



Trueheart

Mel Sterling

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Loyalty. Desperation. Grief.

Eight months ago a mysterious drug killed Tess Gordon's brother, and now it's spreading through her rehab counseling clients. They all claim they're not addicted, the drug leaves no trace except its drained victims, and the cops aren't interested. Aching with loss, Tess vows to find the source. What she finds instead is Thomas.

Slavery. Duty. Enchantment.

Thomas, the half-fae guardian of the goblin market, has plenty of problems—and just got another one. Pressed into the service of the Unseelie Queen, all he wants is his freedom. But Tess won't go away, and the human girl is in way over her head.

One perilous late-autumn night, the fae and human worlds collide. Tess's and Thomas's separate tasks are inextricably tangled. Now, a half-fae and a human rehab counselor must walk the knife-edge of obligation, love, death and transformation--with the entire Unseelie Court, including the malevolent Wild Hunt, out for their blood.

Welcome to Portland, After Dark...

Trueheart Details

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From Reader Review Trueheart for online ebook

Kara-karina says

4.5/5

I am so glad Grace Draven reached out to me to recommend Trueheart for review. I don't think I'd have taken on the new author in the last month otherwise, considering how hectic the blog has been. And I would have missed a discovery of a very good debut in urban fantasy genre.

Straight off the bat, I guarantee that if you enjoyed books like War For The Oaks, October Daye series and the infamous Merry Gentry courtesy of Laurell K. Hamilton, Portland After Dark will make you feel right at home.

While I felt that the book was unnecessary short and would have benefited from the double the amount of the word count, the imagery was lush and intricate, the emotions strong and raw, and the feel of the book itself rich and dark, twisted and complex, - all the things I usually want to see in my fae stories.

Thomas is half-fae/half-human. Deceived and enchanted by Unseelie Queen in the past, he remains her slave until his service will grant him his freedom. It's a fine line between behaving well and guessing the queen's mood right, playing his role of a bitter, jealous lover, while he hates his captor and does everything in his power to keep the remnants of his humanity. He survives until he meets Tess who unfortunately has something that the Queen wants back.

Tess is passionate about her work and tries her best to help addicts to recover. She is level-headed, isn't prone to drama and doesn't suffer from TSTL heroine syndromes. The gal has courage and flexible mind, and when her investigation into a new type of drug brings her into Thomas's world, she doesn't spend much time denying the existence of fae, but tries to do something useful instead.

Trueheart is about staying true to yourself and the consequences of such decisions. It's packed with action, it's beautifully imagined, it has likable heroes with undeniable chemistry between them, and it makes you crave more. Excellent debut, and I'm really looking forward to more books from this author!

K. Lincoln says

I lived in Portland for 7 years, so it was awesome to come across Urban Fantasy with a real sense of the city wherein the story focuses on places like Burnside Bridge and Forest Park. Tess is a rehab councilor who is following one of her clients to the Saturday Market one day when she sees him with a mysterious woman.

Thomas is a knight for the Unseelie Queen.

Their fates meet and intertwine at the Saturday Market just before the wolf moon at Allantide when the Wild Hunt searches for meat, salt and blood for the Queen and a secret plan jeopardizing Tess's home will unfold.

Those looking for a great Urban Fantasy with scary, evil fae will enjoy this one. Trueheart read like a slightly older Wicked Lovely (Marissa Marr) focusing on the love between fae and humans and the duty magic of the Queen.

It's smooth reading, and the romance lovely, and although it seems like Tess is the main character, really she's there to provide motivation for Thomas, who by far, has the most changing and agency in this story due to Tess' ignorance of the fae world. Great start to a series.

Regan says

A fae tale where the Queen of the Unseelie has built her queendom within, around and alongside Portland, OR. It was fun matching my memories of the city to Sterling's Portland, and interesting to see how she played with the concepts of iron and water in a city divided by a river and crossed by unique bridges.

Thomas was human and has lost much of his humanity in his service of and to the queen. Tess is a social worker on a mission to discover the drug that she believes is responsible for destroying several beautiful boys, including her brother. They come together over coffee near a goblin market. So very Portland. :)

The romance is sweetly built and convincing. Thomas's split loyalties and internal conflict are achingly presented. Tess's discovery of the fae world felt overly familiar - perhaps because I'm really, really drawn to this type of story? But I loved how far Sterling takes it. There is no faery tale ending in this dangerous melding of worlds. Instead it's shocking, which somehow makes it all the more delightful.

This is the first in the series, and I'm very much looking forward to the next book.

Sarz says

Dark fairy tales!

I really enjoyed this dark and modern twist on the Tam Lin tale. I'll be looking for the next one as soon as possible.

