



The Bonding

J.C. Owens

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Genre: LGBT Fantasy

Gaven learns that being Vlar's pupil in all things is a mixture of pain and pleasure. He hates his Finnarian teacher...doesn't he? Yet his body betrays him time and again, especially when he experiences the sexual ecstasy of a Finnarian bite and the giving of his own blood. There seems to be so much more in their relationship than either of them can understand, so Vlar calls in his father, a Finnarian prince. What he tells them shakes Gaven to his core and he fears he cannot possibly live up to what Vlar wishes of him. Then when they seem to be on the edge of truly discovering each other, a shadow from Gaven's past comes to shatter it all to pieces.

Publisher's Note: This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable: Male/male sexual practices, strong violence, voyeurism.

The Bonding Details

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Author : J.C. Owens

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From Reader Review The Bonding for online ebook

Tj says

This sequel isn't as intense as the first. You can connect to more of the characters because they become more "human" in Gaven's eyes. He gets to know them and care for them. He finally starts to understand why some things are the way they are, they aren't simply to torment him;) You learn much more of all the characters. Vlar actually melts a little and you see more of him. Gaven goes through something horrible traumatic and he grows and finds his own strength from it. I do think some of the transition from "this sucks" to "I love him" on Gaven's part was a bit abrupt. Good story:)

Theresa says

Rating is for both Parts 1 and 2. Both cruel hero Vlar and critical father Gareth's love for Gaven was conditional. They were both asshats until Vlar's father determined that heroine Gaven was his son's bloodmate.

Gaven was emotionally needy due to a lifetime of neglect and losing his childhood friend. I really wanted Gaven to leave Vlar for Ink. Ink understood Gaven and was emotionally available. Also, he was a better trainer and mentor than Vlar.

Don't recommend this book for hurt/comfort and romance. The Emperor's Wolf is a better book and has great relationship development.

Dre says

*Re-read March 2015

Re-read 6/12/14 for the MM Romance Group's Re-romancing the Faves Challenge. I think I loved Vlar more this time around. I didn't like him much in the first book, but in this one, once you figure out why he's acting the way he is towards Gaven, you can't help but love him, of course him being strong and completely sexy helps too. Still hate that abrupt ending though.

Originally read 1/22/14- 4.5 stars. My only reason for not giving it the full 5 stars was the somewhat abrupt ending. Would have been nice to see the bonding ceremony and of course the hot sex with Vlar afterwards!

Alyosha says

Excellent sequel, the writing was easy to follow and captivating. The world building was solid and the story itself an interesting mixture of violence, gritty sex, revenge and light sweetness.

Gaven, though still very young and insecure, greatly matured as the story progressed.

Vlar is the typical hot and cold alpha male, who by the end is head over heels in love with his "mate".

Beck says

I love this series ... it pushes my boundaries but I'm able to stay on the right side of freaked out because of the sci-fi/fantasy aspect ... Owens has created a vivid world where I become immersed in the characters & their lives ... I'll definitely continue this series & would highly recommend it to lovers of erotic sci-fi with a sadistic twist.

Erica says

Gaven was much less whiny in this second book of the series, so I liked it better, but there still wasn't enough interaction between the two MCs. They love each other desperately, but *why*? How can we know, when so much of the book is about the times when they're apart?

Shira Anthony says

I LOVED the universe J.C. Owens created for this little book. The entire concept, that a boy/man who had been raised in an enemy land, never knowing who his true people were, was wonderful. The idea that, in a warrior society, men have lasting, sexual and loving relationships was fabulous. The concept of an older/wise male training a younger one made for a terrific plot line, as well. That said, I had some real reservations about this book and its predecessor.

First off, the two "Gaven" books really should have been one longer book. Given the cost of each book, especially so. I'd expect installments to be less expensive. "Gaven" was just too short - it read more like Part I and this book like Part II. So for twice the price of a single book, I got one book.

The second problem I had with both of these books was the narrative. Told in first person from Gaven's POV, it mixed more archaic language (not quite thee and thou fare, but close, mind you) with modern expressions that were just jarring to me. I'd rather the entire story have been told in modern language than the mishmash of both.

