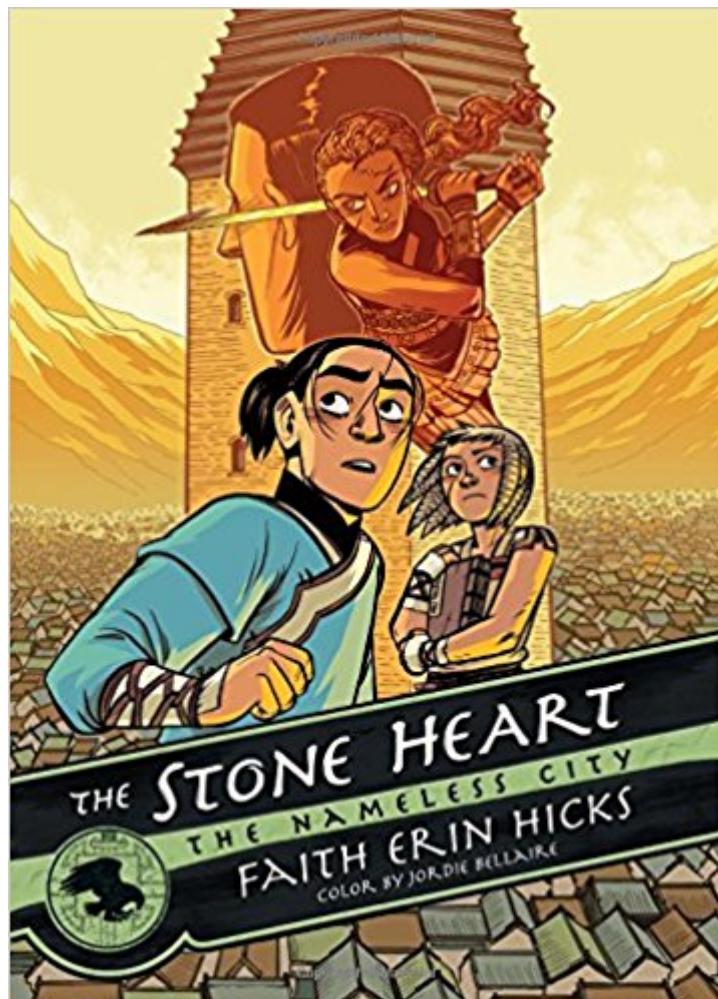


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The Stone Heart (The Nameless City)



Synopsis

The Stone Heart is the second book in the Nameless City trilogy from Faith Erin Hicks. Kaidu and Rat have only just recovered from the assassination attempt on the General of All Blades when more chaos breaks loose in the Nameless City: deep conflicts within the Dao nation are making it impossible to find a political solution for the disputed territory of the City itself. To complicate things further, Kaidu is fairly certain he's stumbled on a formula for the lost weapon of the mysterious founders of the City. . . . But sharing it with the Dao military would be a complete betrayal of his friendship with Rat. Can Kai find the right solution before the Dao find themselves at war?

Book Information

Series: The Nameless City (Book 2)

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Age Range: 9 - 13 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

"Flourishing from the strong worldbuilding and characterization of the first installment, this middle volume of Hicks' epic...brings all to stunning emotional life." — Kirkus, starred review "Her manga-inspired artwork is as lush and detailed as ever, incorporating vast cityscapes, cinematic action scenes, and quiet moments of meaningful, often wordless, expression. While less happens in this book than in the last." — Booklist

Faith Erin Hicks is a writer and artist in Vancouver, British Columbia. Her graphic novels include the

Nameless City trilogy, Zombies Calling, The War at Ellsmere, Brain Camp (with Susan Kim and Laurence Klavan), Friends with Boys, Nothing Can Possibly Go Wrong (with Prudence Shen), the Bigfoot Boy series (with J. Torres), The Last of Us: American Dreams (with Neil Druckmann), and the Eisner Award-winning The Adventures of Superhero Girl.

