



Empowered, Volume 1

Adam Warren

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Not only is costumed crimefighter "Empowered" saddled with a less-than-ideal superhero name, but she wears a skintight and cruelly revealing "supersuit" that only magnifies her body-image insecurities. Worse yet, the suit's unreliable powers are prone to failure, repeatedly leaving her in appallingly distressing situations... and giving her a shameful reputation as the lamest "cape" in the masks-and-tights business. Nonetheless, she pluckily braves the ordeals of her bottom-rung superheroic life with the help of her "thugalicious" boyfriend (and former Witless Minion) and her hard-drinking ninja girlfriend, not to mention the supervillainous advice from the caged alien demonlord watching DVDs from atop her coffee table . . .

From Adam Warren-writer/artist of the English-language *Dirty Pair* comics (the *original* "Original English-Language Manga" before OEL was cool), and writer of *Livewires*, *Gen13*, and *Iron Man*:

Hypervelocity-comes *Empowered*, a butt-kicking, bootylicious superhero lampoon that raises the bar for long-john lust and low-brow laughs. Remove all previous notions of superhero entertainment from your puny mind... and prepare to be *Empowered*!

* Adam Warren's work on *The Dirty Pair* is well-known to U.S. comics readers.

* Warren's skill as a writer has brought him a variety of high-profile assignments in recent years from Wildstorm, DC, and Marvel.

For Mature Readers.

Empowered, Volume 1 Details

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From Reader Review Empowered, Volume 1 for online ebook

Geoff Sebesta says

Everybody knows that Empowered is both more and less than it seems to be. I'll go you one better and say this is the clearest heir to Wonder Woman that we in the comics world have seen since the Marston originals, and there is a tremendous amount of truth to what Warren is saying. He has my unmitigated respect. He took work for hire and made it sing. Not only that, he holds the most interesting mirror up to the superhero cliché that I've seen in my lifetime.

Seriously, Empowered is the most interesting superhero since...I was born? There have been about three truly interesting things to happen to superheroes since the Summer of Blood:

Thunderbolts

The Order/Planetary (specifically retconning the Fantastic 4 to be the real bad guys of the MU)

Empowered

Honorable mentions go to Hellboy, who is the best new bottle that old wine could possibly be poured into, and moments of the Bendis years of Marvel culminating in the Civil War, which was almost fascinating but not quite. But nobody takes the myth apart while simultaneously holding it together quite like Warren has.

Doesn't hurt that the art is magnificent. Warren has such dimensionality to his work that it doesn't matter that the fight scenes descend into speedline irreducibility, I'm not reading for the fights anyway. Things that Warren draws look SOLID. This is helpful when drawing the boobs and the butts that this series runs on, but it's even more useful when he's drawing a car, a coffee table, or a sentient talking belt.

I'll also point out that Empowered touches issues most cape comics would rather gnaw off their fingers than approach. Nearly every single issue, honestly. It really is that good.

And readable.

And enjoyable.

And you find yourself caring about these goofy characters a lot more than you ever cared about the latest new X-Man.

I'm not going to review the whole series individually, I read it at once and I've said most of what I have to say about it here. It's great. Anybody who can read it should read it.

Matthew says

I will start by saying that this is definitely a mature comic. A bit of bad language, some gratuitous sexiness, etc. If you decide to read this based on my review, don't say I didn't warn you!

I thought it sounded interesting: a stereotypical sexy superheroine with self esteem and image issues that is the brunt of jokes and treated poorly by her teammates. It started out slowly, but the little vignettes (most

stories in the collection are under 10 pages) grew on me. Also, in a lot of places, the humorous dialogue was fantastic (I especially enjoy the trapped demonlord)

As I mentioned at the beginning of the review - there is indeed a lot of gratuitous sexiness but in general, it is making fun of gratuitous sexiness. So, it uses sex to make fun of the way sex is portrayed in comic books by being truly sexy but goofy at the same time. Make sense?

So if you like funny comics and don't mind adult themes, you will probably enjoy this (NOTE: it is in black and white)

Gorgon's Kiss says

The art is very good. He mixes Western Comic with a Manga flair that you just don't see every day, and I really dig how animated that makes everything feel.

