



Hero

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Construction worker Hal Porter knows he's nobody special. But when strange events draw him into a magical world, he becomes the only man who can free Morgan, a lonely, long-enchanted shape-shifter. Whether he feels he's worthy or not, Hal is the hero Morgan has been waiting for.

However, Hal's task becomes personal as he and Morgan fall in love. Now, to save Morgan and give himself the happily ever after he's always longed for, Hal will need to do something far more daunting than face Morgan's captor or finally come out of the closet...

He'll have to believe in himself.

This title has been previously published and has been revised from its original release.

Hero Details

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From Reader Review Hero for online ebook

Kaje Harper says

3.5 stars, rounded up for originality.

This is the story of a man who falls in love with a captive prince and is determined to rescue him. The basic fairytale trope is made interesting by a wealth of details that rise above the mundane and had me pleasantly caught by surprise when I thought I knew what was coming next. Heidi Cullinan's writing has deepened and improved since this early book. I didn't have the same visceral reaction to the trials and tribulations of her hero as I have in other books of hers, and so the story was not as captivating. But it was an interesting read with a satisfying story arc.

Lisa The Novel Approach says

A prince is held captive by his own promise. Left to an endless life of use and abuse after having been lured away from all of his family by the promise of love and care, Morgan is now trapped inside the hell of his own making in many ways. But his Mother cannot rest until she finds the elusive “hero” that can love her son enough to rescue him from his captor. In an alternate reality where a prince is actually the very building that holds him captive and evil walks among humans without detection, our hero goes blithely unaware to his construction job each day, passing what appears to be an empty lot.

Hal has left his home in Kansas to come to California in the hopes of escaping the guilt and shame he feels about his being gay. In fact, he can barely acknowledge to himself that he likes men, and the idea of following through and actually being with a man leaves him terrified and wracked with misery. Then he sees a building where there should be none, and in its window a man, a beautiful man who looks so terribly lost and sad—just like himself. After a bewildering encounter with that man where Hal must finally come to grips with whether he will remain locked in his own closet or become the man he was meant to be, our hero sets off to rescue his prince. But how can one man show another that inside each of us lies a hero waiting to save the day?

Heidi Cullinan gives us a unique world where shape shifters take on a whole new meaning. The idea that Morgan is, in essence, able to be both male or female and also erect rooms and entire buildings around himself is at times breathtaking and also baffling. What makes her characters, both Hal and Morgan so raw and shatteringly real, however, is their pain and sorrow. The author explores the thought that our own disbelief in ourselves binds us to an almost half-life existence where we are mired down in our self-loathing and despair. Both Hal and Morgan have little faith in themselves. It is this that allows the evil and manipulative character, Eagen, to use Morgan so cruelly and nearly prevent Hal from understanding that his love for Morgan can make him strong enough to rescue the prince.

Their story and journey is really what makes this novel shine. Both Hal and Morgan deserve a happy ending, and that hangs in the balance until the very end. Layered with a action packed rescue and multiple moments where sex is performed for the pleasure of a jeering crowd, this story is a fast read that keeps you glued to the page until its final moments. The problem that arises in this story has little to do with the burgeoning relationship between Hal and Morgan and more to do with what exactly Morgan is. I found myself never fully understanding how he could be a, well, a building of sorts. I couldn't quite understand what type of

creature Morgan actually appeared to be, and that continually nagged at me, sometimes drawing me away from the story. I felt as though that portion of the story was left unfinished and since it was pretty vital to understand exactly what Morgan was, as it affected Hal so dramatically, I felt the lack of explanation to be a fairly serious flaw.

However, Heidi Cullinan's *Hero* was still an exceptionally compelling and beautiful love story. The change that takes place in both Hal and Morgan was nothing short of breathtaking and left one with a restored belief that heroes do indeed walk among us; and may, in fact, be inside each of us.

Shira Anthony says

[Hal is a definitely-in-the-closet construction worker who has fled his Midwestern home hoping to f

Nancy says

Hal Porter was finishing up his shift at the construction site he works at and notices an unusual building in a lot that was previously empty, and a woman standing in front of it beckoning to him. Hal gets a glimpse of a beautiful man trapped inside and feels an inexplicable longing. He tries to ignore the visions, but finds he's unable to. When he goes into work the next morning and gets fired for stealing, he is escorted from the site by two men, and once again sees the building with the woman standing in front. Her name is Shinju and she has the power to change Hal's life forever.