Volume two of this series was, in my opinion, a little better than volume one. There's a complication of its relationships, an appropriate amount of personal history disclosed for the main characters Kaidu and Rat, a little more Nameless City lore, and of course, a whole lot of betrayal and the threat of impending war, both civil within the Dao Empire as it bites at its own throat and from the Yisun army which has been refusing to enter peace talks. The opening of the book has a good reintroduction to the story--it's been a while since the first one came out, so unless you are very familiar with it or reread it recently, it's very useful to have a reminder. We are reminded of how the Nameless City really has no "rightful" occupant, and we're reconnected with Kai and Rat (and we're reminded that Rat hurt her leg but is healing), and we see the evolution of their friendship has held and probably grown stronger in the meantime as they wait for Rat to be strong enough to race Kaidu again. And of course, the sober reminder that there was an assassination attempt in the last book is a good choice too. I like that Erzi complains about the guards--a consequence of the last book's climax--and says he feels like he's a prisoner in his own home. We're facing a building conflict over whether building a council is the right thing to do--joining hands with enemies to have peace--and we can tell Erzi preferred the idea of growing up to rule the city without any of this pesky council to help. We're right into it at the start, and we don't have to remember specifics to be given enough context to go on from here. That's good writing, and the author takes her time with it so we feel comfortable before she builds on it again. I liked hanging out with Rat's crew after she'd had a long absence, and how she acted while trying to get them to accept Kai even though he's associated with the oppressors. And I like that he has some self-awareness about what his people have done to them, but still doesn't want to be harassed over it. (And there's a cute exchange where Hannya, an acrobat, slyly mentions that her brother will be performing at the riverside, dropping the info carefully in front of Iniko, who clearly has feelings for this brother. Well, I guess kids will tease kids about romantic interests no matter what.) Rat and Kai chillin' at the monastery in a quiet moment was really peaceful too--another example of a clump of silent panels the author is so good at using to convey a feeling and a tone. Rat ends up disclosing some stuff about her family, and it's really nice to see that Kai doesn't push it at all. It would have been inappropriate for him to pry more out of her, or bug her about her real name, so it's great to see their respect for each other has increased to

include reading each other's boundaries correctly. Rat trusts Kai enough to tell the story of what happened to her parents, and it brings up old wounds--the fact that Dao soldiers (like the kind Kai is associated with) have devastated her life and the lives of others who matter to her. It was very touching when she carelessly told Kai a secret about the monks and then remarks that she forgot he was Dao--that he's not supposed to know. But with people questioning whether Kai even counts as Dao because he's not a fighter (and he gets in trouble for preferring evasive maneuvers instead of fighting back), he has a lot in common with the General, and they both seem committed to a future where requiring "conqueror" as an identity is not a feasible path of moving forward. Seeing Erzi and his father Arik, the General of All Blades, disagree over whether a council should be formed was really intense. I'm not going to go into detail about what happened, but it's pretty incredible that Erzi would feel strongly enough about the city and the possibility of leaving it that he would move against his father and insist that he is not a conqueror, even though he's fixated on "the city will be MINE" as his ultimate future. I appreciate that this is a good demonstration of how antagonists don't think they're evil--they think they're doing the right thing for their people and themselves. I thought it was nice to see that the General was inspired by the friendship between Kai and Rat (and that Rat could still accept Kai even though the Dao killed her family), and that he saw forgiveness and peace in their relationship, hoping that following in their footsteps could lead to a world where teenagers don't have to go to war. But Erzi doesn't imagine it that way, and he's willing to turn against people who saved his life to preserve what he thinks of as a birthright. When things turn violent in the latter half of the book, it's presented very well--it happens at a fast pace, but there's no intense focus on the fighting. You get the frames you need to understand who's doing what to whom in battle and how they escape or how they are hurt, and then it lets you get back to how people are reacting to the conflicts. I loved seeing Rat and Kai stick together and help Kai's father when the Empire they served turns against them, and Mura's battle skills are appropriately formidable but not unbeatable, and we know her motivation for fighting too. I appreciated that we went back into quiet moments with more exposition about the tribes of the Dao, more relationship-building, and of course more grieving and planning. I especially like the little hints of individual relationships and loyalties--the monks having their principles and standing by them, the gate guards being willing to let the protagonists escape, the connections Rat has with her friend who will let them stay there while hiding from the new Empire, and of course, the relationship between Kai and his father. The relationship a Dao soldier has with his father is a complicated one in general, and it's intriguing how Kai is questioning his father's authority at the same time as he's working in favor of what his father wants. Overall I felt the story leaned a little less on common tropes than the

