

An Urban Fantasy novel by
JOSH ERIKSON



Hero Forged

Josh Erikson

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Gabe thought he had covered all the angles, but it's tough to plan a contingency for accidentally trapping an evil god in your brain.

Gabriel Delling might call himself a professional con artist, but when walking superstitions start trying to bite his face off, his charm is shockingly unhelpful. It turns out living nightmares almost never appreciate a good joke.

Together with a succubus who insists on constantly saving his life, Gabe desperately tries to survive a new reality that suddenly features demons, legends, and a giant locust named Dale—all of whom pretty much hate his guts. And when an ancient horror comes hunting for the spirit locked in his head, Gabe finds himself faced with the excruciating choice between death... or becoming some kind of freaking hero.

Hero Forged is the first book in the new series, *Ethereal Earth*, a modern fantasy adventure that challenges the natures of myth, humanity, and what it means to be the good guy.

Hero Forged Details

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Author : Josh Erikson

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From Reader Review Hero Forged for online ebook

Jon Adams says

This was a very entertaining, and fast, read.

Thanks, once again, to Mark Lawrence's SPFBO for pointing out so many great books.

Rusty says

I found this book through TBRindr. This is the author's (Josh Erikson) debut novel which just released a couple months ago. It is the first book in his Ethereal Earth series. I listened to the audiobook which was narrated by the author, and done very well at that.

Gabe is a con man. He's good at it, but not so good that he can afford more than living day-to-day. He is trying to balance the bridges that he has nearly burned down. He is trying to do the least amount of work for the biggest payoff. He is a master at reading people, and then becoming the persona that will get what he wants.

One of his latest schemes is to write a book, called ConScience. We get excerpts from the book at the beginning of most of the chapters. His book is meant to be autobiographical, and it begins by telling some tricks-of-the-trade (the science behind being a con or "con science"), and evolves into his reflections on how this has altered him as a person (showing how his "conscience" is keeping him grounded). These excerpts are some of the best parts of the book, and go a long way to show the complexity of Gabe, and the inner struggles he faces.

We also are introduced to Gwendyl, a supernatural being called an Umbra who is trying to break from the Ethereal plane into earth, and bring others in with her. She is extremely powerful, and will stop at nothing to get what she wants.

Their paths collide when Gabe takes on a job with a team of other cons and specialists. The job is nothing like Gabe expected, and he finds himself in the middle of the ritual that was meant to bring Gwendyl's lover, Aka Manah, to earth. The ritual misfires, and Gabe finds himself bonded to a succubus, and linked to Aka Manah.

The story follows Gwendyl's attempts to free Aka Manah from Gabe, and to achieve her grand schemes. Meanwhile Gabe practically tries to go on with life as if nothing happened. Of course, Gabe can't escape the godlike being partially trapped inside him, constantly being coerced to do increasingly despicable things. Gabe's partner and guide is Heather who he used to flirt with, but is now possessed by a succubus. Heather helps Gabe in many ways, explaining things related to the Ether, and helping him connect with other creatures, all while acting out of her sexually-driven succubus instincts.

Gabe is a very complex character who is clearly torn between what he knows – being a con – and wanting to do what is right. He is someone who just wants to be left alone to live his life, and doesn't want to be a hero. Gabe is constantly conflicted with what he should do, and is often choosing between two bad options.

The book does a great job of shifting from light, fun, playful tone and dialogue, to horrific, severe and dark, and back again. While Gabe can be immature and selfish at times, we see that he has a conscience and a set of morals that motivates him. The book builds in intensity throughout and reads very quickly.

This book has been nominated as the first semi-finalist in this year's SPFBO. It is worthy of that recognition and the positive reviews. It was definitely well done and I will absolutely recommend it. I am very eager to read the rest of the series. Thank you, Josh, for sending this to me. Well done! 4.5 / 5 stars.

Sean Cunningham says

When an evil sorcerer opens a door in your head, DON'T GO THROUGH.

This is a fun book. Con-man Gabe stumbles into a world of magic and monsters when a job goes sideways. From that moment on he's got a ticking clock to race against, a whole new world to try and figure out and a great big bundle of enemies at his heels.

