



## Wolf and the Holly

*Sam Burns*

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Five years ago, Jesse dropped out of college and came home to Rowan Harbor to find safety with his pack. A broken man, he's been living as though the world is ending—allergic to responsibility and spending most of his nights at the local bar.

But he can't avoid growing up forever. On the night of his thirtieth birthday party, he finds his childhood friend Isla unconscious, attacked in the middle of their peaceful hometown. The wolf inside him wants to protect its people from the slick-haired, smooth-talking vampire who's brought trouble to town, and Jesse can't run from his instincts any longer.

Now that his inner wolf is out of its cage, it's picked the most inconvenient moment to find its mate. Sean Anderson—recently back from college and much changed from the skinny preteen Jesse once knew—is just what he never knew he needed.

## **Wolf and the Holly Details**

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## From Reader Review Wolf and the Holly for online ebook

### Stephanie GooglyEyes says

According to the author, this is going to be a trilogy of trilogies. Meaning there will be a total of 9 books. So far, it looks like they're going to be pumped out pretty quickly, book 3, Fox and Birch, is coming next month (3/9).

This story is primarily Jesse with some Devon and Wade on the immediate side.

Looks each trilogy will be HFNs with all the characters getting HEAs at the end. What I like about this is it gives all these pairings time to get to know each other while coming into their newly found duties.

Jesse is super reluctant to take over for his mother on the council. Devon kind of got tossed in when his grandma decided to live a little (good for her!). I also think Devon did a lot of growing in this book, he seems to have changed quite a bit since the first book. I understand the whole blackbird ND the threads that connect the community a bit better now. I still think Oak are my favorite characters though and I can't wait to see what comes of Fletcher.

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### Lisa The Novel Approach says

The Rowan Harbor Cycle is set up to be a trilogy of trilogies, totaling nine books when it is all over. What does that mean for these first three books in the first trilogy? Well, these first three seem to be setting up the main players and getting them in their roles for whatever is about to come.

The first book, Blackbird in the Reeds, was really the set-up and a foundation book in the world building of the paranormal aspect, the different types of supernatural creatures in the world, the town and the roles of the council. There is also a little bit of a romance, but it wasn't front and center. Just as the author promises in the blurb, there is an HFN ending. But it essentially is Devon's book, his return signaling the change to come, and his journey to being where he needs to be for whatever is headed Rowan Harbor's way.

This is the second book, which picks up pretty closely to where the first leaves off. Not as much focus is on the world building, as the first book covered that, so this one created more dimension. It seemed to flow better, and the focus could be more on the main protagonist, Jesse, Devon's BFF and Wade's big brother. In the first book it's clear Jesse has a role in the change coming. He is "the one" but rejects the title, refusing to take the mantle of Alpha from his mother, and his seat on the council. It was obvious something from his past was creating self-doubt and depression. The Wolf and the Holly is Jesse's journey to finally facing his past demons and becoming what his fate needs him to be.

Though there is a romantic element to these stories, it's not at the forefront. Rather, the romances appear to be just another piece of the puzzle that will be revealed as each book goes forward. Jesse finds his romantic interest in Sean Anderson, but don't expect that to be the focus. Sean wasn't quite as fleshed out as everyone else when it was all said and done. It was like an introduction to him and Jesse. Sean doesn't even enter the picture until a third of the way through the book, then quickly is MIA until close to the halfway mark. He continues to remain more on the outskirts, only to appear briefly before something else occurs, taking Jesse's attention elsewhere. There is potential, there is a beginning for Jesse and Sean, but their relationship is definitely not the focus. It was a little insta for my tastes when they meet, and I had a hard time immediately

connecting to the two as a couple since their time together was so brief, but it also didn't ruin the experience in the rest of the book for me.

Jesse's journey to self-discovery revolves around his and Devon's other best friend, Isla's unexpected return to town and her attack. Though eventually the mystery is solved, it definitely expands on some of the questions raised in *Blackbird in the Reeds*, and it's strengthening a plot ARC for the future books. I have my theories, but they are still just that, because everything could go in so many directions at this point.

What I really enjoyed was learning the Blackbird and the Wolf roles in more detail, as their purposes and strengths are expanded upon here. There all around just seemed to be more fleshing out of the main players for what is coming, this one particularly focusing on Jesse taking up his rightful place, meeting his mate and forming a bond, and then throwing out some possible future foes.