(view spoiler)

So, bearing in mind these flaws, I'm only giving this a 3 star (since 3.5 isn't an option).

The UHQ Nasanta says

2.5 stars

I found myself less aggravated with *The Bonding* than I was with Gaven. This was mainly due to the fact that for at least the first half of the book, I didn't have that much trouble visualizing Gaven as a young man. I liked the humor. I thought that the author did a fairly decent portrayal of a young man with a difficult childhood, low self-esteem, and a yearning for love and acceptance that he did not get as a boy. And the sex scenes were pretty hot. The author's writing style was also readable, and if it weren't for my personal preference not to read a character like Gaven, who I was informed is a twink, I might have rated this a star higher.

It's a pity for both the author and me that I have this compulsion to finish reading books I find aggravating or to continue with a series although I have a feeling I won't enjoy it as much. C'est la vie.

As I mentioned, I find this author to be readable, which helped me to partially enjoy the story. Unfortunately, there were several problems with this book that made me feel a bit snarky in my comments.

Problem #1: Twinks or Seme/Uke coupling

From Wikipedia:

The seme is often depicted as the stereotypical male of anime and manga culture: restrained, physically powerful, and/or protective. The seme is generally older and taller,[39] with a stronger chin, shorter hair, smaller eyes, and a more stereotypically masculine, even "macho",[40] demeanour than the uke. The seme usually pursues the uke, hence the name. The uke usually has softer, androgynous, feminine features with bigger eyes and a smaller build, and is often physically weaker than the seme.

Sorry. Hated it. I hated how this turned Gaven into an emasculated, child-like, unrealistic young man. The emphasis on his youth didn't help. Honest to God, I spent nearly the whole book envisioning him as a 15 year old. How old is Gaven, anyway? I think early 20's? Was this simile to a child really necessary?

"He pulled out, and my tears came faster. I felt cold and empty without his strength within my body, but then he picked me up, cradled me like a child against his chest."

There were a couple of comparisons of Gaven as a bride or something feminine like that. Hated it. It was about halfway into the book when my mental slide into visualizing Gaven as a young woman began. It started reading less like a m/m romance and more like a m/f one, especially when I was reading sentences like this:

"I unclenched my fists in a conscious effort to relax and not turn on Vlar with my frustrations. Although why I was bothering...After all, this was his fault. I was not quite sure of the particular details, but I knew it was damn well his fault somehow."

Wasn't this particular train of thought the stereotypical providence of women regarding men? Why was this

young man sounding exactly like a stereotypical woman??!! Granted, it was funny but it also left me so frustrated. And finally, maybe I'm being too narrow-minded but I cannot imagine a young man not feeling shame at being cuddled and carried out of a room by his father: "I felt no shame as he carried me from the room."

This kind of coupling between the main characters would have been irritating enough for me, but when I noticed that nearly *all* the couples in this world was of the same variety (BIG, MASCULINE MAN and a smaller, effeminate one), it was beyond ridiculous.

Which led to my second (well, third) problem:

Problem #2: Scant Attention to World-building

It looks as if Gaven was the only one born of a woman because THERE ARE NO WOMEN. There are no m/f couples. There is only a short mention of Gareth's affair with Gaven's mother. All of the couples mentioned are m/m. Although it's fantasy, it's still unrealistic, and I couldn't buy it. With the lack of women came also the lack of other children and young people. Gaven is constantly thinking about his youth and his inability to feel like one of the Masarians. Where did all the other young men Gaven's age go? He can't be the only young warrior in his father's army, can he?

There was mention of the Finnarians and Draconians serving humans. Why? Why would these powerful pseudo-vampires and pseudo-dragons serve under humans instead of treating them as prey?