first book--the last one had six or seven very common story elements that snuck in there, and this one had fewer of them, but I think my chief complaint would be how consistently "this happened to me as a child, so this directly influenced who I became as an adult in this specific way" was used as a motivation. It's not surprising, of course, that specific conversations or events during one's formative years have an effect on the characters' loyalties and personalities, but the story did choose that presentation several times: character does X, flashback to conversation or confrontation from the character's past that explains it, character later has line of meaningful dialogue that invokes earlier flashback. And though I did understand Erzi's connection to the city because he grew up there, and though I did appreciate his outburst toward his father where he expresses frustration at having his entire future upended, I didn't fully comprehend his motivation and why it would inspire him to be so violent. But he has Mura immediately whispering in his ear planting ideas and making him think he's in charge. She's a dangerous character and I'm curious to see what else has fed into making her the character she is. Art-wise, I'm still really digging the skillful expressions on characters, their body language and how it works to convey emotion even if it's a faraway model, and the great balance this artist has between scenery and people. You could say that the characters are on the cartoony side since they are frequently given very simple expressions (which still convey their feelings well), but you still feel like the anatomy, proportions, and detail are "realistic" somehow. At one point toward the beginning Kai plays music and there's a really interesting effect the artist chooses to show him easing back into playing after being rusty. It's great because we obviously can't hear what's coming out, so seeing these increasingly smooth swirls balanced against the others' expressions works really well. As the story goes on, my favorite thing about the art is the meaningful looks and implied gestures between the characters--how they'll silently acknowledge each other as they stand together while witnessing something horrible, or how there will always be a reaction shot when they have important conversations. It's really quite a good balance of words and NOT-words in the storytelling here. Recommended for anyone who liked the last one, and anyone who likes character-oriented storytelling with rich history and a little action.

This was an amazing continuation of The Nameless City series. Things get pretty tense in this book. I love the detail that went into building this world and the beautifully colored and detailed illustrations. The characters are amazing as well. The Nameless City ends up on the brink of war again...despite the best efforts of those who live there and want to engender peace once and for all. Kadu unravels more history behind his father's past and Rat reveals some secrets behind the monastery she grew up in. Both are struggling not only to save the City but their

own lives. The illustration throughout is fantastic and easy to follow. The story is getting increasingly complex and things get pretty intense. I would recommend to middle grade and older readers as a result. This should be a graphic novel adults will enjoy too; it's complex enough and deals with some interesting issues around war. Overall I really loved this 2nd volume in the Nameless City series. I would recommend to those who enjoy fantasy graphic novels about war and politics. This is an incredibly well done series with excellent illustration and an amazing world.

Ms. Hicks' art is wonderful, her story is fluid and the city she's created is beautifully realized. Eagerly awaiting the third entry into this world.

The book is amazing, and I'm glad that I purchased it from the original publisher, since 's new policy change regarding the Buy Box deprives authors, illustrators, and publishers of their income.

Well written and beautifully illustrated, The Stone Heart is a great read.

*The Stone Heart is the second book in Hicks' Nameless City trilogy which begins with The Nameless City. This review contains spoilers for book one.*Kaidu and Rat are still recovering after stopping the assassination of the General of All Blades. In the wake of the assassination, the Nameless City seems peaceful and there is reason to hope things will stay that way. The General of All Blades and Kaidu's father are working to create a council of all the nations that claim the City as their home to stop the constant fighting to claim the City as territory. But not everyone supports the idea of a council and its promise to change the Dao way of life in the city forever. As conflict begins to fracture the Dao nation from within, Kaidu discovers a formula for a powerful weapon--a secret that has been protected for generations and something Rat might be able to decipher. Sharing the formula with the Dao could mean giving the City's current conquerors a dangerous edge. Hiding it could make peace even harder to achieve. Kai and Rat already did the unthinkable by becoming friends and saving the General of All Blades. Will they be able to do it again to bring peace to the City before it's too late? in The Stone Heart (2016) by Faith Erin Hicks. The Stone Heart is the second book in Hicks' Nameless City trilogy which begins with The Nameless City. This review contains spoilers for book one. The Stone Heart picks up a few weeks after the conclusion of The Nameless City bringing readers back to the City that Rat calls home and the place Kai is coming to care about. Hicks uses the relative calm at the beginning of this installment to expand the world of the City as Rat shows Kai more of her world and introduces her to several new characters. This

expanded view helps to bring the City into clearer focus and situates the story within the larger context of the world Hicks has created based on thirteenth century China (as mentioned in an author's note which talks a bit about her research process). Hicks' full-color artwork is as stunning as ever and once again brings Kai and Rat's story vividly to life. When the uneasy truce that Kai and Rat helped bring to fruition falls apart spectacularly, the story moves in an unexpected direction and new villains emerge. Will Kai and Rat be able to save the City? Will the mysterious formula Kai and Rat found fall into the wrong hands? Readers will have to wait for trilogy's exciting conclusion to see how everything comes together. Recommended for readers looking for a new comic adventure and those who enjoy their adventure served with a side of strong-but-unlikely friendships.

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