One reviewer compared this story to Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*. When I think about it, there are definitely some similarities. Hal is a really nice guy with a very ordinary life who's a little naïve. In some ways he does remind me a little of the bumbling Richard Mayhew who has a dull job and finds his life changed when he finds an injured girl in the street.

When Hal enters the building, he encounters magical beings that are not so friendly and a young man who is trapped. With the help of Shinju's magic and his own courage and determination, Hal must find a way to rescue Morgan.

When I first started reading, I thought the magic and world-building overshadowed the characters quite a bit. I also felt the magical abilities at times were overused with little explanation of its rules, and felt a little contrived. As I read further, I found Morgan and Hal much more appealing as their relationship developed and they realized the power they had together. The secondary characters were very well-developed, particularly Eagan and Shinju.

The sex scenes were very hot, but there were a few non-con scenes that made me a little uneasy. Overall, this was a very enjoyable romantic fantasy.

Optimist ?King's Wench? & MANTIES Champion says

I'm an HC fan. Unashamedly so. I like how she smuts, how she writes, how she develops a character... well, you get the idea. If I were Empress of the Universe (because aim for the stars, right?) she would be in my coterie of storytellers.

I've not read anything like this from her before. It was weird and cool and strange and dare I say it? It was a *far out* urban fantasy. I wonder if she was or if we are supposed to be just a tiny bit... ah, altered to *really* get it. You dig?

Hero is part Japanese folklore, part fairy tale, part paranormal, part good old fashioned faith and heaping tablespoon of exhibitionist smut like only HC can do all blended up together in a psychedelic cocktail. I'm not even sure I can describe what happens here, but I'll give it a go and hope for the best.

Hal is an in the closet construction worker. He moves to LA ostensibly to come out of the closet, but it never pans out. Alone in the big city, away from his family and working a construction job that he's not crazy about leaves him feeling listless and lonelier than ever. Whilst pondering his miserable state he has a vision of a prince in a glass tower and is beguiled, but also thinking he might need to have a professional take a look under the hood.

Shortly thereafter he sees a sex kitten in a fur coat IN SUMMER! IN LA SUMMER! And in an empty lot across from the construction site. Hooker, right? That's was my first thought. Nope. Not even close. She's the key to the prince in a very convoluted sense. The prince is a shape shifter named Morgan. Morgan is the most fanciful and extraordinary incantation of a shape shifter I've ever read.

What ensues involves:

- *A vision of a bar that only Hal and Shinju (the sex kitten) can see.*

- *A sociopath named Eagan who's not too keen on Hal poking around in that "vacant lot".*
and...

- *A shit ton of foxes (kitsune) plus other creatures thrown in for good measure.*
One word: Trippy.

HC made me believe in the *instalove*, (a feat in and of itself) by constructing Hal and Morgan's relationship in such a way that they were like two souls finally finding one other across time and space recognizing their other half instantaneously. Hal falls despite the outward appearance which confuses him, but then again souls don't need the "right" shell to recognize one another. It's a subtle but potent difference OR I'm a total sap who gets sucked into the destiny trope. Sue me.

Hero is not all feels. The adventure to find the "hero" is one freaky journey. Don't we all have a little hero in us? Somewhere? Or are heroes to someone? Sometimes we just need a little push, someone to believe to make the magic happen.

“I just love you. I loved you too soon and too fast and too deep, in a way that doesn’t make sense and never will. My love isn’t rational, Morgan. That means I’ll never stop trying to find you if I lose you. I’ll never stop. Ever.”

HC can smut like nobody’s business and she definitely knows her way around exhibitionism. That knowledge is on glorious display here. *Hero* is also smutacularly romantic and a tiny bit kinky. **SQUEEE!!!** I’m not even going to spoil the smut. Suffice to say, there is such a thing as a lifesaving blow job. HC said so and she’s like an oracle.

It goes without saying that I recommend *Hero*. Everyone should experience HC.

Reviewed for

Jason Bradley says

In 'Hero', Heidi Cullinan artfully combines a storyline containing the subtleties of ancient Japanese myth with an unique dark fantasy world comparable to that of Neil Gaiman's 'Neverwhere.' The depth and skill of storytelling, along with character development, took me by surprise as I sped through this tale, eager to turn each page. I can't recommend this book highly enough.

Kelly H. (Maybedog) says

Very unusual beginning.kind of dream like.

I don't get or like that Howard isn't coming clean about why Shinju made him think Morgan was a woman. It's stupid because Morgan is clearly gay, and it's deceitful. At least he should admit he is into men. He doesn't know how? Just say what happened. Recite the day. Stupid.

Original, unique. Clever with the whole being a place thing.