Mary says

Enjoyed it

A fun story of fae from the old ways. Not the Disney fairies, not Tinkerbell, but the fae of the old world. A story of love true to the soul of the person and not rooted in glamour.

Edna says

3.5 Stars

Ashley Williams says

I wanted to like this more than I did. I love books about the fae and was super excited for this, but it fell short for me. The writing was good and the romance was there, so that was a bonus. I had an issue with the redundant actions (bridge, home, market, bridge, home, market). They kept coming and going from virtually the same places, woke up and did the same thing the next day. The heroine was stupid, despite being an intelligent woman, and that's what frustrated me the most about this story. I hate it when the MC is given a million warnings and refuses to heed them, kinda stubborn to the point of stupidity. I'm not sure if I'll read the next story in this series.

Misha says

Hated the main character. Her behaviour and decisions irritated the crap out of me. Couldn't go on.

Rennegade Hunter says

I love these urban fae and their cruel courts! Reminds me of Holly Black's Valiant, with something of Lilith Saintcrow's The Demon's Librarian, two books that I adore.

Perfect themes, but it's good that the story is standalone because I don't think I could read much more of Tess. Thomas, I liked. He's flawed in an interesting way. She crosses the line from stubborn-and-independant into reckless-with-other-people's-lives.

I suppose that's a subjective judgement, but Tess is terminally stupid, which is tolerable when she's still in shock and trying to adjust, but she really doesn't deserve to just walk away from everything without harm. I hate those sorts of characters because the story progression relies on the villains being equally incompetent and that ultimately spoilt the last 10 or so chapters.

Melissa Hayden says

The story is of fae nature and we see the fae influence in the story by way of descriptions. The details of the world and people given with creative descriptions.

The ending... Thank you Mel for doing what you did. I loved that we didn't get the ending that we 100% thought would happen. Oh, part of it is what I wanted. But there was a small piece, once you read you'll know what it is, that held true to the story and was a great thing to see happen.

****FULL REVIEW****

*I offered to read this book for an honest review.

Thomas's enslavement to the Unseelie Queen is coming close to an end, but not close enough. All he wants is to be completely human again. His current job is to prevent the Queen's items from being stolen from

storage at the Goblin Market. While at the market, Thomas's eye is drawn to a tall woman who is talking to glamoured and dangerous fae.

Tess's experience with her brother drew brought out her drive to help others in trouble with drugs. She works in a rehab center for drug addicts and she's got a few clients that are getting worse, even though they claim to have not used drugs. Tess tracks one client to the Artisans Market under the bridge, asking about a new drug while picking up fancy trinkets she finds tucked around the market.

Tess finds a spark of a new interest in a man that helps her out of the market. She also digs deeper than she should to find a world far more dangerous than she could have imagined from the fairy tales she was told. Tess will give anything to help those that are in danger...

The story is of fae nature and we see the fae influence in the story by way of descriptions. The details of the world and people given with creative descriptions.

We get the story from both Thomas and Tess's POVs. This format provides a lot of information from the proper venue. Thomas has the knowledge of the fae, and worries about Tess being too close to the world he knows could do worse than kill her. Tess is determined to help those in danger from the new drug on the street. She never sways from her plan. We also see the reaction of introducing the world of fae to Tess from her and Thomas's sides. It's scary and heart aching. There is a blooming relationship between Tess and Thomas, that may not survive the knowledge that he's half Trow.

There are fae, other fae, that have their own agendas in their world. The Queen has a goal in mind, that we don't know about. We learn what it is as the story unfolds. Hunter is another with his own agenda. Hunter despises Thomas to begin with for being half human, half fae along with having the Queen's ear without being full fae. Hunter will use or kill Thomas for his needs. There is a game to play with the fae, but Tess doesn't know how to do that yet.

All at work comes to a high on Allantide - Halloween. The dangers come after Thomas and Tess and they finally face off for their lives. I don't think I will look at Fall leaves the same way again.

The ending... Thank you Mel for doing what you did. I loved that we didn't get the ending that we 100% thought would happen. Oh, part of it is what I wanted. But there was a small piece, once you read you'll know what it is, that held true to the story and was a great thing to see happen.

I enjoyed the dangerous fae written here. I am looking forward to reading on in the series.

Douglas Meeks says

Finished this book, was loving it until I went to turn the page and there were no more pages ...??? That surprising ending kinda sucked but if I was not REALLY enjoying it I would not have cared.

NOTE: The author intends to include an excerpt for the next book in the series at the end which will let readers see a bit farther down the road than the ARC I was reading.