I really enjoyed the way Erikson describes the Ethereals, particularly in the beginning when we get to see one come into the world. Small details suggest a long history of them on earth and you get the beginnings of a picture of how much they've changed in the present.

Gabe is a con-man, a guy used to working with his wits and his mouth, not special martial or magical abilities. It was fun watching him try to trick and talk his way to solutions to his problems when he had only half an idea of what was even going on.

He's joined pretty quickly by a succubus. What had the potential to be a bit of a cliche evolved into an interesting and enjoyable working relationship, and then a little more. Together, they're two characters whose adventures I want to see more of.

Hero Forged is a fun, well-written and overall enjoyable urban fantasy story. I'm looking forward to the next book in the series.

Mark says

A very good well written story, can see why it was voted into the spfbo2018 competition. Decent world and character building. Full of twists and turns to keep the reader entertained throughout the book.

Highly recommended to fans of urban fantasy.

Calvin Park says

I don't normally read much urban fantasy. For whatever reason it just doesn't typically do it for me. But *Hero Forged* by Josh Erikson has been a pleasant surprise. It's urban fantasy, but it hooked me almost from the first page. The characters are engaging, it has a fun and fast paced plot, and I just kept wanting more.

There is a lot to like in this book, and that starts with our main character, Gabriel Delling. Gabe is your typical somewhat cocksure, snarky con man. He reminds me a little of a younger Nate Ford from *Leverage*—just with a demon god trapped in his head. In any case, Erikson easily avoids falling into tired tropes here. The character of Gabe sets him apart and makes the reader want to keep reading because you identify with some of his motivations or—at other times—because you’re truly curious to know if Gabe is going to make it. The side characters, while not as well developed as Gabe, are still a strength of the novel. The pacing was excellent throughout the bulk of the novel, and I felt Erikson sprinkled just enough glimpses of the larger world and what was going on behind the scenes to tantalize without allowing the story to become bogged down or become confusing to the reader. Well done all around.

For me, the end game pacing felt off. The rest of the novel felt so perfectly paced that it was jarring to get to the end game and feel like we entered one end game, only to then enter another, only to then find ourselves in a third. It was, perhaps, drawn out slightly too much. Perhaps another way of saying it is that Erikson had a number of threads to pull together and it may have just taken him two chapters too many to do so. This is not a complaint that these ending chapters amount to an extended epilogue (see *The Lord of the Rings*), but rather that the pacing just didn’t seem quite right for the final 15% of the novel. In addition to this, on occasion it felt like Gabe sometimes picked up a new ability without much explanation to how the magic worked. I hope to see more exploration of the magic system in future novels set in this world.

Hero Forged is a wonderfully unique, humorous, pulse-pounding adventure that you shouldn’t miss. I’m definitely looking forward to the next book in the series and I’m glad that I took a “risk” on reading an urban fantasy, Josh Erikson has made me a believer. 4.3/5 stars.

5 – I loved this, couldn’t put it down, move it to the top of your TBR pile

4 – I really enjoyed this, add it to the TBR pile

3 – It was ok, depending on your preferences it may be worth your time

2 – I didn’t like this book, it has significant flaws and I can’t recommend it

1 – I loathe this book with a most loathsome loathing

Tam says

I was a little hesitant when a friend recommended the audiobook of *Hero Forged* to me. The first thing I noticed was that the author was also the narrator, and that doesn’t normally go as well as authors using professional narrators for their books. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the author is, in fact, a really damn good narrator.

Hero Forged follows around conman Gabriel Delling. It kicks off with him taking a robbery job which turns south fast. A crazy demon is there, and by the end of it, Gabe is running from demons, supernatural hunters, and has an evil god in his head. Thus begins his quest to find out what is actually going on, how magic works, and to avoid being killed by the people chasing him down.

Gabe is a really enjoyable character to read about. He has all the charisma in the world—as you’d expect from a conman—a difficult past, and makes for an awesome reluctant hero. He really doesn’t want to be involved in whatever the evil god and demon are up to, but with the god stuck in his head, everyone is after him, and he doesn’t have a choice but to get involved or be hunted down.

Hero Forged has some great humour in it, and some really touching moments too. I really liked that Erikson

could show the way Gabe dealt with stress and difficult situations, and how he felt for those people who he's close to.