I'm not sure how I feel about the interweaving of Roman Catholicism. On the one hand, it's cool to allow magic to coexist and on the other hand it's silly because their religion preaches against magic and against homosexuality, and the many of the foundations of their religious practices are in direct opposition. It feels like the author is Catholic and can't imagine a world that it isn't a reality.

I didn't like the ending. Too distancing like we could be along for the ride but not for the beautiful part. I felt excluded, like an ordinary human on the outside.

Shelby P says

[How was the construction manager,

Kassa says

Hero is an unusual book even among fantasy fans but succeeds in offering a unique and riveting story in a pretty stunning authorial debut. I'm not sure why this book hasn't been talked about more because it is thoroughly engrossing with a complicated and intricate plot, great characters, and a very strong romance in the somewhat mind bending fantasy world. It's not perfect and there are some moments that the two men need to be slapped on the head but the honesty of their emotions is never in doubt and the complex plot moves very fast so you won't want to put it down. Fantasy fans especially will appreciate this book but the themes offered should appeal to mainstream m/m romance fans as well.

Howard Porter, called Hal, is a typical construction worker from Kansas that came to Los Angeles to get out of his small hometown. After a particularly warm day at work, Hal see an old, dilapidated building appear with a beautiful, lonely man in the window and a gorgeous woman beckoning him forward. Like any normal person Hal realizes how silly such an image is once he comments on it to a co-worker. Although he tries to ignore what he saw, the image appears in his dreams and won't let go. Soon Hal is mixed up in a world of magic and cruelty where he doesn't know the rules yet has one goal – to save his beautiful, lonely man Morgan.

The storyline is incredibly complicated and mixed with heavy world building, intricate characterization and strong romance. What seems to be a classic theme is actually turned into something unique and fresh. At the core the story is about Hal and Morgan and how the two men must overcome their own insecurities and doubts to find a way to happiness together. It's never that easy and here there is a wealth of problems presented to the new couple in the rules of magic, cruel and fantastical beings, and well the slight problem of interspecies dating. The world building is an important part of both characters and the story. The magical rules and alternate reality offered is interesting but somewhat incomplete. There are inherent problems because any more world building would have overwhelmed the story and bogged readers down into too many details and issues but often the magical rules felt made up as the story went along or thrown in without much previous context. This helps keep the suspense and intrigue going – as I had no idea how the story would resolve – but also frustrating at the ever changing structure of the world. I never did get a firm grasp of the complex and complicated magical setting.

Worked in with the setting is the character of Morgan. He's thoroughly unique and blends the magical world with romance incredibly well. He's a young man that's so desperately lonely he makes bad choices and enslaves himself to cruel men rather than be alone. The depth of his need and desperation is slightly exaggerated, just as his inability to take control of his situation is frustrating. However, Morgan needs to be a polarizing character as his situation and final actions show a dynamic change. He is kept rather sympathetic as a lonely, desperately sad man that has resigned himself to a life of misery. His change from a somewhat pathetic creature to a much stronger man is a key aspect to the story and the romance. He can never be totally independent and part of the reason is the fantasy setting – which is a truly inspired touch with regards to Morgan's character – but he comes to understand his own strength and ability while finding his confidence and sense of self worth.

Following a somewhat similar path is Hal. Hal is a painfully shy gay man that struggles with zero self esteem and shame at his sexuality. He grew up in a catholic family and his mom sends him the Catholic Digest with money stuck between the pages. Although his mother is not an evil, ranting character – and the later explanation for her motivations is pretty clever and funny – Hal still experiences a great deal of fear and shame surrounding his desires. He struggles with a crippling shyness that prevents him from expressing himself and accepting his life. He is not attracted to women but a part of him desperately wants to be so he can be normal by his own definitions. So Hal's struggle with accepting his sexuality and more so, belief in himself and his abilities is a key aspect to the story. Hal's struggle is shown on many levels from his initial lies out of fear to finally admitting, vocalizing, and ultimately accepting his desires. His characterization and growth is difficult but well written. It stumbles in a few places when Hal is so wrapped up in his fear and shame that you want to shake the man and tell him to grow a spine but the exaggeration here as with Morgan helps to explain the depth of their shared love and emotion. Perhaps a more subtle touch would have been better but in contrasting to the muddy, elaborate fantasy world an obvious character growth is not bad.

The themes presented in the story are pretty universal. At the heart of the story are two gay men that together find the support and love they need and crave to finally believe in themselves. The concept of a hero is used very well as both men need to grow themselves before they can save anyone else and neither man is actually more powerful than the other, just possessing a different kind of magic. The world building is serpentine and somewhat convoluted but thoroughly absorbing and interesting. If you're willing to stretch your imagination and dive into the fantasy world provided, this story definitely delivers.