But to be honest, I wasn't as bothered by problem #2 as I was by:

Problem #3: Internal Monologue

Where was the editor? Did the editor not realize that Gaven barely spoke 3 words for 1/4 of the book? That he still barely speaks for the rest of the book as well? The author failed to balance the internal POV thoughts of Gaven and the external actions of the story. I would guesstimate that 3/4 of the book was of Gaven's thoughts. He nodded. He smiled. He frowned. He cast his eyes to the ground. He barely opened his mouth. Yes, Gaven was shy. Yes, Gaven felt out of place. Yes, Gaven felt like he couldn't speak in front of his father or Vlar. Yes, I felt cheated of a proper show vs. tell opportunity. Too many of certain conversations or actions were summarized through Gaven and his thoughts rather than shown through Gaven and his actions.

This book was in Gaven's first person POV, and I thought that that really detracted from the story because 1) as a female reader, it made it even easier for me to feel as if I was reading the thoughts of a young woman rather than a young man 2) Gaven's thoughts were tiresomely angst (Why would anyone love me? Will I find someone to love me? Does Vlar feel anything for me? I want to find someone to love me.) and 3) I felt that this 1st person POV made it easier for the author to forget that Gaven should have actual interactions rather than constantly go off to a hidden corner, and think and think:

"At feast on that particular night, I was withdrawn and introspective, my thoughts far from food and companionship."

Me: "Gaven, you've been that way the entire first half of the book."

Finally, unrealistic sex scenes. At least they were hot.

Natasha says

DNF at 70%.

Just couldn't cope with the cliches of this book that the first in the series steered clear from. "Soulmate"/"Bloodmate" anything is enough to make me lose my dinner. When the "Mine!" Shit starts to spew right around orgasm, it's time for me to bow out.

M'rella says

[The story suddenly became plagued with sex scenes, which is all right, I guess, just not *my* thing. Gaven turned into a peeping Tom. There is a lot of repetition, for example, Gaven being carried bridal style; using same old excuse to watch others having sex; hot-cold treatment by Vlar which got very old very fast and so on... (hide spoiler)]

Scarletine says

Very sexy and sweet story, with a nice bit of angst thrown in for good measure. Vlar and Gaven are such a cute couple. Straight on to the third book!

Dreamer says

Okay m/m fantasy read..

'Vlar stood outside, in pouring rain, utterly naked. His face was turned upward, his arms spread, palms up as though to praise a deity, his body arched back slightly.'

Juxian says

I really loved the first book because Gaven is such an incredibly appealing character. And he still is in this book, too. Actually, almost everyone in these books is great: Sadan is fascinating, the Eight are wonderful, so is Andar, even Gareth is interesting. It's Vlar that I couldn't like at all. There is nothing likeable about him. Well, he is good looking and good in bed. Not enough! He actually treated Gaven quite shitty before finding out about their bond and then he suddenly became loving and considerate. This kind of conditional lov really makes me question if he loved Gaven or just the idea of bloodmate.

Barbara says

JC Owens has succeeded keeping me locked to the reader with his telling of how Gaven finds his place within the Masarian's and in Vlar's heart, the Finnarian teacher who at first he hates...

The road he follows isn't easy and he has much to learn in a world that is violent but also very very sensual.

Vlar ...

One of the scenes I love...

The wolves...

* **Endless says**

It's a little disconcerting that the 2 main characters have extremely different personalities from what they started out as... It would not have been so weird had the author given us a bit more on their motivations to change like this...It's like you know there will be change and you want the change, me as a reader am expecting it but the reasons for the change, the conviction is just weak...I wanted more interaction between Gaven and Vlar, they should've talked to each other more rather than have their own inner dialogs and reassuring dialogs with supporting characters.

Loederkoningin says

3.5 Before I move on to my thoughts, I need to get this off my chest first: HOT, ahhh, so HOT, and HOT. Like baby brother of Bloodraven HOT. Ungh.

Owens is like a great fanfic writer: you can tell that she's totally into her own pairing, and she nails those hot 'n heady dynamics. But she's not so much into plotting a decent fantasy story, nor is she into using beta readers apparently. And sadly, because this is not fanfic, the MCs were not fleshed-out in advance, and Owens fails to do so. Other than that, so many missed opportunities to provide the MCs with interesting dilemmas and lift the plot from its predictable patterns, yet another forced bonding on top of the forced bonding in the first book that allows the writer to avoid actually having to work to make her MCs accept and love each other, repetitive wording, inconsistent characters, that dreaded descend into sap in the final chapters, no, no, no.