Erikson has written a fantastic book here and done really well with the narration too. Would highly recommend to people who enjoy:

- * Urban fantasy
- * Reluctant heroes
- * Charismatic MCs
- * Humour

For more reviews, check out my blog, [The Fantasy Inn](#)

Lukasz says

Actual rating: 4.5/5

I've been looking for some fresh Urban Fantasy for a while. Not an easy task when you grow tired of angry chicks in leather or self-loathing wizards/detectives. *Hero Forged* surprised me in a good way - it's a right mix of everything I love in the genre served in a way that works on all levels.

Gabe is a charming, clever con artist with a skewed (but working) moral compass. He's the master of talking his way out of things he'd talked himself into. Also, he's short on cash. When a chance to earn a decent amount of money appears, Gabe accepts.

Things go downhill fast. Gabe finds himself trapped in a mansion with bloodthirsty and power-hungry lunatics from other dimension and with a god trapped in his head. Oh, and a sexy succubus bonded to him.

Despite his hopes it was all a drug-induced hallucination, it's real. Demons are after him, the god trapped in him wants to tear free, and the god's wife plans to bring the world to its knees.

Hero Forged shines because of three things: characterisation (especially of Gabe and Heather), masterful pacing and action, and overall writing style. First, characterisation—Gabe is smart, witty, and charming. He tries to be cynical but somehow fails. Under all his false personalities, he's a decent human being with the heart in the right place. His point of view is often hilarious, sometimes profoundly philosophical. As the story progresses, we discover the even shaped him. Beyond Gabe, the other standout character in this book is Heather - Gabe's succubus side-kick. There's much more to her than curvy lines and sex-appeal. I think the author nailed the perfect balance between sly succubi side and a layered, relatable character. Bad guys deserve high praise as well - they were all nuanced, and it was tempting to see the things the way they did.

There's a lot of information packed into *Hero Forged*, but Erikson's accessible writing and slick plotting make the pages fly by at a lightning pace. The novel is propelled by Gabe's efforts to discover the nature of deity trapped in his head and looking for a way he can survive another day. A cinematic conclusion is satisfying, and the ending gives a strong final twist that surprised me. And Gabe as well, I'm sure.

Any drawbacks? Well, there were some plot devices used to move things forward (especially diverse foes' attacks that "forced" Gabe to negotiate with Aka Manah and gain new "skills"). Anything else? Not really.

By any means, read it. Do it before it gets cool. Josh Erikson is a natural storyteller, but also somewhat of a philosopher too. He's one of these authors who can create original narratives from the elements we all know and love. *Hero Forged* was fun, clever, and entertaining.

Emma says

Imagine you're living a normal (ish) life, conning people and stealing stuff, when you take the wrong job and end up in a creepy basement in the middle of some kind of supernatural ritual involving bodysnatching and death and the crossing of worlds. Some bad day, huh? Gabriel Delling is just that unlucky. Except it's even worse than that because that he ends up sharing head space with an ancient God who has a seriously bad attitude and a hankering to make the place his own. From carefree swindler to lead in an Urban Fantasy in one instant, Gabriel's brutal entry in to the world of gods and monsters is too close for comfort...and it comes with a ticking clock. Get rid of his divine passenger within a few days, or he could transform into a paranormal nightmare or, you know, die.

His whole life philosophy was based on the idea that things weren't worth doing if he wasn't effortlessly good at them. It had worked so far.