Each trilogy cycles through, so Jesse and Sean's story—or at least the book from their POV—will be revisited in book five, in the second trilogy. The next book will be about Deputy Fletcher, and I honestly cannot wait to find out what is going on there and what his role is going to be.

I am someone who loves a good series, one that keeps me guessing and wondering what is going to happen. I don't mind that the romance isn't the center of attention if the rest of the story flows and keeps me invested in the outcome. Honestly, I'm finding Sam Burns' style of writing just clicks with me, and I am absolutely hooked. A great addition to what is shaping up to be an excellent series. I highly recommend it for paranormal urban fantasy lovers. Just make sure to start at book one. This can definitely not be read as a standalone.

Reviewed by Lindsey for The Novel Approach

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### **BWT (Belen) says**

A little slow to get going in the beginning, it's worth it when it gets up to steam. It does leave the reader with more questions than answers and the romance takes a backseat to the mystery element in this installment, but listeners are left with a HFN ending, and it's *interesting* world-building (how far do Devon's powers extend...I must find out!).

I feel like Chris Chambers has grown between his performance in *Blackbird in the Reeds* and *Wolf and the Holly*. He's less stiff in his delivery, and though his pacing is still quite structured, he does infuse some emotion into the text particularly during conversation. He also does a good job of creating and using distinct character voices for each of the large cast.

Single POV, paranormal with romantic elements, some action, good world-building, and continues to build the base for this trilogy of trilogies.

**Bottom Line: I enjoyed listening to the audio**, the world building is interesting and I'm looking forward to Fletcher's story next in *Fox and Birch*.

Story = 3.5 Stars, Narration = 3.5 Stars; Total: 3.5 Stars

Note: The Rowan Harbor Cycle is a series of 9 books - a trilogy of trilogies. The main characters (Devon and Wade, Jesse and Sean, Fletcher and Conner) will have their own book in each trilogy with a happy for now ending and later their (hopefully) happily ever afters.

*This review has been cross-posted at Gay Book Reviews.*

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## **Annika says**

### Audiobook review

We first met Jesse as Devon's best friend in *Blackbirds in the Reeds*. I was intrigued by him and his backstory and I couldn't wait to pick up this book to get to know him a bit better.

This book is set shortly after the last one left off. We find Jesse drinking in the local bar and chatting with friends. Only trouble enters the bar and all Jesse can smell from the stranger is death. It is clear to everyone in town that this stranger is up to no good. Nothing makes this clearer than finding his childhood friend nearly beaten to death in an alley. Though (very) reluctant to any form of responsibility or claim his birth right as the future alpha, Jesse makes it his mission to find the one responsible.

For most of his life Jesse dreamed of finding his mate, the one person destined for him. Only past experience while at uni put him off relationships and mates. So when he runs into Sean again, and electricity sparks (literally) between them he's a little conflicted. I wouldn't call this book a romance per se. Sure Jesse finds his mate, but the time they spend together in this book is minimal. It's mostly focused on happenings in town, learning about the past, learning more about the world they live in and the consequences for choices made.

So while we didn't get to have much Sean time or really getting to know him, the core group of people this series is growing. I'm sure we'll get to see all relationships - romantic and non-romantic ones - develops as the series moves along.

I loved Chris Chambers's narration of the first book so I had high hopes for this one. And he delivered, he truly did. His narration is filled with emotion and he truly captures the essence of the town, the people and makes them come alive. It is always easy to follow along and knowing who's speaking, having distinct voices for all the characters.

So far these books follow different couples and are told from different POV's. At the same time they aren't really standalones, they are each a part of a larger story, a bigger picture that's only ever hinted at, at this stage. They should definitely be read in order so you don't miss out on anything, because I have a feeling that each minuscule clue we get will be important later on.

*Wolf and the Holly* was another great edition to this series. While one part of the story has been resolved, there is so much more brewing on the horizon and I can't wait to listen to the next book and find out what will happen next.

*A copy of this book was generously provided by the author in exchange for an honest review*

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## **BWT (Belen) says**

### **Looking forward to more.**

It was a little slow to get going in the beginning and I struggled a bit. Also, not going to lie...the reason why Jesse dropped out of college and returned home, but seemed stuck, lacked emotional punch for me because it took too long to reveal it.