But....those sex scenes. Like I said, Blooraven-ish, repetitive, hypnotic power-fucking with vampire teeth instead of a giant green peen as unique selling point, and with only a teeny weeny hint of dub con, because the "little one" soon becomes insatiable (and jcf, I comforted myself with the thought that it could've been "oh, little one" instead, but Owens really doesn't go easy on the MC's pet name, does she?). And really, this sort of thing can gloss over much of my disappointment. Mmm yeah...

No, wait. Ugh. I feel that this writer could be so good with a lot of TLC from betas and from aiming higher herself. But looking at the reviews for her other works, she seems more interested in pushing out one lazily-plotted book after another at warpspeed. My loss.

Argona says

Gaven's story picks up at the second book and Gaven finally arrives at the Masarian capital. One of the things I love about this book is Masarian society and how it's based on camaraderie and bonds among the warriors. The emotional and sexual bonds created between the warriors are the very reason their army and society is so strong and feared by other nations, therefore such bonds are deeply treasured and encouraged. Isn't such society just wonderful?

In this book, Gaven is finally getting comfortable in his own skin. It's heart-breaking how little he thinks of himself and it's beautiful how others slowly help him see his own worth and value. His Eight companions were definitely one of the stories delights for me as they helped him in a way Vlar never did. In my opinion, Vlar didn't do very little for Gaven. The romance between him and Gaven is definitely stronger than the first book but I still can't figure out why Gaven fell for him. I wanted Gaven to end up with someone like Ice or Ink not Vlar. It's true that Vlar is a beautiful magical being but during most of the story he is only hurting Gaven by his actions and his lack of communication. He alternates between being passionate and being cold, leaving poor Gaven completely in shadows. The first time I read this book, I was extremely mad at him. He simply left many of my expectations unfulfilled. When I skimmed through this book for a second time, his behavior made much more sense to me, considering I knew what was troubling him and what was going on in his mind but still it wasn't enough to make me care for him. I get why he fell for Gaven but again I don't get why Gaven fell for him. The real emotional support was always provided by Gaven's eight companions. With a sudden revelation, reader is supposed to accept the sudden changes in Vlar's behavior because the plot demands it. There simply wasn't enough meaningful interaction between Gaven and Vlar. So when it comes to romance, the story isn't that strong. Vlar simply didn't impress me and I cared little for him and his relationship with Gaven.

Despite this weakness, I still really enjoyed Gaven's story because I cared for HIM and I wanted him to be happy. My most favorite part of the story was near the end when Gaven's relationship with his father reached the final stage. To tell you the truth, all I cared about while reading this story was THIS relationship. The climax of the story really satisfied me and I can't even begin to describe how happy I was when (view spoiler)

At the end, I really enjoyed Gaven series as one of my very first M/M romance novels, not because of the romance but because of the beautiful familial bonds that bloom among people strange to each other and the camaraderie that exists among the Masarian warriors.

Kassa says

3.5 stars

Gaven 2: The Bonding is a successful sequel to JC Owen's intriguing new world. The first book introduced Gaven, set up his sexual relationship with Vlar and now that relationship becomes more complicated with a final happy ending in the sequel. The story is decent but once again what really shines is Owen's solid writing, gift for description, and ability to incorporate violence and angst while still feeling like an easy, absorbing read. You can read this one on its own or go back and read the first if you're a stickler for series but there's enough background you can pick it up alone.

The story starts where the previous book left off, after Gaven and Vlar were sexually united. Vlar is now Gaven's teacher both in military training and sexually. Gaven must submit to whatever Vlar wants but the relationship is almost mechanic. It's merely a formality that all soldiers go through and it doesn't mean anything special. Except Gaven wants more from Vlar and he's starting to fall for the taciturn older man. Gaven is confused whether he should give up trying to understand Vlar or push for a more meaningful relationship. Just when Gaven may have figured things out, an old enemy threatens Gaven's newfound happiness.