Michelle says

Interesting read by Heidi Cullinan but I'm finding that I do not enjoy her paranormal reads. I'm not connecting to the world building so it's making it hard for me to connect to the characters. I enjoy Ms. Cullinan's contemporary reads so I think I'll stick to those.

Heidi Cullinan says

To whoever keeps deleting the new edition of this book and/or making it not the primary edition: stop. This is the proper edition. This is the proper cover. (I'm the author. I should know.)

Manfred says

Reading this book for the second time I am not sure why I rated it so high before. At the moment I would put it somewhere around 3 stars, it was just too weird to completely enjoy, but I am not going to change my review completely, as it was what I felt before and I will just leave it at that...

So this is what I thought when I finished it last time :

When I started this book I wrote in my update status that I have confidence in HC to deliver a great reading experience. Although it was like nothing I read from her before and it was really really weird I can say that I was definitely right.

Be aware, this is certainly not your typical gay romance novel.

Weird does not even start to describe what awaits you in this story. It's fantasy, it's sci-fi, it's paranormal, it's a shifter story, but all that does not really do it justice.

The only thing I am sure about is that it is unique and as I said, it's weird (good weird in my opinion)...

Somewhere in the middle I was really doubting if I could and should continue, but gladly I did.

Howard and Morgan were both wonderful main characters, I loved both of them and seeing how they complemented each other was so touching and heart warming.

If you are not afraid to go out of your comfort zone a little bit, or if you are a fantasy fan who is looking for something a little different, this might just be perfect.

For me, it definitely was and I would rate it 4.5 stars and absolutely recommend it!

CS says

Full disclosure: I am friends with the author.

But even if I weren't friends with the author, this book would go on my "keep forever and death to anyone who borrows it and doesn't return it in a timely and pristine manner" bookshelf. It's THAT good.

I love a good romance and I very much appreciate a well-structured fantasy. HERO is more than both. Another reviewer compares the world building to Neil Gaiman's, and I have to admit that's exactly the thought that ran through my head as I gobbled up the book. I'm not going to spoil the fun, but the Oasis's reveal was so original, and yet made so much sense within the world the author built so skillfully, I wanted to applaud.

And can Heidi Cullinan write! I fell in love with the protagonist, Hal, from the first few pages. All of the characters are drawn so well, and all have their own distinct personality - even those who show up for just a few pages.

Now, you're welcome to take my review with a grain of salt because I know the author. But I only take the time to write reviews for books that touched me, whether for good or for annoyance. If I didn't truly love the book, I would paste some stars on it and walk away. But this is such a lovely, touching, fabulous tale (and very, very hot!) - I would rave about it regardless of who wrote it. And I'm not usually a M/M reader - but I can't wait for the next book!

Leigh says

Review can also be found at Under the Covers Book Blog

Hal Porter is a 37-year old man trying to find himself and has moved from the mid-west out to California in order to do that. He knows that he is gay, but he hasn't come out to anyone, especially his very religious mother who keeps asking when he will find a girl to settle down with. While working at his construction site, he suddenly sees a building in a normally empty lot, where one was never before standing. Is he hallucinating? Been working too hard? He is drawn to the place by what appears to be a prince in a window, and a beautiful woman trying to coax him there, but then she and the building are gone. Before long, he realizes that he is not hallucinating, but rather that the building is there, and he decides to take a leap of faith and venture in. What he encounters is more than he ever would have imagined or dreamed.

Once Hal is inside the building – the Oasis – Hero grasps a hold of the reader and doesn't let go. Hal finds himself in a fantastical world of beings – the laumu – who are shape shifters and live in an alternate world where humans are detested and certainly not welcome. He is drawn immediately to the bartender, Morgan, who also happens to be a prisoner and sex slave of the laumu inhabiting the Oasis. The laumu decide it's time for Hal to play their game, using Morgan as they deem he should be used and humiliated. The legend has been told that a hero can come and save Morgan from his prison, and while Hal questions that he is that hero, he is so drawn to Morgan that he is certainly willing to try.

It's been awhile since I've read a fantasy, but I enjoy them very much, and Hero was no exception. Cullinan spins a very creative and imaginative tale that pulled me in from the start. I love the unexpected and reading about fantasy elements that are new to me, and the concepts within Hero were just that. Morgan's history, his origin, the kitsune culture, and who he was was so very interesting. As a reader, you wonder, "how does this work?" but Cullinan writes and weaves a tale so well, that it does.