While I liked the second installment, it does leave the reader with more questions than answers.

I was also hoping for more in the romance department other than the promise for more, but am assured Jesse and Sean will return in book 5.

The world building is interesting and I find myself driven to find out more about the characters so it's a no brainer that I will continue on and I'm looking forward to Fletcher's story next in *Fox and Birch*.

3.5 Stars

Note: The Rowan Harbor Cycle is a series of 9 books - a trilogy of trilogies. The main characters (Devon and Wade, Jesse and Sean, Fletcher and Conner?) will have their own book in each trilogy with a happy for now ending and later their (hopefully) happily ever afters.

*This review has been cross-posted at Gay Book Reviews.*

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## **Sandra says**

4.5 stars!

In this 2nd book in her new series, Sam Burns gives us Jesse Hunter, brother to Wade, childhood friend to Devon, reluctant would-be Alpha wolf, who came back to Rowan Harbor five years ago after dropping out of college for reasons not entirely clear and has been sort of drifting along aimlessly ever since. He's the accountant for many of the business owners in town, still lives with his parents and doesn't want to take his mother's place on the town council.

The night before his 30th birthday, which is where the book opens, we find Jesse in the bar with friends, trying out one of Cassidy's new concoctions and generally feeling a little sorry for himself. The evening is interrupted when a rogue vampire named Sol enters the bar. He's known to both Cassidy and Max and warned immediately to not feed from humans, but register with the bloodbank.

Jesse has a bad feeling about the new vamp - he smells wrong, and Jesse's wolfy nose is still perfectly functional, no matter how much he tries to deny the wolf inside.

As Jesse leaves the bar and walks home, he smells blood in an alley way. Thinking the rogue vamp may have struck, he investigates and finds his childhood friend Isla slumped at the end of the alley, unconscious and

bleeding from a head wound.

Thus the author has set the scene for what follows, and Jesse can no longer deny his instincts - the wolf wants free to protect his family and friends.

This is billed as a paranormal romance, and there is a romance inside as Jesse finds his mate in Sean Anderson, who recently returned to take over the flower shop in town (a unique place, you'll see). The romance however takes a backseat as the paranormal and suspense parts of the plot unfold.

The whole story is told from Jesse's POV. Sinister forces may be at work, and Jesse must use his wits and overcome his reluctance to figure out what is going on and how to stop it and who's behind it all. I still had questions at the end, and can barely contain my excitement at the prospect of book 3.

Most of the world-building was taken care of in the first book, and these cannot be read as standalones - don't even try. A lot of the background information provided in book 1 is needed to understand the dynamics and the events in this book, and I expect that the subsequent books will be no different. The author calls this a trilogy of trilogies so these must be read in order as well. There is also no HEA for Jesse and Sean in this book, only a HFN, which made sense to me because they have only JUST found each other. I also like very much that while there is a mating pull at work, the couples aren't automatically in love - they still need to learn about each other and forge a relationship.

This book is alternatively edge of your seat intense and giggly fun (such as when Jesse gets zapped by Sean, as I knew he would), but there are also parts that really showcased the author's talent in creating fully fleshed-out characters, who are flawed and complex and don't always have their act together. Jesse's self-doubts, his fears, and the reason he's denied his wolf for so long - there were moments when I wanted to either shake him to pull his head out of his rear end or hug him and tell him that yes, he could become what he was meant to be.

None of these characters are perfect, not Devon whose anger can make buildings shake, nor Wade who can be a bit grumpy, nor Isla who has been running for years for reasons explained within, nor Jesse, the wolf who left to find his place in the world, only to realize that his rightful place is home in Rowan Harbor, doing what he was born to do.

The townsfolk have interesting dynamics. Some made me laugh and some made me think - especially since not all is as it seems at first. So well done.

At the very end, the author cleverly sets up the events to come in book 3 - I cannot wait. Is it March yet?

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\*\* I received a free copy of this book as part of a review tour, in exchange for an honest and unbiased review. \*\*

**Joyfully Jay says**

*A Joyfully Jay review.*

### **4.5 stars**

Wolf and the Holly is the second book in a projected nine-volume series — three trilogies involving the city of Rowan Harbor and its mystical residents — but you do not need to have read the first book to enjoy book two. It helps flesh out the world as book one introduced the town and its residents while book two jumps right into the action, but you can easily follow the story without it.

