



Darkest Hour Before Dawn

Charlie Cochet

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Charlie Cochet's *Darkest Hour Before Dawn* is the ninth installment in the THIRDS series, a paranormal gay romance saga about a militarized law enforcement team of Therians, humans that shape-shift into animals. It focuses on the fiery but on-again, off-again romance between Team Leader Sebastian Hobbs and Chief Medical Examiner Hudson Colbourn. The briskly paced novel is packed with exciting action, steamy sex scenes, melodramatic passion, and tender moments of romance.

THIRDS is an elite team that subdues shape-shifting baddies with tranquilizer darts or a "quick punch to the muzzle." Hudson and Sebastian rekindle a flame and draw nearer. Seb strives to protect his teammate and lover as enemies hunt Hudson down, he goes feral, and his brother Alfie returns from the grave.

The book features sharp and humorous dialogue like "If I don't get at least a six-tier wedding cake with enough sugar to power the next shuttle launch, I'mma cut a bitch." The novel excels at action, whether in ensemble fight sequences or boudoir scenes. Sex scenes are erotically charged but never gratuitous. They're grounded in characters that are developed further, such as by having them flirt while sharing memories about past battles in air hockey, pool, and Mario Kart.

Erotic scenes are well written and detailed. Prose veers away from cliché and toward feeling: "A shiver racked through Hudson, and he closed his eyes. Being in Seb's arms brought a flood of want through him." Writing rips along with ferocity, leading to intimate and often confessional pillow talk that lends an emotional depth.

Action scenes are written cinematically, and it's not difficult to imagine fights playing out on a movie theater screen. The plot zips along. The romance burns brightly. Cochet gives reasons to care about the characters. The novel would be interesting to anyone who's read the previous THIRDS books, who appreciates well-written gay romance with a supernatural bent, or anyone who's really into stories with shape-shifting animals.

JOSEPH S. PETE (LGBTQ+ 2017)

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