



The Tempering of Men

Sarah Monette , Elizabeth Bear

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In Iskryne, the war against the Trollish invasion has been won, and the lands of men are safe again--at least for a while. Isolfr and his sister, the Konigenwolf Viradechtis, have established their own wolfhaell. Viradechtis has taken two mates, and so the human pack has two war leaders. And in the way of the pack, they must come to terms with each other, must become brothers instead of rivals--for Viradechtis will not be gainsaid.

She may even be prescient.

A new danger comes to Iskryne. An army of men approaches, an army that wishes to conquer and rule. The giant trellwolves and their human brothers have never hunted men before. They will need to learn if they are to defend their homes.

The Tempering of Men Details

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Juushika says

With the troll threat extinguished, the trellwolves and wolfcarls must determine their future role in Iskryne society. This sequel widens its perspective considerably to three PoV characters and as many overlapping plotlines--also to the larger world, and other human cultures, of its setting. It's rewarding to see Isolfr, protagonist of the first book, from an external perspective; the characters and relationships here have convincing nuance. But the slice-of-life feel of this can't rival the intense personal investment or id-level payoff of the first book. It remains surprisingly likeable, readable, engaging; but the first book is more than likeable, it's striking, and this can't compare.

Wealththeow says

[the troll queen was finally destroyed, which will probably eradicate trolls from Iskryne forever. (hide spoiler)]

Amanda says

Well, that was a quick and disappointing read. Despite my problems with the first book, I wanted to find out what happens next, especially to Isolfr and Viradechtis.

HAHA say the authors, TIME FOR LOTS OF POV CHARACTERS, NONE OF WHICH ARE ISOLFR!

Also, gah. The plots were less developed and interesting this time, probably because there were three distinct plots going on. The characterization was also worse. Maybe it's because the POV swapped around too much for the authors to really get deep into anyone's head, maybe it was because they really didn't have a feel for the characters after the first book. I mean, yay, so we know more about the two wolfjarls and some other random people. That's all to the good, buuuuut. Meh. The entire book just feels like a sort of... middle piece of wondering how to set up and introduce the next book, and much of what happened could have been easily reduced without losing too much characterization simply through pacing of action.

The one thing I really liked was seeing Isolfr through other characters' eyes, because maaaaan, no one gets that he is just this shy reserved sensitive dude at all and they all think he is scary and it just makes me laugh.

Also: this book transferred from being fantasy to being AU history fantasy. sigh.

Peggy says

This book was a big disappointment. I'd been looking forward to it for awhile, and then it was just a blatant and entirely boring setup for the third book in this series. And look, the middle piece of a trilogy does not

have to be bad - Two Towers and Empire Strikes Back are the best of their respective series. But this book was disjointed and, quite frankly, boring. It inexplicably did away with Isolfr's POV and introduced a handful of characters to tell the story. And I didn't really care about those characters or their stories that were little more than excuses for plot points. I wanted this book to tell me more about Isolfr and his relationship with his wolfjarls, and I didn't get anything close to that. I was also baffled by the decision to apparently make Isolfr 100% straight and just pair off his wolfjarls together. It would have been about a thousand times more interesting to develop that story as a threesome relationship.

I will probably read the next book in this series, whenever it comes out, but only in the hope that the hours of my life spent reading this book weren't entirely in vain.

Renee says

4.5 stars

A wonderful visit back to the Iskryne world. It's such a fascinating civilization. I love what Monette/Bear do with the sexual politics and gender roles. Yet while those issues never overtake the story itself, they greatly inform the plot and culture. Vethulf and Skjaldwulf's stories really shed a lot of light on their characters. It was great to learn more about them, and their relationship dynamics are so interesting. I found myself reading slower and slower as the book progressed, so I could stretch out the story. It's going to be tough waiting till 2013 for book 3 of the series. The only reason I didn't give this 5 stars is because I was so disappointed that Isolfr was such a peripheral character. I really missed him.

Thistle says

I really, really wanted to like this book. I love the idea of being bonded to giant telepathic wolves. I love the world the books are set in. I love how natural and accepted gay sex was in this book. But I just couldn't like this book. I stopped reading it later than perhaps any other book I've read: I reached 92% (one more night of reading and I would have finished it). I was just so beyond caring at that point though, I wanted to spend my very limited reading time on something I might like better.

Tempering of Men felt more like an in-between step between books instead of a book itself. There was no big plotline through the book, just a couple smaller things happening (most of which I didn't like/didn't work for me). There were three POV storylines. In order of how much I liked them:

1) The "love" (like?) story. Usually these wolf groups have one alpha male and alpha "female" (really a man), but in this case there were two alpha males and both of them loved the alpha female... but he was straight and didn't love either of them back. So, through time, the two alpha males realized they loved each other. In a book series where I still, after two books, had no idea who most of the characters were, it was unsurprising that the subplot with the characterization was the one I liked best.

2) Some new character who wasn't in book 1, met the world's elf race. As I never liked the elf race, this really was not at all interesting to me.

3) Half of the wolf group traveled south and met... the Roman Empire. It had a slightly different name, as

everything in this book did from the real world version, but it was still the Roman Empire. While there had been nothing in the previous book that said there weren't other parts of the world other than the cold north where the wolf men lived, this felt like it came completely out of left field, and I really did not enjoy it at all.