As a lifelong con artist, Gabriel has developed the kind of quick thinking, charm, and glib patter necessary to deal with all kinds of dodgy or unpredictable situations, as well as an ability to read people and negotiate his way into or out of almost anything. All handy talents he's going to need more than ever now magic has come into play. His past has given him a seriously well developed antenna for danger- he's seen the movie and isn't playing the game. That thing where people run blindly into dark basements with no thought to the waiting horror?? Not this guy. His outlook is all about self-preservation, with a moral flexibility that should allow for the prioritisation of his personal security, except for that pesky tendency for occasional bravery and heroism. It's hard to decide which part of his character gets him into more trouble. He's fully alive to the dangers of such courageous acts and somewhat equivocal about taking them. This awareness forms part of a larger understanding of and reference to literary and film tropes that runs through the book and is seriously funny, forming one means the author uses to trample all over your expectations. On top of that, there's a truly excellent level of snark and humour that rarely misses the mark, especially in the conversational banter and backchat. Gabriel has a sarcastic internal voice that felt truly contemporary and properly made me laugh, endearing me ever more to him as the book progressed. He reacts to the whole thing with a kind of humorous incredulity: you're kidding me, right? Guys...?? Come on....seriously? Even if I thought he maybe should have gotten over it a little quicker, it's an easy stance to take from the safe distance of my armchair. His instinctive reaction to want to shut it all out and not deal with it once all the action and fleeing from enemies died down felt entirely real, I would have bailed long before that. And died, no doubt. As in many other instances, his sidekick succubus, Heather, is there to slap some sense into him. Refreshingly portrayed, she's an excellent foil for newbie Gabe, a supernatural entity that brings realism to his now violently disordered world, and she's not about to allow him to let him take the easy way out. They've got lives to save, after all, including their own.

The book starts out a little shaky but it picks up quickly, though I would have started with Gabriel rather than Gwendyl. I see why the author chose to do it that way but Gabe's chapters are by far the best, with those from the Team Bad perspective a little too superlative, a bit 'behold my evilness and villainy, I am the baddest baddy of bad times' type of thing. Actually, the author addresses this issue at a later point, turning it into another joke, which kinda made me forgive the whole thing because it was done with a purposeful smirk. He works the same trick with the romance, there was much eye rolling when it was introduced right at

the beginning, but the relationship was so well utilised by the end that I appreciated being fooled. Perhaps there were a few instances of too handy plot devices, one matrix style information update via magic was a bit unnecessary for example, but the world building as a whole more than made up for that. It was detailed, inventive, and as fun as everything else in the novel, fitting well the swift pace that favoured action over character. The book has a light touch, but doesn't suffer for it, it's pure enjoyment and allows space for future instalments to reveal more of each individual's qualities. Even so, the short 'rules' section at the beginning of each chapter, purporting to be from a book Gabe's writing on the art of the con: CONscience, effectively add a greater depth to his character and the relationship with his father, giving the events of the finale a poignancy that wouldn't have been quite as sharp without them.

Hero Forged is one of those just-another-chapter books, and if you do manage to put it down, you want to get back to it as soon as you can. It's action packed, creatively imagined, and one of the most genuinely funny books I've read in ages, with real heart lightly hidden beneath the humour. There's no doubt I'll be reading whatever comes next.

SPFBO entry 2018

Timy says

The full review with a choosen song can be found on my blog!

The first semi-finalist by Fantasy Book Review in SPFBO!

Gabe claims himself to be one of the best con artists in the world, while living in Lincoln, Nebraska, taking care of his dad and trying to get through the days. Then he gets a job offer he can't afford to turn down and things go to hell from there. He finds himself sharing his head with a god who happens to be the master of lying, running from a goddess who wants to get her husband back, with a succubus on his side who is bound to him. Gabe has to come to terms with things quickly, if he wants to get out alive from this mess. His skill of talking himself out of any situation might not be much helpful this time. He is also forced to make choices he might not be ready to make.

Gabe, despite being a con artist, surprisingly a pretty likable character. You can't help but feel sorry for him when he finds himself deeper and deeper in trouble every time he makes a decision or strikes a deal. His struggle with grasping his new reality is very well portrayed. Although the events happen in a matter of days, Gabe goes through several phases of acceptance starting with denial. And who would blame him? When you find a god trapped in your head and monsters from your worst nightmares chasing you, you'd be inclined to crawl back to bed, pull the blanket over your head, waiting out until the madness passes. Gabe, however doesn't have the luxury of that, and when he wakes up he finds a succubus right beside himself in his bed. Which could be a very nice dream, if she weren't so keen on insisting to keep him alive long enough to earn her freedom. Gabe is smart, not really athletic, and always have at least one plan. Which usually ends up with a bigger catastrophe than the previous one. At least he is not your average urban fantasy main character who accepts his situation almost instantly and sets out to save the world. No, Gabe only wants to save himself and Heather since she is bound to him. And also because she saves his ass a few times. Not talking about her being sexy as hell and quite seductive when she wants to be. But then, that's a succubus for you. All in all, Gabe is no hero. He never was. He never wanted to be. And sure as hell didn't ask for being responsible of stopping some enemies with a really dark power at their disposal. And a few supernatural