The stories are short and engaging, I even enjoyed the dialogue of the "meta" filler between stories.

Very entertaining, I will be looking for Volume 2 and beyond!

(A word of warning: book contains images and themes somewhat unsafe for work, and I do not recommend it for anyone under the age of 17.)

Elly says

I had to give this book two tries. The first time I barely got to page 50 without putting it down thinking it was nothing but soft core porn and no character development. I was wrong. This bondage-esque comic actually turned into one of the sweetest stories about self encouragement and determination and has one of the most healthy relationships in comic books today. This series is definitely worth the read for the light hearted feel good (and sometimes feel horny) stories with some serious events thrown in. It makes the characters seem all together more real. You really start missing them when you turn the last page.

Jim says

I don't know. I'm not really sure how to take this book. I think I realize the author and artist is being ironic. I think. The whole tying up and gagging thing is kind of "ew". And, as we get later in the book it seems like he is trying to make a point. But when it starts out, it just seems gratuitous. The book is kind of manga-ish, which I am not really used to, so it was interesting to read the different form. But I'm still struggling with how to take the stories. Ist it feminist? Anti-feminist?

However, I do like superhero stories that don't fit the mold of the regular superheroes fighting bad guys. But I still can't decide if this serious issues it seems to be tackling, like body issues and degradation of women are just excuses for a sexy superhero whose costume is constantly ripped off, and is constantly tied up.

Chibineko says

I've both avoided and been drawn to this comic for various reasons. I love Adam Warren's art style but the general idea of the comic just seemed really stupid. After putting it off for a while I finally gave it a chance & while it's stupid, it's stupid in a good way.

If you want a series with depth, you'd be looking in the wrong place, at least in this volume. (I've been told that the series gets more depth as it goes along.) This is solidly cheesecake fare and it revels in this fact. I think that this is what made this such a fun read. I loved all of the little jokes here.

The artwork is what really won me over. As always you can expect lovely ladies drawn with loving care. There's a bit of a rough edge to the drawings, but it works here. It's not the uber-polished style that you might see in some of the comics out there but it works to help set this aside from some of Warren's other works.

KWinks says

Whoa. I have not disliked anything this much in a long time (mostly because if I am not enjoying something I put it down and move on). This was a book club read, so I toughed it out. This produced in me the same feeling one would get if eating slightly off mayo. I didn't HATE it, it wasn't powerful enough to produce such emotion. I just really, really disliked it. It wasn't clever enough to be ironic, it served no purpose other than straining my patience, and it had absolutely no point, none, whatsoever. If I never see the Super Homeys again, great. Bye. I'm erasing you from my mind right now. Thank goodness I didn't spend money on this.

Mike says

Emp is a tricky comic to read let alone write about, considering the artistic subject matter. She's super-powered only when wearing a super-skin-tight body-paint costume; when that costume shreds (at the breath of a butterfly), she loses her powers and usually gets tied up; when she's tied up in a shredded costume, she looks ridiculously hot, vulnerable and uncomfortably manga-y.

There, I said it. It's a comic tailor-made for the male gaze. And sometimes take swipes at the predicament and the premise to give us a slightly less-swollen sense of shame about it.

It's a little like Red Sonja or Power Girl - I feel like they gotta work twice as hard to make this feel less like a guilty pleasure and more "intelligent" or "worthwhile" - like a Shallow Reader can't just enjoy it for what it is, without constantly watching over their shoulder to see who's going to catch me reading this would-cause-a-public-lynching-when-read-on-the-bus.

This first volume is particularly tricky, with short sequences and obligatory tied-up-in-costume-shreds filling out most of the page count. It mercifully starts to veer into ongoing storyline territory about a third the way

through, so there's actually a heroine to cheer for, and some actual stakes she's engaged in claiming.

Funny thing tho - I found myself enjoying this, the more the characters accumulated an actual flawed-and-funny personality. (And the personality of the Immortal Demongoat, trapped in a bondage belt and lying on a table - that's almost Dr. Dinosaur worthy.)