The things I did NOT like:

Our heroine has basically had her life ruined, none of the "bad guys" really have been dealt with but these are

things you have to expect with book 1 in a series (it does have a logical stopping place)

Thomas our "hero" is unable to be much of a hero in typical fashion due to constraints he has little control over.

The only person who "won" in this first book seemed to be the guy who wants to kill one or both of them.

What I DID like:

An excellent plot, not too many mind numbing details (the bane of fantasy writers everywhere)

This is a great mix of present day setting with an "old world" Fey society overlaying it.

A somewhat HFN ending which is not my favorite but much better than some cliffhanger (which I HATE with a passion)

The fact that I really was loving the story and to have the ending take me by surprise means I was deeply involved in the plot which I guess you have to say that is a good thing.

Bottom Line: It is a great first book of a series (trilogy?) and a very original setting and story using present day with rules that come from the real fables where the Fey were NOT your friends by any measure. 4 Stars for a great plot and story, can't wait for the next one.

Gabriella Messina says

If you're only experience of "the fae" is Tinkerbell in Peter Pan, you may be a little shocked to meet the real thing here. But Mel Sterling's "Trueheart" brings the true mythology of the fae folk to gritty life. (although, if you did read Peter Pan, you known precious Tink was pretty cruel and calculating, actually).

Okay, so I preorder this one and read it in less than 24 hours... I simply couldn't put it down! Overall, the pacing was great... Clean writing, with an obvious depth of research into the subject matter to make the mentions and details of characters and lore of the fae world very believable and acceptable. The good guys (Thomas and Tess) were appealing, well-drawn, and had a wonderful chemistry right from their first meeting. The bad guys were suitably menacing, though in decidedly different ways. My only complaints are that it ended at all and that I have to wait until 2017 to continue the journey.

Review breakdown below (Possible Spoilers, though I'm trying to avoid it)

Plot: The plot can be divided into three parts that involve the main characters.

Thomas, the lead male, is a human/ fae who was captured and enslaved by the seductive Queen of Faeries more than 200 years ago. Striving to be free from his bondage, Thomas does what the Queen wants, including the current assignment to find out who is stealing from her. As to what is being stolen, and why, you'll have to read to find out.

The second plot track involves Tess, a social worker who is trying to find out why so many young men are showing up in her care with delusions about "green men" and such. Some are reduced to catatonic states, others withering away and dying. Tess' quest to help her patients leads her to the Underbridge market, and into the path of Thomas.

The third plot is the romance element of the story, and the author does such a wonderful job here. The credit

goes to shaping such believable, and lovable, characters. Both have flaws that must be overcome, but the acceptance of one for the other is so beautiful that you find yourself really feeling for them, rooting for them to succeed.

Characters:

As mentioned above, Thomas and Tess are so wonderfully drawn and filled out. You feel what they feel, want them to succeed and be happy.

As to the "bad guys", which are all of the fae world, there is a wide variety of creatures guaranteed to frighten and amuse. The main bad guy, Hunter, is described very visually (in fact, you get a glimpse of him in costume on the beautiful front cover), but you also sympathize with him in some ways, as he is also bound to the Queen.

The Queen? Vicious and vibrant, bad and beautiful, clever and cruel... We're don't learn her "truenname" during the course of this book, but hopefully we will in the future, when somebody takes the b*tch down. ;)

Quality of Writing:

Smooth writing style, clear and clean. The depth of research done on the subject of the fae world and its lore was obviously extensive and brings a authenticity to the story that is necessary in a genre piece. In addition, the knowledge of the city of Portland and the surrounding area is also extensive. I don't know if the author has ever been to those places, but based on her writing she would never get lost if suddenly dropped there. I am now looking at large grass-covered mounds in an entirely different light.

Originality:

I am a newcomer to the paranormal romance/ urban fantasy genre so for me this was a very original piece. My limited experience with anything resembling faeries prior to this consisted of Peter Pan and Tara Janzen's Chalice trilogy, so the subject matter was fresh and fascinating to me. I found myself looking up things like "kelpies" and "trow" so that I knew what I was reading about.

Cinematic Quality:

The categories I used for this review are based on screenplay reviews I used to do, so that's why I'm throwing this one in. I think when you read a book, you see it. Like a movie in your mind. And the movie I saw with this book was SPECTACULAR!

So that's it... Five stars for sure! And I can't wait for the next installment, "Ironbound".

Lynn says

Tess Gordon's job as rehab counselor for those caught in addiction involves her in much of life's misery with clients who have spiraled out of control damaging themselves and everyone around them. When she loses her own brother to the demons of addiction to a drug no one has ever heard of or can prove exists, that seems to be the cruelest of blows. Tess's crusade to save others from her brother's fate requires a journey into the underbelly of Portland to what she does not realize is a goblin market. Thomas, a half-fae enslaved by the Unseelie Fairy Queen, guards the market against Fae who would cross boundaries and humans who might see things they should not. Tess knows her brother and a young man whom she is trying to protect where drawn to the market; she has also been there collecting unusual trinkets for some time.

