truly cannot wait to dive into the third installment, *The Shattered Vine*, and I can only hope that Gilman makes it just as exciting and captivating as this work has been.

Todd (Reflections of a Book Addict)

<http://wp.me/p18lIL-Rp>

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### **Cathy says**

It's still very slow. I like the kids, but the pace is still stop and go, but even the go parts are slow. They travel, go home, startbout again, travel for three more months... I like that it shows how big the world is and how much they've taken on, but it dissolves all sense of urgency for the reader. And very little happens when things do happen. I think I could sum up the book in a few sentences. And I'm not sure of the point. The character study of Jerzy as a person and a Vineart is interesting, but I don't care at all about the bad guys. We don't know them, they don't have any big societal or historical significance, there's no epic battle I'd the gods or huge political upheaval except that being caused by these outsiders, it's all a bit underwhelming. Plus the idea that these 4 kids are the only ones who know that something is going on, so they blithely ship off toward the source of trouble like naive idiots... And Jerzy keeps showing his friends secrets that have even kept for almost two millennia without feeling any doubts or regrets, even as he expresses the emotional distance he feels from them.... And he can do tons of magic, all by instinct and with no training, that no one else can do.... If it's leading to a big plot where he's something special, another son of a god or a prince with some special mix of genetic that enables this, than it needs to be a bigger, more dramatic plot, not something saved for the last book in the trilogy. And if it's not some important to-be-explained-later plot point then it's lazy storytelling, creating a structured system and then having your characters ignore it whenever you want to move the story along.

So far, it's not a big, sweeping epic fantasy. It's more of an interesting little story that's been drawn out over

too many books. So far, I have the feeling that if the whole trilogy had been written as just one book, I'd probably be happier. I'm still hoping that book three redeems it for me. It's not awful, just not what I'd hoped for.

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### **Peter says**

The middle book of a trilogy is often the hardest to write. The first book is carried by the initial story idea and the final book brings the conflict to a resolution, but the middle book has to carry the story forward, keeping the readers engaged without taking anything away from the concluding book.

Weight of Stone, the middle volume of Laura Anne Gilman's Vineart War trilogy, gets an A- from this reader. At the end of Flesh and Fire, the opening volume, Jerzy, the former slave, now vineart apprentice, has escaped a bad situation with two traveling companions. In Weight of Stone, the trio becomes a quartet, with Jerzy serving as their sometimes brooding, sometimes pro-active leader. The quartet then break up only to be thrown back together for the final third of the book.

As in book one, Gilman concludes Weight of Stone, with the hero escaping a potential deadly situation only to find himself confronted with an even more threatening one ahead. In book two Jerzy matures physically and emotionally, growing into his greater responsibilities not only with regard to his traveling companions, but also his status as vineart--a master of magical wines.

The pace of Weight of Stone may trouble some readers as may Jerzy's battles with self-doubt, but Gilman is such an accomplished writer that these issues are small in relation to her ability to create a unique alternative world that revolves around a form of magic that is imbued in the craft of wine-making with political intrigue and a transcendent evil that her hero must overcome. I'm looking forward to that concluding volume.

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### **erin says**

I give this a 3 if only because I really like the story it continues. But I have to complain about the continuing evidence that this book had very little editorial presence. I was able to skip about every three paragraphs of unnecessary, repetitious stream-of-anxiety-ridden-Jerzy-consciousness or repeated-for-the-sixth-time-block-of-exposition. I really can't say how many times I'd be reading yet another paragraph involuntarily making my brain go "blah blah blah blah blah" and then scan desperately for the next new or necessary word...and then find it on the next page. And while the plot, characters, and world continue to be interesting, there's also so many elements that didn't seem to be worked out very well (besides the fascinating wine-based system of magic)...and the pacing really has issues...but all this may just be due to the publishing industry's continued requirement for a trilogy rather than a tight, well-written single volume. \$\$\$ It's true that I have high expectations of fantasies, but I feel I can't let this one off the hook for being genre fiction--it has too much potential. Ah well...I look forward to the rest of the story anyway.

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