

Van Laven Chronicles: Throne of Novoxos

Tyler Chase

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A fresh guilty-pleasure series, this powerful story is the perfect marriage of science fiction and romance.

Science fiction, along with a nod to the ancient world, brings unique settings and characters to Tyler Chase's romance, *Van Laven Chronicles: Throne of Novoxos*. As a first installment, Chase's novel is a powerful and unpredictable story of star-crossed lovers defying their families and their own better judgment in order to be together.

Comron Van Laven and Vaush Bastionli meet after a transport crash; although their families are sworn enemies, they work together to survive until rescued. Despite ancient family grudges, Comron and Vaush pledge that they will find a way to be together. But this promise is complicated by betrothals, inheritance, secrets, and betrayals that challenge their loyalty to their families and to each other.

While the story maintains a frenetic back-and-forth between dangerous battles and passionate coupling, a pervasive sexual violence rides the edge of fetish and could be distasteful to some readers. After Vaush and Comron enjoy lovemaking and Vaush insists upon declaring her love for Comron to her father, Comron stops her by slamming her into a wall and threatening to kill her. Even more disquieting, Comron and his father, Duke Crausin, have an ability to mind-meld that has allowed them to simultaneously enjoy sex with the same woman. Crausin, as a young man, had been forced by his father to have sex in front of him with a woman who closely resembled his own mother. These details allow for curious plot twists, endless opportunity for misunderstandings, and the kind of pleading vulnerability that make for dramatic romance, but they also expose layers of depravity and an archaic notion of ownership of women.

A few overused literary devices are worn out over the course of the story, such as "He raked his fingers through his hair," and repeated observances of Vaush's "hazel eyes" become cliché early on. The frequency with which the primary characters flirt with death and must be saved by various healing machines or potions also starts to feel like overwrought precursors to the inevitable intimacy that follows.

Chase pays due respect to both science fiction and romance genres, never obviously favoring one over the other, which keeps the story moving quickly. With only a few too many repeated actions and an occasional dalliance into dark, taboo situations, *Van Laven Chronicles* promises to be a fresh guilty-pleasure crossover-genre series. There is no indication that the tension or pace would falter in future installments, and the tangle of secrets and hidden loyalties provides more than enough interest to keep reading.

SARA BUDZIK (November 7, 2014)

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