Thomas has the onerous task of finding the thief who stole from the Queen objects of power for which she has nefarious plans. He is caught between two deep desires: protecting Tess from the Queen's minions and most especially the deadly, relentless Wild Hunt, and fulfilling the job which he is compelled to do which is capture the thief. Thomas has yearned for so long to be free and human again. Meeting Tess, a seemingly

powerless human, and being inextricably drawn to her fills Thomas's heart in a way he had long forgotten. There is power in courage of those such as Tess who would risk all to save the lost and enslaved, most especially Thomas. When Tess sees Thomas for who he really is, and after the initial shock of finding out the Fae are real, she sets her mind to releasing the enslaved and finding the vanished as well as avenging her brother's death regardless of the personal cost.

Tess and Thomas each exemplify courage and determination to preserve against seemingly insurmountable odds. What they find in each other gives them strength and hope when dark and difficult times arise. This very enjoyable Dark Fantasy tale has all the foundations of a good story whether you enjoy those supernatural elements or not including action, adventure, and well thought out characters underpinned by a love story balancing the darker aspects. Ms. Sterling's writing will take readers on quite a ride engendering a desire to go on to the next in the series to spend more time in this enchanting world.

Raluca E says

I have mixed feelings about this book. The writing is very good and so is the world-building. It is action-packed and fast-paced, but maybe more romance and steam would have been nice.

I also didn't think much of the h – she just lacked salt and pepper and by that I mean spark and interesting character traits. In other words, I found her quite dull. I generally don't like heroines that, despite being told about the dangers of a particular situation, stubbornly decide to go ahead and act (stupidly) on their own. Tess did quite a bit of that – even though she was quite panicky and over-analytical (something else I didn't like), and I also felt like it took her a bit too long to acknowledge the existence of the fae and their world. She did, however, accept Thomas in his true form and eventually even embraced it. Thomas, the H, was a bit better in that he was quite an interesting guy with a lot to overcome, but he, also, seemed a bit lame at times. I don't really know how to explain this, but they failed to generate strong emotions in me (other than frustration).

I am, however, very interested in Hunter's story so am very much looking forward to book 2 in this series, which I am hoping will be fierier.

Elizabeth Hunter says

I was very pleased over the holiday break to be able to read an ARC of Trueheart by Mel Sterling. Full disclaimer: I am friendly with Mel on Facebook, and we have a lot of mutual friends, but you guys know I don't recommend anything I haven't read and loved for myself. The plus to having author friends is that I get to read these kind of awesome advanced copies ahead of time and give you guys a heads-up! (And trust me, you guys want the heads-up on this one.)

Trueheart is the first in a new series called Portland After Dark. It was ripping good fun, and a contemporary fantasy I'd recommend to all my readers. Fast-paced action pushes the reader through an intricate and intriguing plot, while a well-drawn romance anchors a fantasy world I'm eager to revisit. I stayed up until 2am to finish.

Sterling's world is well developed, and she captures the macabre beauty inherent in fae mythology. It's

beautiful. It's grotesque. It's violent and fragile, all at the same time. Likewise, her characters and their relationships, both romantic and adversarial, rang true.

Well-drawn protagonists are always what make a fantasy world for me, and Tess and Thomas were perfect (in lovely, imperfect ways.) Tess is smart, loyal, and alternately awed, attracted, and repulsed by the fae world she's forced into. And while the hero, Thomas, may not be (fully) human, Sterling expresses both his humanity and his otherness, which made him doubly intriguing as a character. I loved them both, and was very satisfied by the ending.

Trueheart is set in Portland, Oregon, and while the insertion of old-world fae mythology might seem incongruous in many modern cities, Portland—damp, earthy, surrounded by woods and rivers—is the perfect setting for Sterling's imagination. The supernatural and the realistic mingle in subtle ways that mirror the creeping ivy of Forest Park, and her writing brings the world to life. It's lush and elemental, but not so dense as to hinder the pace of the book.

It was a beautiful romance, but the side characters were just as intriguing as the leads, and I think Sterling has left herself a lot of world to play with in the following books. The teaser of the second book, *Ironbound*, made me eager for more in this world.

I don't usually do star ratings, so I'll just say that I highly recommend this! It was great fun and beautifully written. Mel Sterling is an author I'll be following.

Trueheart releases on January 12th, but you can pre-order it now! It's only \$3.99, which is a steal.