Jesse thinks he's a broken man. Something happened to him at college, something he's never told anyone about. It caused him to lose confidence in himself and has led to him ignoring the other half of himself. He hasn't shifted to wolf form since coming back, hasn't patrolled the magical barriers of Rowan Harbor — a task the alpha werewolf is supposed to do, a task his brother has been doing in his place — hasn't done anything but... give up. He does the books for various businesses, socializes with his friends, and little more. With his best friend Devon back home, though, Jesse has been drawn out of his shame to his friend's side. Devon brings out the old Jesse, the strong werewolf who fights for his friends, pranks the town, laughs and jokes with his friends, and isn't afraid to do what has to be done.

**Read Elizabeth's review in its entirety [here](#).**

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### **Cadiva says**

Another superb addition to this urban fantasy series sees us finally finding out about Jesse and why he seems determined to ignore the path his alpha wolf status brings him.

There's some more great world building, a bit more exploration of how magic works in Rowan Harbour and a lot of new plot elements laid down which will be picked up later in this series.

And, speaking of series, it was good to hear there will be more of Jesse and Sean as well as Devon and Wade, and that Fletcher will be the third subject of the author's focus in book three.

It's difficult to review this excellent series without giving too much away, but the same other worldly, ethereal and magical atmosphere runs through this one as it did in book one.

This has a HFN but one which will clearly become a HEA later in the series. I can't wait to find out more now about Fletcher and discover who is going to be his mate!

#ARC kindly received from the author in return for an honest and unbiased review.

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### **R \* A Reader Obsessed \* says**

#### **3.5 Stars**

This continues to be quite the intriguing story as it expands on the background of Rowan Harbor, an enigmatic town that literally seems to harbor all sorts of paranormal fantasy creatures and their secrets.

Quickly starting where Blackbird in the Reeds left off, this centers on Devon's bff Jesse, a wolf who's bound and determined to ignore his instincts and responsibilities. He's been through a trauma that makes him eschew what comes naturally, but that excuse will only stick for so long.

When Jesse finds his long gone friend Isla hurt, unconscious, and left for dead in an alley, it sets off a series of events as Jesse and company try to figure out who and what hurt Isla. Slowly, Jesse comes into his own and finally embraces his wolf, a thing he should've done years ago.

So yes, there's a common theme running through this series so far. Fate, destiny, a continuation of setting things up for something big and most likely, something equally bad.

Not much is revealed, the romantic progression is barely a blip but this is supposed to be a trilogy of trilogies focusing on three main couples each with 3 planned stories all tied together as they become the new leaders of Rowan Harbor. I'm definitely intrigued and caught and look forward to more!!

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### **Achim says**

#### **3.5**

I still enjoy the world building here and what's not to like about a small town founded by paranormal beings open for humans if they somehow invited and keep the secret. And because I like it I need more details and want to see the 2 other founder families come into play more actively.

Different to book 1 Wolf and the Holly is of a piece and we get to know more about Jesse and why he became a college drop-out. It's a book about friendship and growing-up (even at the age of 30) and accept who you are. What it's not is a romance. Sure there is Sean and because Jesse's a werewolf Sean is his mate - but the romance takes not even the backseat, it happens somehow on the run, is more a footnote in the world building and the mystery. Pity because I got the impression that I could have liked Sean if there would have been more of him, if there would have been emotions but there weren't and while I now could somehow believe in Devon and Wade I can't see anything between Jesse and Sean. Hope that is going to change in book 5 when they get their "2nd chance".

Still, it's the world building what will make me read book 3 as soon as it's out.

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### **Ami says**

Hmm, I still think the world built is lacking -- but this is my biggest problem with this second book. I felt like I was being *left out* of what was going on, and that was NEVER a good feeling when I read a paranormal/urban fantasy setting.

With the first book, Devon didn't exactly KNEW who or what he was, so he was as clueless as I did. Which made me feel connected to Devon better, as we both trying to figure out what happened in Rowan Harbor.

