



The Fire's Stone

Tanya Huff

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THIEF, SWORDSMAN, AND WIZARDESS

AARON. Clan Heir, he has fled his people when his beloved was slain by his own father's command, abandoning his training, duty and beliefs to become a thief. A master of his trade, he now dared the odds in Ischia, city of the volcano, where the price of being caught was death.

DARVISH. Prince of Ischia, third son of a king who had no intention of giving up his throne. The prince was a drunkard, a lover, and a wastrel, yet was gifted with sword skills and with the ability to charm all around him. But not even his charm could free him from the political marriage now being planned.

CHANDRA. Born a princess, she had chosen to become a Wizard of the Nine, that rarest of beings, able to master all the forms that sorcery could take. Now, promised as Darvish's bride, she undertook a desperate journey to Ischia to convince him they must not wed.

Aaron, Darvish, Chandra—three strangers whose fates were about to become intertwined. For someone had stolen The Stone, the magical talisman which stood between Ischia and the volcano's wrath. And unless the three could learn to work together on a quest to find the Stone, Ischia would drown in a sea of lava.

The Fire's Stone Details

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From Reader Review The Fire's Stone for online ebook

Vanessa says

One of my long time favorites. I always grab this book when I need something relaxing that takes me away into another world.

The story is a typical fantasy adventure of the "retrieving lost powerful object" kind. Nothing wrong with that, especially since it's executed well and brings character- and relationship developments for our protagonists.

They are the highlight of this story. Aaron, Darvish and Chandra are such lovable characters - on their own and as a team. They completely carry this story and I never felt like one of them was shortchanged.

They seem to be basic fantasy tropes at first (the drunk prince who sleeps with anyone he pleases, the best thief of the city clouded in grief and the beautiful princess who longs for something more than being a wife), but there is so much more to each of them (for example, neither the prince nor the thief fall in love with the princess in this one and the princess really couldn't care less) and they and their friendship are written in such a charming and heartwarming way that one can't help but fall in love with them. Everyone has their little arc: Darvish coming into his own as a prince and overcoming his alcoholism, Aaron learning to accept himself and dealing with his grief and Chandra experiencing true friendship for the first time and learning more about being a powerful wizard.

And of course they're never better than when they're together - all three or in all the various combinations.

As always in Tanya Huff's books every character, no matter how little time they get on page, has a personality. Everyone feels real, which in turn makes their world feel real, making this book an utterly enjoyable experience in my opinion.

The authors style is entertaining and easy to read. I could see everything perfectly in my head.

Jamie Collins says

Possibly I'm overrating this, because I'm a fan of Tanya Huff. It was a nice enough read. It's a standard, predictable quest story, where a collection of misfits save the world. Well, the city.

I liked the nonchalance regarding gender, which is typical of Huff but almost startling in a traditional swords-and-horses fantasy setting. The characterization rightly took precedence over world-building, and the chemistry between the trio of protagonists was nice in the beginning.

Their conflicts dissolved away too quickly, however, and the romance felt forced. I wasn't crazy about the constant POV changes. Also Aaron's eyebrows were called "demon wings" too many times.

Korynn says

This was really an extraordinary fantasy novel. It takes all the basics: a warrior prince, a wizard princess, and a well-born thief and has them go on a quest for a stolen magical object that must be retrieved otherwise it

will doom an entire city. Each of the characters has their quirks, their families, their personal tragedies, and their abilities. But I have rarely read a book that has such well-written fantasy characters that realistically struggle with alcoholic dependency, fear of failure that destroys their ability to perform, and an inability/refusal to empathize due to the loss of a parent. At the same time, the author also writes a love subplot that subverts the genre. Amazing.

Kaje Harper says

It was no hardship to reread this. Tanya Huff is one of my favorite fantasy novelists, and this is one of her best. Aaron has fled a harsh abusive father and is living as a thief when he tries to steal a gem from Darvish's palace. Dar is the king's third son and has been convinced his role is as drunkard and wastrel and all around useless spare part. But when Aaron tumbles onto his balcony, life is about to change for both of them. Chandra is Darvish's promised bride, except that her magic will be diminished if she ever loses her virginity. Even as a teenager Chandra isn't someone to meekly give way to other people's plans for her.