monsters for emphasis. But he copes with all this on his own way: being a snarky smart-ass and trying to con everyone and everything they come across. Earning a few more enemies along the way. But hey, they practically asked for it! Starting with Aka Manah, the god taking residence in his head. But this time Gabe got a worthy opponent: with the time running out the line between madness and reality gets blurry and it's hard to say what is a lie anymore.

"Most of life is about embracing the choices you make and making something of them. Even your mistakes. And if you're really good, you can own your errors so thoroughly that they actually become advantages."

Hero Forged has two strengths: the characterisation and the humor. Gabe and Heather are both very complex characters who come a long way during the story, and learn to deal with each other as much as their enemies. The ever-present banter between them just makes their interactions more real and enjoyable to read. Gwendal is a crazy enough villain, with no morals and questionable taste:

"Once upon a time it might have been nice to have a throne of skulls to sit on as you glutted on the blood of virgins, but there's only so many times you can do that before it gets old, you know? And skulls are not terribly ergonomic. The teeth are particular murder on the thighs."

And this quote also highlights the humor this book can offer. I'll be honest, I laughed out loud a few times. When the only thing that keeps you sane is humor, well, then you have to use it. And it works, it lightens up the mood when the shit really starts to hit the fan.

The short snippets from Gabe's book he is working on, titled CONscience are just pure awesomeness. Sometimes they are light and funny, sometimes they have deep thoughts but most importantly give a background to Gabe's character without actually using info dumps and thus sparing the space for the action and character building.

"Most of life is about embracing the choices you make and making something of them. Even your mistakes. And if you're really good, you can own your error so thoroughly that they actually become advantages."

Overall, this book is very well written. It takes a bit of time to understand what's happening, what Umbra is or the Ether and what is happening exactly. Erikson choose to explain everything to the readers as Gabe tries to grasp his new reality. The pacing is generally good, sometimes felt a bit dragging, but the end play was pretty cathartic and managed to place a few punches. But honestly, I still have no idea where to put Aka Manah. He remains to be a mystery.

This book reminded me a bit of Craig Schaefer's Daniel Faust series with the tone and atmosphere, and that the main character isn't your typical hero in shining armor. Their moral might be a bit shady, they still try to do the good thing. Which usually comes back to bite them in the ass. Gabe's well-played ruination of a sorcerer has unforeseeable consequences for one.

Hero Forged is a fast paced, unique, entertaining urban fantasy. It has everything from a villain with blood lust, to an information dealer giant locust, some monsters from your nightmares, gods, a succubus, and a snarky main character being thrown in the middle of it all. If you are bored with the usual UF tropes, you might find this book quite refreshing. A warning: there might be quite a few dead bodies scattered along Gabe's path.

Esmerelda Weatherwax says

I was given the audiobook by the author in exchange for an honest review. I saw that this had been self-narrated, and boy can that go so wrong so fast. However, this was really well done, I honestly would never have known that wasn't "professionally" performed if I hadn't known up front. The voices were well executed, they were distinct but light, consistent, and not overly cartoonish.

I didn't read the blurb so I didn't know what I was getting into with this one, so all of it came as a pleasant surprise.

Set in modern day, Gabe is a good hearted con artist, he's past his college years but not by too much (I don't remember a specific age given) and is a loner by choice, sort of. Relationships become complicated and don't last long when one partner is out conning people as various personas he's made up over the years. He has the ability to almost become someone else when he puts on his con act, it's lead him to develop social reflexes that get him out of dangerous situations. He's able to read people and know when he's being played and is an excellent negotiator. Overall, he's an easy character to like with a charm to him.