But Jesse ... he knew who/what he was. But he didn't exactly *invite me in* (as a reader) to his thoughts and his fears. I didn't understand why Jesse thought he couldn't be an Alpha of that he kept mentioning "the wolf who wasn't there". I understand that maybe Burns is trying to keep that part of Jesse's past as some sort of

climax or revelation, but it didn't work for me. It felt like "tell not show" as well.

And pfft, the romance was WAY too fast for my liking, never did enjoy the whole 'zap', 'electricity', 'my mate' thing.

But again, what I can say I like is that Burns' writing feels familiar. Plus I do care about these characters. I want to see them flourished. And I'm a bit in love with Fletcher in this book.

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### **Isabella ~Mikku-chan~ says**

\*~~\*ARC kindly provided by the author to me in exchange for an honest review \*~~\*

The second book in the Rowan Harbor series starts with a kind of interlude of introducing the book's main character Jesse, but reveals actually less than expected, at least for the moment. The first quarter is about the upcoming danger and when Jesse and Devon find their childhood friend Isla attacked and unconsciousness in a lonely alley, it's time to overthink the security in the small town.

I really liked how the book focused first on Jesse, how we get to know him better, but how he still remains a slightly mystery to the reader, even if his fears, his vulnerable sides are shown as well as his adorable quirks.

I also loved how the friendships and dynamics in the town was displayed, how Devon and Wade are an couple and being domestic with each other (with being sweet but without being sappy), but also how Jesse is struggling to fulfill his family's expectations to be the new alpha wolf. How this is a large burden for him and how he feels like a failure.

When Jesse meets Sean, it's a pleasant and warming greeting, and although he isn't aware how much Sean has changed and vice versa, Jesse knows him vaguely through mutual friends and small encounters.

Sean's behaviour and calm attitude is a slight contrast to his appearance and his build. I especially loved how shy and timid he was, how he blushed when he asked for Jesse's help and the unexpected side we saw from Jesse with his love for numbers, statistics and math in general.

The book is because of its focus a bit slow burn, as I mentioned the first quarter is almost exclusively about Jesse, his friend Devon, his brother Wade and the other town's people as well as the appearance of strange vampire Sal, who has an obvious history with Cassie, and makes everybody slightly nervous & fearfully about his reason to visit Rowan Harbor.

I loved how the tension & thrill was there, how the whole series is more and more build around the characters, their development and their relationships between them, may it the love stories or the friendships. I admit as a reader you have to like or be fond of to switch from one pairing to another over the single books, keep a lot of details in mind, remember a bunch of names, but in the end, it's pretty obvious now, it will be a pretty huge "universe", with a lot of interesting and unique characters worth to "get to know".

I loved this second book as much as the first one, therefore 5 out of 5 stars. :)

Review originally posted on my blog with added content Mikku-chan / A world full of words

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## Meags says

### 4 Stars

Engrossing and fantastical, the Rowan Harbor Cycle series is proving to be an endlessly fun and intriguing reading adventure.

Carrying on from the first book (Blackbird in the Reeds), this sequel follows new MC – but already well established Rowan Harbor resident – Jesse Hunter, as he and his friends and family continue to face new and mounting threats to their supernatural town.

Jesse is the town's future alpha, but he's always been reluctant to assume his mother's mantle. It seems like a huge responsibility to Jesse, who by his own admissions is in a bit of a rut on the cusp of his thirtieth birthday. He dropped out of college five years prior and returned home to Rowan Harbor (for reasons unknown), and now he spends his days working an unconventional book keeping job for the local businesses. He spends his nights drinking and his mornings sleeping in, all while still living at home with his family. He likes his freedom and is beyond hesitant to assume the role his birthright demands, but mostly he suffers from major insecurities where his werewolf-y confidence is concerned. Thankfully, his family and the townsfolk at large do not hold any doubts about Jesse's strength of character or his ability to lead and protect their town; he simply needs a good kick in the butt to see his potential for himself.

When a new threat comes to town and an old friend is injured, Jesse steps up and takes charge of the hunt for the baddie. In a situation that's fairly stressful and dangerous, Jesse finds himself finally embracing his responsibilities and leading the people of Rowan Harbor when they need him most.