These three come together in a quest that is not unique in fantasy, although well done. What drives this book is character. Chandra's spunk and dedication to her magic. Dar's strength underlying the addiction that has been forced upon him. Aaron's bleak solitary loneliness and steadfast honor. The growing friendship between all three, and the slowly-developing attraction between the two men that is almost palpable.

This book is sweet-no-sex. It begins in pain and torture (mostly off page) and conflict. Aaron is not aware of being bi, and his awakening to any kind of human affection is slow. But the progress of the journey all three of the MCs take is just fun and occasionally deeply touching. This is a multiple reread for me.

Bri says

This book is such a hidden gem, and it's become one of my go-to comfort reads. It was one of the precious few physical books I took with me when I moved away from home...and I was choosing from hundreds.

The story is a pretty typical "find the magical artifact and save the day" type quest. Which isn't a bad thing, and the book doesn't pretend to be anything more than it is. It's really refreshing, to be honest. "Short and simple" can be hard to come by in the fantasy genre. The worldbuilding isn't all that unique, but it manages to break the mold just enough to stand out - it takes place in a Middle Eastern-inspired society where bisexuality appears to be the norm. Pretty neat, considering it was published in 1990.

The characters are where this book really shines, though. Each member of the main trio comes from a different background, and at the start of the book, all three are terribly lonely. While on their journey, they form a strong, tight-knit bond and help each other overcome their personal weaknesses. It feels very much like a coming-of-age story even though some of the characters are a bit older. It's surprisingly intimate and introspective for such a short book, and the character's struggles and insecurities are painfully relatable. There's also a lighthearted romance that develops in the background along the way. It's subtle, but it's really quite sweet.

My only disappointment is that the ending feels extremely rushed. It cuts off abruptly after the climax and

wraps everything up in just a few pages. I really wish there had been some kind of epilogue, or a sequel, because I just wasn't ready to leave the characters behind.

Sho says

Was going to continue listening to Phoenix Rising but ended up listening to an old favorite while to/from work.

I love the balance between Aaron, Chandra and Darvish. They are perfect together in this quest to find themselves as well as save Darvish's country. It is still believable and nice to read how the relationship of the three strengthens through the trip and eventually heals all of them. I think this is like my fifth time (or more) to read since I first read this decades ago, but it still is a really nice read.

OMG just found that this is out in audiobook at Audible.

One of my favorite Tanya Huff book! Should I or should I not? that is the problem. It could be a wonderful comfort listen if the narrator is good.... Hmm FT/MM and has a nice strong female character... just like a good Yaoi manga.....

Ack! I am getting this. LOL resistance is futile

Nikki says

It's been ages since I first read this, but I've been meaning to get round to rereading it for ages, and I'm glad I finally did. The world itself isn't particularly distinctive: wandering peoples, oppressive clans, magic which requires detachment from the world, royalty and court intrigue... but the characters are what make it shine for me. Chandra, Aaron and Darvish each have their faults, but together they make up a surprisingly strong team, compensating for each other's faults — and not just easily or naturally, but by working at it and learning to rely on one another. Each has their own sadnesses and goals, and gradually they learn to come together and deal with it.

The relationship between Chandra and the other two is as important as their romantic relationship with each other; she's not just a woman in the way of the guys getting together, as some people seem prone to viewing women in queer stories. Chandra is just as integral to their strength as either of the men.

I think the process of dealing with Darvish's alcoholism is also well done. The reasons he drinks, and the reasons he stops; the way he tries to resist it and where he fails. All of it is sensitively done, to my mind, and felt real. Aaron's struggle with his sexuality is one that is also, unfortunately, real; there's plenty of people who'll force themselves to stay in the closet because of fear of what society or particularly their families would say. And Chandra's determination to remain independent, because attachment might blunt her powers — well, that feels real, too. (Think of the people who complain that a woman will be 'distracted' by having a partner and family...)

I enjoyed the book a lot, and it's also nice that it's a stand-alone. Not that I wouldn't mind more of the trio's adventures, but I feel that it's unnecessary. The story is complete as a one and done. That's kind of refreshing in a world of so many trilogies.

Reviewed for The Bibliophibian.