Gabe went with a group of cohorts for a 'job', but it went horribly wrong. Gabe finds himself in the middle of a sacrificial ritual performed by one of the Umbra known as Gwendyl. He can't wrap his head around it and he refuses to believe what he's seeing. Magic isn't a thing in this world, his world is just like the 'normal world' with no hint of supernatural anything. He watches as one by one his 'friends' throats are slit, and then raise back up – except they aren't his friends anymore, they've been altered. The rest of the group have been possessed by the Umbra and are now subservient to Gwendyl.

Gwendyl has been trapped in the Ether, or the ocean of life and creation that reality sits inside, it's a lonely boring place with no real boundaries or timescale. She's managed to come back to Earth for the first time in 500 years and is under the impression the world is in danger. She believes that forces greater than her own are determined to annihilate all life on Earth, and only she and her husband can 'save' the world.... by enslaving it. I kind of liked the take on lesser evils vs greater evils and the twisted ways villains can see themselves as heroes. She is preying on humanity, killing them and stealing their life's essence, and raising people from the dead newly possessed with more Umbra. She wants Gabe's body to be her husband's new vessel, who is still trapped in the Ether. When she gets to Gabe and performs the ritual, however, Gabe is able to push out the Umbra spirit... almost. After the ritual, Gabe is linked to her husband, but not possessed by him, but she didn't know that at the time. With quick thinking, Gabe is able to talk his way out of her presence and starts to head back home. There's a complication though, during the ritual he becomes bound to a succubus.

Heather was once one of his cohorts, one he was being kind of flirty with, actually. Now she's risen again in front of his eyes and telling him that she's bound to him for life. She's essentially enslaved – she must always tell him the truth, and protect him from harm at all costs. She doesn't want that though, she wants to be free. They strike a deal that he will try and learn how to set her free, the problem is he has no magical ability, and to break the bond requires magic on his end. While they figure that out she fills him in on the world he never knew existed, and tries to help him rid himself of the husband Umbra, Acamana. Acamana, is an ancient and powerful entity, more akin to a god than a minor demoness like Heather. He's known as the god of lies, deception, and evil, not exactly something you want hanging around your brain. The problem is, they have no idea how to sever the link, and no one else seems to either. All the while, Gwenlyn is super pissed off and sending demons and monsters after the two of them leading to a lot of mayhem.

I liked Gabe, he was easy to relate to, he was smart and at times funny. Sometimes I was annoyed at how long it took him to accept what was happening around him, although I don't know how much better I would be doing in similar circumstances. He has a lot of loyalty when he's invested in a person, despite his dad being a shithead, Gabe still takes care of him now that he's disabled and unable to care for himself. Even though there's a lot of danger all around him, he's reluctant to run to a different city because he doesn't know what would happen to his dad. He also develops a complex relationship with Heather, whom he doesn't trust much considering she's a demon – but she's so atypical for what one would expect a demon to be, he can't help but become attached. There are many instances where running away would have been the 'smarter' choice, but he stuck around to help Heather out of some deep shit at risk to himself.

I really liked Heather, she was a character that just kept getting more layers as the book went on. She's a succubus, so naturally, she's a little flirty and uses sex appeal to get her way. Books with a lot of male gaze annoys the shit out of me, so the fact that this one pulled off a succubus without being laced with male gaze is awesome. Instead of talk of boobs and ass, she is often described in scent, (perfume, vanilla, flowers) or visual images that have meaning to the main character, like the place where he had his first kiss. She's simply described as beautiful beyond comprehension and having a hypnotizing magical force rather than focusing on descriptions of her physical attributes. She has no ill intent either, for being a succubus she's a pretty laid back gal, all she really wants in life is to eat good food, drink good drinks, and have a lot of sex. She is a succubus after all.

There were all sorts of magical elements in this book, gods, demons, vampires, hobgoblins, Hell Hounds etc. It was introduced slowly at first though, it was just the Umbra and the Ether in the beginning and then everything else was added in slowly. Umbras have been around since before written history but they've been concealed through powerful glamours allowing them to blend into society unnoticed. They can come in all shapes and sizes and rely greatly on collective human belief. The more an Umbra is worshipped and thought about, the more powerful they can become.