Of course, Cullinan pens a wonderful love story as well. There is something that clicks between Hal and Morgan from the get-go, and Hal knows that after having met Morgan, he cannot return to his daily life of construction work in the real (read: human) world any longer. Something would always be missing. While I am not usually a fan of insta-love, and I do think that those feelings of love may have come a bit too soon for Hal and Morgan, Cullinan makes it work for these guys and for the story as a whole. They needed that deep connection in order for the story to move forward, and it did. The steamy scenes between these guys were really sexy as well, those in private and the not so private. They definitely had great chemistry together.

Moreover, I know that going into a book by Cullinan, there will be so much more to the story than what is shown on the surface. She always has a deeper meaning, and to me, Hero is that book that makes you question your inner strength, to know that there is more to you than meets the eye. Hal is dubious that he is a hero at all, and Morgan certainly believes that he himself is not one, either. But they both discover something about themselves that defy everyone's expectations, including their own. Heroes truly do come in all shapes and sizes.

All in all, I enjoyed Hero, but I do wish some things had been flushed out a little bit more: how the enemy discovered that Hal had the sight to see the Oasis; the humming Hal experienced when in the Oasis; how Hal was able to do the things he was even though he was a mere human; more explanation for why Hal and Morgan's enemy couldn't be fully defeated but others of his kind could (because I believe that his final punishment was much too lenient for all the bad he did). I also would have liked to learn more about the kitsune culture. Of course, realizing that adding all that information in could have easily turned this book into a series, I do believe that what was fit into a one book was still great and definitely an enjoyable escape.

*ARC provided by author

Qin says

This tale did not work for me, despite the crisp English and beautifully evocative prose, for a series of reasons which, considered separatim, may well look churlish yet amount to such a consolidated listing that I could not bypass it: the flow of the story is bad, with a few dozen pages of porn thrown in at the middle bar under the pretence of flushing the human protagonist of a poisonous, magical drink; the too sparse world building distracts from the reader's engagement; the insta-lust element has not been cleverly engineered; the plot is feeble, with no interest in meeting likely objections like the utter strangeness of the presence of two

Japanese shifters in the mist of Western-type cryptids no matter the flimsy explanation provided at the eleventh hour, or the ridiculously feeble trick devised by the Asian woman in the fur coat and collar of pearls (if it were so easy for her to glamour a human like Hal and make him see Morgan in the light guaranteed to make said mortal fall in lust with the shifter, why on God's green earth did she never attempted it before, and we are speaking here of a vigil that extended on her part over several centuries ? Barring all such secondary pleading, though, this was not a successful book mostly because I felt that, for all that this is a urban fantasy, the paranormal elements (viz. all that revolves around the mysterious bar next to the alpha hero's worksite, the Asian lady, and Mr Harper) were not well blended at all with the mundane setting. Hal's entire life, no less than his dealings with his mother and his identity as a blue-collar, gay man, are the epitome of boring with nary an inkling of any special strength of will or particular affinity with the supernatural; the way Mrs Cullinan throws him to the sharks so that he could become the hero Morgan so urgently needs thus felt contrived in the extreme (and I am not merely pointing out the cheapness of the Asian woman's parlor tricks here), and indeed once Hal is inside the bar, he behaves moronically. Such is his absence of any charisma, so great his lacking in cunning and tactical intelligence, so utterly clueless his actions and parlance, that he drags into the rubble all that he happens to touch, Morgan, the mysterious lady, the villainious Harper, and the assorted supernaturals that clutter the bar. Actually, the paranormal in this book does not extend beyond a misty veneer that recalls the, not picturesque at all, depiction of the normal world; though the Japanese folklore is the cornerstone of the entire plot, its vivid imagery and picturesque images have been tamped down for no discernable reasons, while nearly all of the magics are done in magisterially anticlimactic fashion, from Hall having to swallow a pearl than a frothy beverage (comically named 'Stiff drink') down to Morgan finally reining in his squatters and facing Harper in a showdown that provides no pyrotechnics at all. The cover in the (lightly) revised edition only underscores my point here; where the original issue of the book had cleverly evocative artwork superimposing a boy with flowing hair and robes on a fantastic castle looking at a man seen from behind, we now get a sort of ninja wielding a curved saber (why that weapon, which plays no part whatsoever within these covers, only a Seer could tell). Ultimately, my impression is that of a competent writer who either attempted something rather too ambitious for her capabilities or worked hurriedly under compulsion and did not lovingly polish her piece as it ought to have been.