Most redeeming moments: when Emp speaks to the reader through the fourth wall of the intro panels. She's actually aware of how exploitative these little undressings are.

Most uncomfortable moment: when Emp and her boy toy engage in some pretty pornhub-worthy action.

Most hilarious moments: every time the Caged Demonwolf speaks.

Most empathetic moment: Sistah Spooky's origin story. Makes me want to get to know her more.

Shallow Comic Reader approved(tm).

[Side note: this might be the only comic I first heard about on War Rocket Ajax that I actually *want* to keep reading.]

Dr Zorlak says

This is a sexy, very imaginative story of a crappy superhero with very unreliable superpowers and a distorted self-image. Her relationship with a former villain provides a tender undernarrative. Her bickering, unsupportive companions push most of the series into comedy. Supervillains are absolutely awesome, especially the one whose superpowers are a side effect from an alien STD he got from a visiting extraterrestrial princess. Nice touch.

Pencils are superb. I'm head over heels in love with Ninjette.

Extremely addictive.

Fugo Feedback says

Leyendo Empowered me surge una duda: ¿Cómo es que Adam Warren no es reconocido como uno de los mejores autores yanquis actuales? Jamás vi a alguien combinar tan bien lo que se dice un comic comercial con un montón de pavadas personales y un trazo mangoso que tan pero tan buenos resultados da en este tomo.

En una de las carátulas en las que la protagonista rompe la cuarta pared y le habla a los lectores dice algo onda: "Lástima que este cómic seguro le va a parecer demasiado superheróico a los lectores de manga y demasiado mangoso a los lectores de superhéroes". Yo me considero un lector de ambos tipos, y creo que es

bastante mejor que el promedio de mangas (shonen, se entiende) y el promedio de superhéroes (mainstream, se entiende). Si alguien se anima a editarlo en castellano, me tiro de cabeza, aunque la verdad que esos tomates 3en1 que hay en inglés me resultan bastante tentadores...

Peter Tupper says

Adam Warren's *Empowered* series is a little like the old story about boiling the frog: if you raise the temperature slowly enough, the frog won't jump out until it is too late.

The story starts out easy, with Warren's skewed take on superhero conventions. It's cute and fun and sexy (the art dances on the edge of full nudity, male and female), with an array of goofy wannabe villains. Considering that the prototype superheroine, Wonder Woman, was created with bondage fantasies in mind, it's not surprising that our heroine spends so much time in bondage.

Every so often, Warren adds a minor chord. Things like Emp lost her dad when she was a girl, or just about everybody around her treats her like crap, or Sistah Spooky had a messed-up life and her lover had an even worse one, or the possibility that Emp is somehow dead and her suit is keeping her alive. This builds up, bit by bit, and before you know it, you're reading about decidedly non-goofy villains like the guy who steals the bodies of dead superheroes and turns them into zombie slaves, or the guy who is a serial rapist (bad enough) whose skin burns at several thousand degrees (even worse).

It's a tricky balancing act, and Warren sometimes wobbles. There are moments when Emp stops being a lovable underdog and is more like Ally McBeal in a black rubber catsuit. Most of the time, it works, making for an intriguing read.

Lina says

Empowered is a weird graphic novel. It's filled with bondage and fan service up to the wazoo along with a heroine who could qualify as worse than incompetent. Yet, I couldn't help enjoying it with a passion. Empowered is a young fan girl, with the help of a skimpy and unreliable costume braves the day and continues the fight crime despite the taunting and ridicule by allies and villains alike. This is a very light-hearted comic that frequently takes shots at it's own premise. I enjoyed it because it knew what it wanted to be and did it with enough fun and quirky characters that I would recommend it to people, however I'd first suggest you borrow it from a library because the humor is subject to taste in the worst way.

E.B. says

The moment I finished this book, I wished I had vol 2 in my hands right then and there. Which makes me feel like a total dork as I have just slagged off Alan Moore's *From Hell* and am now going to praise Adam Warren, my favorite Artist/Writer in the biz we call Comic today, but whatever. Empowered is 10 times better than *From Hell*. Why? IT'S ACTUALLY FUN TO READ.