The strength of the novel is once again in Owen's writing. She's a gifted writer with a flare for description and angst. Gaven is the first person narrator once again and he has some considerable angst through the story. He struggles with Vlar's hot/cold behavior. Gaven deeply craves someone to love him, want him, and to validate his life so Vlar's dismissive attitude is hurtful. Gaven spends a lot of time internally musing about what he wants, why he can't have it, if he'll ever be happy and so on. Some of this could get old and whiney but the writing keeps the pace quick and doesn't dwell too much to annoy the reader.

The characters are once again intriguing, though they change gradually over the course of the story. Unfortunately with Gaven as the narrator, the various personalities and actions are all filtered through Gaven's heavily biased view. Thus Vlar seems to make wild changes and swings from extremely hurtful actions towards Gaven to very loving. Gaven is still pretty immature and thus he doesn't see motivations and reasons beyond the surface. So to really enjoy the story, you have to accept and furthermore like Gaven, even for all his flaws. Personally I really liked him despite everything and thus was satisfied to see him get a happy ending.

Some things I didn't appreciate are the repeated violence scenes. From the stag kill to the later abuse, there is a lot of violence in the story. The easy hand to this helps negate some of the negative reaction and a lot of the later violence happens off page. The world building remains pretty sparse and ultimately I never truly bought into the connection between Gaven and Vlar. They're an interesting couple and the obvious choice for romance but I found the connection between Vlar's father and his dragon lover to be more appealing.

Overall this is a good solid sequel. The writing is the real draw and the characters and fantasy story are entertaining and absorbing; definitely an engaging story to pass the time and worth reading. As much as I like Gaven, I'm ok if there are no more stories featuring him and would rather delve into something else new and interesting. If you haven't read either books, I'd recommend them.

JenMcJ says

Oh...I am so torn on how to rate this. I am going to go with 3.5 rounded up to 4.

On the one hand, the first 3/4 of the book was great. I enjoyed it and I love Gaven. I can understand his issues and I like his internal monologues.

However, the last 1/4 of the book just seemed to completely change the atmosphere of the entire book. Personality changes occur that are so out of character that it's hard to reconcile them. We get no good explanation for the changes of heart that occur.

Additionally, Vlar has a change of attitude that is disconcerting. I suppose it's understandable but it was

jarring and unexpected for him to go from casual indifference and somewhat harsh treatment of Gaven to treating him like a treasured prize.

All in all, I really, really like the way JC Owens writes but the ending of this one seemed to try to tie everything up in a happily ever after ribbon too quickly and in such a way I found it hard to reconcile the beginning with the end.

Emanuela ~plastic duck~ says

When I read the first book, I had a few questions that were left unanswered regarding Vlar's nature and what Gaven felt for his mentor. In this book a lot more is explained. I liked the world building, but the focus was on Gaven and Vlar's relationship.

Gaven is growing up from boy to man, he is learning to fight and to love, but he still feels a bit estranged and very much alone. Because of his upbringing far from the Masarians, it seems to him that he will never fit between these fierce and proud warriors. The warriors closer to him try to make him feel that he belongs, but he is his worst enemy, he sees himself as weak and unworthy of praise and love.

His relationship with his mentor Vlar becomes deeper in unusual ways. Gaven realizes he is falling in love with Vlar, but he also thinks it's just a crush over this strong and fascinating man, who is something more than human. At the same time, Vlar shows he is affected by their relationship.

In this book Vlar's character - even if we don't get his point of view - is more developed, because we also see his moments of weakness and uncertainty. I have to say though that Vlar's father, Sadan, and his mysterious lover Graitaan steal the scene, so I'm glad to know there's a sequel about them.

This book is as dark as the previous one, because the world where the characters live is violent and Gaven has to endure a series of gruesome misadventures in this book too, and even if it's clear what Gaven and Vlar feel for each other is becoming deeper, their encounters are still pretty intense. There is a good romance part, but it's not a series I'd recommend to everyone because of his darker theme.