The writing in this was pretty solid, and it came through very well in the audiobook. I really think this is one of those books that would read better as an audio because of the emotions and voices cast to the characters, it was all well done. The pacing was even and consistent with a tension that built up slowly through the book. The world building expanded when it needed to, but without a lot of info dumps and there were alternating periods of downtime and action scenes. This had an overall lighter tone, despite all the doomsday threats going on the main character was a very 'light' as was Heather which balanced things out.

Audience:

For people who like:

Con artist characters
easy to like characters
urban fantasy
audiobooks
vampires, succubus, Hell Hounds, gods
action scenes
lighter in tone
Not for people who don't like cursing

Ratings:

Plot: 12.5/15

Characters: 12.5/15

World Building: 13/15

Writing: 12/15

Pacing: 12.5/15

Originality: 12.5/15

Personal Enjoyment: 9/10

Final Score: 84/100

Gavin says

Hero Forged sucked me into buying it by having a really fun sounding blurb. Yeah, I'm a sucker for a good blurb! The good news is the story almost lived up to the promise of the fantastic blurb and this book turned out to be a very enjoyable read. I'm not always a fan of UF but this one really worked for me as I enjoyed the mix of grit and humor we got in the story and I liked the main character enough that I was rooting for him and emotionally invested in the story.

The premise was really fun. Self proclaimed professional con artist, Gabriel Delling, finds his life getting surprisingly complicated when his latest con goes badly wrong and ends up with him sharing his mind with an evil God! As if that was not bad enough he now has the Gods crazy girlfriend hunting him (along with her evil minions), a cranky succubus bound to him, and the so called good guys, the Knights of Solomon, as eager to see him dead as the villains. As if that was not crazy enough to deal with for a guy who had no idea the supernatural world existed the day before poor Gabe also has to deal with the evil God in his mind whispering some awfully tempting deals, all that come with a cost of course!

It was all a whole lot of fun. Mostly because Gabe was a charming and amusing narrator who was easy to root for in his adventures despite the fact that he was a morally grey con artist. It helped that he mostly found himself up against some crazy enemies.

I found Gabe easy to like right from the start of the tale but the story itself took a little bit of time to grow on me. I enjoyed Gabe's con artist stuff but took longer to become interested in the supernatural aspects of the story. It did grow on me though and I was sucked into that aspect of the story and enjoying it as well before too long. Erikson's magic and supernatural world building was actually quite fun once I grew accustomed to it. It offered some cool stuff and was a nice mix of gritty and hilarious. Just like most of the story!

This was one of those stories that got better and better as it went so I ended up enjoying it quite a lot. Not that the story was completely without flaws. I wish I'd took to the supernatural aspects of the world and story a bit quicker than I did plus there was the typical small amount of misogyny to be suffered. Nothing out of the ordinary but present and one particular incident was a bit annoying. Luckily none of that really hurt my enjoyment of the story.

As always getting the balance "correct" in a story is important for me. This story mixed humor and likeable, if morally grey characters, with some dark happenings so the story felt gritty without ever getting too dark and bleak that it got depressing.

I really enjoyed the chapter introductions we got. They were excerpts from Gabe's fictional book on being a con artist. They started out being pretty witty and funny but also offered some fun musings and a deeper

emotional glimpse into Gabe as a person. Very well done!

All in all I was quite impressed with this UF and will look forward to reading more of Gabe's adventures when the sequel gets released.

Rating: 4 stars. This was a solid 4 stars. A few flaws but a likeable and charming main character and a fun story keep me quite engaged!

Audio Note: This was narrated by the author, Josh Erikson, himself. That is usually a big no no for me as most authors are TERRIBLE audio narrators. I took a chance on this one mostly because it had such a fun sounding blurb plus I got the audio for a bargain price. It turned out to be a great decision as Josh Erikson might just be the very best author/narrator I've encountered so far. He was not just tolerable but actually good and fairly talented! He did not have the typical deep baritone voice most professional male audio narrators have but he was clear-spoken and affable sounding. He was also good at dealing with both the character voices and the general narration. His voices were great for all the characters in the story and he had the ability to voice act and so could convey the correct emotions into the scenes he was reading. The best compliment I can pay him as an audio narrator is that if I spotted him narrating a book he had not written himself I'd still be happy to buy it safe in the knowledge the audio had excellent narration if nothing else! I'm rarely a fan of authors self narrating but in this case I do hope the Erikson sticks to narrating the rest of this series himself as he did a great job!