What starts out as a self admitted bondage fantasy drawn out over 5 to 6 page short stories, EMPOWERED evolves into a Manga/Anime inspired underdog comedy.

Our heroin, awkwardly named "Empowered", hates her superhero name, despises her costume and none of the super villains or other superheroes themselves have any respect for her. As you read through the short stories, you suddenly begin to root for Empowered. Sure she remains a poor excuse for a super heroine, Her costume tears easily and she can't shoot laser beams straight, but when she ends up with a boyfriend and best friend that both love her, it becomes one of those stories where you learn that life isn't all about work. It's funny, but that's the lesson I took away from something that was probably supposed to just be fun. But really, it showed me that trying hard is just as important as succeeding.

As you read on, the story does remain sexual. But Warren can't stay away from a narrative, as hard as he tried in the first couple of chapters of Empowered. The cute yet erotic FemSub S&M Fantasy (not in a scary way I promise you) melts away and a real, although lose, story starts to develop. It's clear that even Warren wanted to know more about his creation. The world he draws is a voluptuous one filled with silly superheroes and goofy monsters.

It is erotic and both men and woman of any orientation will be turned on. I really feel like woman will really find it erotic, though, as the "bondage" aspect of the book is presented amongst comedy. And **NEVER does it become gross out or "toilet" humor**. Even though poor Empowered finds herself at the mercy of Villain and Hero alike, she keeps trying. And discovers that the other superheroes may not be as "all that" as they like to pretend they are.

Elizabeth Wallace says

A fantastic book in a fantastic series. Superhero-in-training, Empowered has a super suit that gives her super strength and makes her nigh-well invulnerable. Except when it rips, then it doesn't do much at all. And considering the fact that it's about as tough as tissue paper, it rips pretty often, and she ends up tied up and helpless at the mercy of the super villains. A lot. A WHOLE lot. Since this series started out as a series of drawings Adam Warren was doing for someone who had...particular tastes, the "tied up and helpless" bit was sort of the whole point. Until, as Warren says, she developed a personality. And a back story. And a boyfriend (a really REALLY hot boyfriend, hence a lot of the reason *I* read the series.)

Add in a Ninja best friend and a caged world-destroying demon that lives on the coffee table, and you have a WONDERFUL graphic novel. Adam Warren's art is just fantastic, wonderful, AMAZING stuff, and the story really pulls you in. And then all the sexy fun. Of course. GREAT book.

Zedsdead says

Empowered is the enthusiastic, insecure JV member of the Superhomeys [sic] superhero team. Her ridiculous super-suit is a skin tight membrane that doesn't work with clothing over it, leaving her functionally nude. On top of that it shreds at the slightest contact, frequently leaving her ACTUALLY nude. AND she loses her super-strength when it tears, which gives Adam Warren the excuse to draw her naked, bound and gagged before gawping supervillains over and over again. Empowered is a comedy so she's never depicted in actual peril, but it still reeks of girlies-in-distress softcore bondage porn. Which is not my particular bag.

Worse is the awkward, trying-too-hard, look-how-hip-we-are lingo. Superhomeys, sup dawg, hey yo Sistah Spooky, etc. Meh. I was embarrassed for the characters having to spout this drivel. I came very close to DNFing. But then...

...maybe halfway through the book Warren seemed to find his voice. The tortured dialogue dialed back some. Empowered spent less time in ropes and more time skewering superhero tropes: the difficulties of car-throwing, the rank absurdity of her power-suit, her lowly status in the Superhomeys. She acquired a decent-guy boyfriend, a hard-ass best friend, and a wisecracking captive world-devouring demon sidekick (reminiscent of Bob the Skull in the Dresden Files. The wisecracking scourge-of-the-spaceways demon is hilarious). She began to feel like a character rather than a dirty magazine, and her book began to feel worthwhile. To my surprise I'm considering giving the second volume a try.

While I'm not a fan of the manga-ish faces, Warren's pencil illustrations are gorgeous and almost enough to make it worth checking out Empowered all on their own. He does kinetic action extremely well. And hey, if you're into shoulders-back-tits-out rope bondage...he definitely does that pretty well too.