Along the way, he also makes some new friends and also (re)meets his fated mate, Sean Anderson, who is also a Rowan Harbor alum, who has just returned home after 6 long years away at college. Their attraction is immediate, but although the whole fated mate thing is pretty much a done deal, the two decide to take things slow and actually give their relationship time to progress naturally, which I absolutely loved. Jesse and Sean don't spend all that much time on page together, but that's more than okay because it became very clear while reading the first story, that even though several romances will develop over the course of the series, the focus will largely remain on the dramas surrounding the town and its supernatural inhabitants as a whole.

Ideally, the books in this series should be read in correct order. Each story builds on the last and features a really large cast of characters – I've had enough trouble keeping everyone straight while reading the books in order, so I certainly do not recommend reading any of them as standalones. Apparently the series will be nine books strong and will be made up of three connected trilogies. My understanding is that the three main characters – Devon, Jesse and Fletcher – will each have three books in the overall series, presumably one every set of three books. It's all very complex and potentially confusing, but I kind of love the idea behind the bigger concept and I'm most certainly looking forward to reading on as the bigger story unfolds.

This series has very quickly captured my attention, and although it sometimes seems too vague or too confusing at times, I've found myself completely endeared by all the characters and their mysterious plights. I'll certainly be back for more Rowan Harbor fun.

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## **Jennifer?Pher? says**

Hmmmm...I am still completely intrigued.

I'm a little on the fence with this one though. Overall I enjoyed it and yes, once it all came together I was even a little in love. It just seemed to take a very long time for Jesse to really get his head out of his ass. But really, once he did it was on!

I was shocked by his revelation, that was not at all what I expected. I would even go so far as to say shocked in a good way. It was a spin I did not anticipate and added a bit of softness to him which was needed.

Since there was a message at the end about *Trilogies inside of Trilogies* I will not even touch the romance in this one. Really, I'm into it and don't really even need it...yet.

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## **Chris, the Dalek King says**

Back to Rowan Harbor we go in this second book of what I believe to be a 9-book series (as the author explained it, The Rowan Harbor Cycle is a trilogy of trilogies, with the books circling (or cycling) through three sets of MCs as their stories and the story of Rowan Harbor expands). This book is basically the story of Jesse—the very reluctant would-be Alpha werewolf that was featured as a friend of Devon, the MC in book one. I really enjoyed his parts in *Blackbird* in the Reeds so was looking forward to getting to know him further.

For reasons that come to light later in the story, Jesse has spent the last few years trying his damnedest to convince the town—and more importantly *his mother*—that they have the wrong wolf for the job when it comes to who is going to take over his mother's spot on the town's Council. But wouldn't you know it, fate—or more importantly *Rowan Harbor*—has its sights set on Jesse and isn't going to let go so easily. And when he discovers the beaten body of a friend in an alley mere hours after a strange vampire waltzes into town, he might not be fighting that responsibility so hard. Especially if it means he can beat the bastard who put Isla into a comma, into the ground.

I found that with a lot of the set-up for this world taken care of in book one, that this book has a much better flow to it. Why I wouldn't exactly call this a mystery, the questions posed in this—and the previous book—do get a lot more time to grow and be resolved (mostly) without constantly having to take time to fill the reader (and the MC) in on what exactly is going on around them. As a result it was a lot easier for me to sink into this story than it was in *Blackbird*. The character themselves—especially Sean Anderson, Jesse's mate—don't get as fleshed out as I would have liked, but seeing as how we are going to be getting to know them over the next seven book I don't mind all that much.

As to the romance in this story...well, it is very much the beginnings of a romance, more than anything else. I do wish there had been a bit more to tide me over till we get the couple again as MCs in book five, but it was very sweet. I can't wait to learn more about Sean, whose background is bound to make for some great scenes later on. Mostly I was just very pleased with what I got, even if what I got left me desperately asking "please sir, can I have some more?"

Overall this book was a bit better than the first one, though the characters in both books have me hooked into

this series. I find that Burns way of writing characters makes it incredibly easy to believe in their stories and want to stick around for more. I'm really looking forward to the next book centering on Deputy Fletcher—a character that basically made me want to run after him with a blanket and a request to cuddle him to death, in this book. The story ended on a lovely hook for book three and his character. Can't wait to see where it goes.

*This book was provided free in exchange for a fair and honest review for Love Bytes. Go there to check out other reviews, author interviews, and all those awesome giveaways. Click below.*

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