Lyra says

To be absolutely honest, a lot of what is going on with this book and me is teeth aching nostalgia. I don't think this was the first m/m book I read, but it was the first one I read that didn't have one of the MCs/love interests dying tragically in the series (which is why I can't tell you the name of the first book I read, because, well, spoilers!). From an objective perspective, the plot doesn't stand out to me now, and even the characters are kind of meh in a lot of ways (and the ending is kind of irritating for our female protagonist, in my opinion), but oh, boy, *at the time* this was something for me. When I read it I didn't have the internet at all, so I certainly didn't have Goodreads lists or even Google to help me find recommendations. I was in a tiny town where no one talked about sexuality at all if they could get around it, to say nothing of homosexuality, and even the library catalog couldn't deal with searches of that kind except MAYBE in a medical way. I don't even remember how I found this book at all. Being able to read a book about a gay couple and a spunky girl who was determined to follow her own path no matter what? My young self jumped on that so fast. Representation is so important, and there was so little for my young self. I have access to so much more now, but I don't forget what it meant to me to have even one or two books then.

Stephanie says

The ot3 is SO STRONG with this one.

Kim says

I enjoyed this book very much. The world in which it's set is described in enough detail to feel real without being overwhelmed with unimportant filler. The characters are complex and extremely likable; they have real flaws and real strengths. The plot was exciting and the writing was gripping.

I do have a few complaints. The edition I read was poorly proofread; perhaps later editions were improved in this respect, but various typos kept pulling me out of the story. Second, the action seemed somewhat rushed in some parts. And third, there were a few point of view shifts that I found sudden and distracting.

Overall, though, an excellent yarn.

schneefink says

Interesting main characters that are great together, queer characters (with a background romance including a forced soulbond yess give me all the tropes), a solid adventure plot, and a wonderful amount of h/c.

SA says

I quite liked this, for all that I felt it moved with a faster pace than the characters or plot deserved. I liked the Darvish/Aaron angle, though the fade to black was kind of a bummer. Also, man, Aaron is kind of shit at keeping up the stoic outlander gig! He was smiling by page forty.

On the whole, a rollicking good yarn that, while engaging in the tropes, still managed to avoid them somewhat at the same time.

Points of note: remarkably well treated alcoholism; casual sexuality without an angst-bomb on every other page; female character's complete ownership of her future and herself. Great summer read.

Cat says

Fire's Stone is a beautiful story and I'm not exactly sure how many times I've read it really. The plot itself isn't what's so amazing, its the characters themselves and their development through the story. Each character has their own strengths and weaknesses and by coming up with a situation that puts them together we get to see how these strengths and weaknesses work for and against them. We also see how they grow as the plot advances.

I loved the light love story that takes place in Fire's Stone. Its not a romance by any means but the attraction that grows into friendship and then love is very believable and by the end you're shedding tears of joy over the choices the characters make.

If I could pick a fantasy story to make into a movie, Fire's Stone would definitely be in my top 5.

S. says

I first read this book as a young teenager, coming to grips with my own sexuality. I can remember at the time feeling a secret thrill that I had found a book that depicted a gay relationship. (shock, gasp). As a result, I read this book many times over the years, and still go back to read it from time to time.

At the time I found this book, I was an avid sci-fi and fantasy reader, and that is what this book is. Although the hero's in this book have a relationship, the plot of the book does not completely revolve on that relationship. This is very much a fantasy/swords and sorcery type book, in which the two main characters happen to be gay.

Needless to say, this book holds a special place on my shelf. This book definitely deserves to be read.

Ben Babcock says

It's really neat that the *Of Darkness, Light, and Fire* omnibus contains both urban fantasy and classical fantasy. Not a lot of combined editions will do that. It showcases Tanya Huff's wider abilities, and it also provides a nice change of tone if one is reading the two novels back to back. It can also make the task of comparing the two books somewhat more difficult. Even after a few days of thinking on it, I'm still not sure whether I prefer *The Fire's Stone* to *Gate of Darkness, Circle of Light*.

Back in the day when I was all up in the David Eddings stuff, I picked up a copy of his *The Rivan Codex*. It's essentially a cookbooks for constructing your own fantasy world. He lays out exactly how he went about creating the various political and economic systems of each of the countries that appear in the *Belgariad/Mallorean* world by taking existing cultures and societies and adapting them. It provides interesting insight into one possible way of creating a fantasy world, and it's also a potent reminder that it's very easy to fall into the trap of cookiecutter fantasy characterization.