Swiffer says

8.3 / 10

What impressed me the most about this extremely fun urban fantasy is how it covers so many things so well. The shady, outlaw characters with their dry wit and questionable moralities call to mind Elmore Leonard's Detroit/Florida-set crime capers. The "hidden in plain sight" supernatural population and their quirky attitudes was reminiscent of Men in Black. Humor juxtaposes the horrors of the demonic presence and adds levity before the content gets too dark. Even the romantic angle is nailed, with palpable sexual tension between the two leads that grows over time.

The characters are likable and their motivations are easily understood. In a story where soul-eating demons make human sacrifices to revive elder gods from a void plane of existence, the author didn't lose sight of what makes a good and compelling protagonist. Gabe's relationship with his father, coupled with his unpublished book passages that prelude each chapter, give the reader a strong sense of how and why Gabe ended up the con man he is. And the book cleverly morphs from a "How to" book on scamming into a more personal confession of self-discovery. It sneaks up on you quick and it meshes well with the emotional finale.

But the finale is probably the only part that didn't totally land for me. Since this book is a series, it had to spend some time setting up the sequel with a few unexplained mysteries, which was fine. But the actual final confrontation took quite a long time to set up as well as execute. Each time I believed we reached the final location, the resolution kept being pushed back. It was an odd pacing shift, as I had devoured the page count so quickly, but took a couple of pauses in the last 20%. Also, although there are rules to the magic of this world, some of these rules seem to have been bent for plot convenience. But it's a minor nitpick, one of very few I found in this well-crafted story.

Overall, Erikson's writing is both creative and sharp, presenting many interesting concepts while keeping the story moving fast and clean. Urban fantasy isn't my usual cup of tea so I didn't know what to expect when I started this, but Hero Forged has won me over to the genre. The overarching plot was secondary to the wonderful relationships Erikson has built, which I am looking forward to exploring further in future volumes. This is a fast-paced, funny, and surprisingly emotional genre mashup that is deftly executed. A very easy book to recommend, even for newbies to urban fantasy.

Kristen says

Full review is here, on my blog!~

This is the story of Gabe Delling, who is a self-described conman living in Lincoln, Nebraska. One day, he is recruited by a contact of his to go on what seems like a pretty simple and straightforward job, which turns out to be a crazy summoning of a crazy evil god that ends up with Gabe having the aforementioned crazy evil god stuck in his head. He's pretty partially possessed, as it turns out... and he finds out that he has to get the evil god out of his head before he goes insane or dies horribly... or both.

Meanwhile, the evil god's evil wife is hunting Gabe down looking to extract her hubby, and Gabe and his companion Heather, a succubus who also got randomly summoned in the robbery/ritual, go on the run looking for ways to extract the god themselves without Gabe dying horribly.

This was a well written and really fast-paced urban fantasy which had plenty of twists and turns, ups and downs, and a few chuckles along the way. I cheered pretty hard for Gabe, who, for a conman, is actually quite an honorable and polite dude. I also wasn't expecting to get all emotional while listening to this one, but that ending... no YOU'RE crying! *baw!*

Last, but not at all least, the narration. This is a book that is narrated by its author. This is also the first book narrated by its author that isn't by Neil Gaiman or Stephen Fry (because I mean... come on) that I loved the narration so much as to be able to say that I loved it as an audiobook more than I probably would have in print. He gives each character their own flair. Each character is exactly as they should be, and he would know, because he wrote them, lol. He does believable accents too. Loved it.

So, all told, I really liked this one. I sat and listened to it in 2 days, which I haven't been able to do for a while now. Really great characters given stellar narration. I had 4.5/5 stars of fun with this audiobook. Highly recommend! :)

Maja says

3.5 stars

This was a fun ride. A good debut novel. Looking forward to read future books.

kartik narayanan says

Hero Forged is good urban fantasy; the likes of which I have not seen in a while. I had as much fun reading this book as the early Dresden files. There are some similarities to the Sandman Slim series too especially when it comes to the semi-amoralistic protagonists.

The stand out features are the writing, world building and the main character.