The Fire's Stone is, at times, almost laughably like this. The three protagonists are literally a fighter, a mage, and a thief (TVTropes alert). They go off on a quest to retrieve the eponymous stone, which magically protects the city of Ischia from being consumed by a volcano. Because, you know, it's totes a good idea to build your city near a volcano and then rely on magic to protect it. Along the way, they do the typical fantasy quest things, including drinking in taverns and fighting pitched battles. (And then there's the Shoi, the stereotypical "magical romantic nomad" analogues.) (TVTropes)

In a way, I find this book very reassuring, because it reminds me of the kind of stuff I was writing when I was much younger and was just beginning to grasp the idea of cliché. Which is not to say that *The Fire's Stone* is clichéd, just that, by contemporary standards, it is definitely more loyal to the usual classical fantasy tropes than subversive. This is not a bad thing, and Huff plays it in the right way to create a compelling narrative. But there is never really a time when *The Fire's Stone* will leap off the page and surprise you.

There are a few clunky components that almost made me cringe. I really wanted to like Chandra, because she is so committed to remaining independent and preserving her agency. She is also a whiny sixteen-year-old girl who spends much of the novel displaying incredible skill but then stamping around and declaring, "Of course not! I'm a Wizard of the Nine!" as if that's her answer to every possible question she could ever be asked. ("Would you like fries with that?" "I'm a Wizard of the Nine!" "What time is it?" "I'm a Wizard of the Nine, do you expect me to tell time?") She is remarkably single-minded. I found this very annoying, though to be fair, Huff does a good job showing that this is part of the process of her developing into a more mature, open-minded individual.

The antagonists of this book are remarkably laid back. The king who organized this heist is quite concerned about the idea that an incompetent prince and a thief (who got caught, so, you know, probably incompetent) are on their way to steal back the Stone. The wizard who actually has the Stone? Not so much. And, apparently, despite having the power of the Stone, not much of a match for our heroes.

If it seems like I'm speaking in very generalized terms, that's because it's so easy to generalize here. Huff has all the components down, but she has yet to be able to season the dish with a sufficient amount of her own original creations. *The Fire's Stone* is a very skilled but bland work.

I did enjoy the development that Darvish undergoes. He begins as a fairly boorish drunkard who, despite being permanently intoxicated, doesn't seem to have any problems in bed. (Mind you, he's a prince. He can

probably afford some good wizardry, if you know what I mean.) Forced to step up for the good of the kingdom, Darvish changes for the better. The change is gradual, and Huff depicts the struggle he has to remain clean after giving up drinking. It gets to the point when, in the climax, he almost slides all the way back down the slope.

I also enjoyed the slight twist to the standard romantic pairing that we'd usually see in this type of book. Darvish is bisexual, and initially he's quite taken with Aaron the thief. Aaron has some cultural taboos about that, and it takes him a while to overcome that prejudice. Meanwhile, Chandra has been betrothed to Darvish against her will, and without ever meeting him. She is committed to remaining pure and free from distraction ("I'm a Wizard of the Nine!")—good luck with that one.

Tradition would dictate that, over the course of their quest, Darvish's nobility and self-sacrifice would soften Chandra's heart and cause her to love him and want him despite her resistance. Instead, Darvish and Aaron grow closer, while Chandra does some soul-searching and decides she can marry Darvish, for the good of her kingdom, and not sleep with him (especially if Darvish has someone else to keep him comfortable instead). It's all very complicated and decidedly *not* traditional, which is awesome.

Despite being more rigorously cookiecutter in some aspects, I'd probably say I prefer *The Fire's Stone* over *Gate of Darkness, Circle of Light*. I don't know whether this is a bias of classical fantasy over urban fantasy, or if it's more to do with the specifics of the plot and characters involved. Maybe it's that I expect people in urban, contemporary settings to feel more "real" and less stereotypical, whereas it's easier to get away with the fantasy character-class approach in a classical setting.

Regardless, *The Fire's Stone* won't be making any of my "best of" lists any time soon. But I think that it's one of those books that would make sense as an answer to someone who asked, "What is a fantasy novel?" I could hand them this story and tell them, "It goes something like this," and suddenly they would understand. And really, I think sometimes that can be sufficient.