Usually I rail against books that include a list of who characters are and a glossary of made-up words, but this book needed those. However, instead of including them, I wish the authors had instead written in ways that hadn't made them necessary. Character names were 10-20 letter long, appeared mostly random order to English-only me, and more often than not, started with V. At the 90% point of the second book, I encountered a name and had no idea if it was even a wolf or a man, and that was the final straw.

I wanted to like this book. Apparently I enjoy the "companion animal" genre (which makes sense, really). Sadly this one just didn't work for me. I never hated it (thus my "okay" rating for it), but I ever liked it either. I haven't deleted the third book from my Kindle yet, but I don't expect that I'll be reading it anytime soon.

Trix says

[I was ready to continue the adventures alongside Isolf and Viradecthis. Instead they only played a secondary role (at best) while everyone else took stage front center. My attention was spread between each adv

Kaje Harper says

3.5 stars. I loved the first book in this series, A Companion to Wolves, (although be warned there is some dub-con sex in that one that is very disturbing to some people depending on how dubious you perceive the consent to be.) This book was more rambling, with the main characters separated again, delaying the emotional interactions that needed to happen to bind them into a working relationship. It is definitely only to be read after the first, or you will drown in the names and designations. What I do love about this series is the feeling of authenticity, the realness of the details and the way the relationships between men and wolves are not all sweetness and light and do not make the wolves feel like furry people. There is obviously going to be another book, as this one ends in something of a cliff-hanger. Given the choice, I might wait to read this until the next one is available since it feels like it is building to something more and then stops short.

E says

This follows directly on A Companion to Wolves, where a Viking-like society soul bond with wolves to fight trolls, and occasionally have Viking sex with each other. The sequel has lost a lot of the id-scratching appeal of the first book, it spreads out the POVs to three secondary characters from the first book and divides the narrative as well. There's an increased focus on world-building which was interesting, also I appreciated the attempts to deal with finding a purpose for our wolf pack after the victories of the first book, but the result is an equal lack of focus and drive for the story itself. I didn't mind seeing Isolfr from an outside perspective, especially as readers of the first book know that what comes across as coldness to others is really concealing major angsting, but the POV characters this time around weren't as appealing. One of the storylines sputters out before the end and the other two feel like set-ups for book three. The pace picked up sufficiently by the end that I will be picking up the next book but this was a bit of a letdown.

Aldi says

(This contains some spoilers.)

More wolves! More swartalfs! More territorial wolfjarl pissing contests, many many journeys, and not quite as much – but still quite a lot – gay wolf-bonded viking sex. Good times. I really like the unique premise of these books and that they don't play coy with some of the more controversial issues. And I enjoy the sly sense of humour shared by many of the characters. I could explore this world for quite a bit longer than the books actually spend playing in it (but more on that later).

Generally I enjoyed the switch in POVs. It was great to get more insight into Isolfr's two wolfjarls, especially Vethulf who was something of an enigma in the first book. And I love me some Skjaldwulf with his level head and wry sense of humour and rueful reflections on how he's older than dirt at the senile age of thirty-six (okay then, mate). Vethulf and Skjaldwulf coming to a more beneficial arrangement than growling at each other and secretly pining for a guy neither of them can ever really have was also nice to see, although I do wish more time had been spent on developing that. It started off great with their conversation about Isolfr but then almost immediately the plot sends them to different locations for almost the entire duration of the book, which felt like a bit of a let-down in terms of seeing a proper development of their relationship. (Though the way they started playing the "What Would Skjaldwulf/Vethulf Do" game across hundreds of miles and obviously missed each other was admittedly lovely and alarmingly close to being adorable).

(Also, by wanting more development, I don't mean I wanted to see lots of them sitting around and talking about their feelings – I realise that would have been out of character. But I expected more than an entire book of physical separation with a quick shag on either end.) I did really like where they ended up, though (with Isolfr matchmaking, no less!), and I still think the entire relationship - Isolfr, Vethulf and Skjaldwulf plus wolves - is such a refreshingly unique and issues-ridden configuration. ~~Oh Isolfr, why so very straight.~~

I wasn't sure about Brokkolfr at first, but he quickly grew on me, and Amma with her boundless love for puppies of all species was just precious. His and Kari's adventures with the hidden swartalfar tribe were fascinating – it was wonderful to get more insight into their culture and background. And that cave/warren was an awesome setting. Nicely unique variation on the metal-mining elf type.

I did miss Isolfr as a POV, I have to say. His perspective in the first book as someone who is never going to be quite comfortable with his role in this society and had some hard choices to make because of that was so complex and interesting and I missed being in his head and learning how he feels about the current situation. By necessity he came off mostly as "aloof, unavailable ice prince" in this second book as viewed by the other characters, and it was quite the contrast from the first book where we got to experience his own insecurities and conflicts first-hand.

In a related vein, I found myself wishing more than once that these books were longer and that various plots and developments were more fleshed out. I don't mean bloated tomes like George R.R. Martin's latest few, but sometimes the narration is so perfunctory, almost summarising, when I would have loved for it to linger a bit and explore events more fully. I do like when an author knows which parts can be safely skipped or wrapped up quickly, but sometimes this made me feel like I was being much too quickly herded from one plot point to the next when I wanted to stay and play.

The introduction of Otter was a major asset! One thing I felt was missing from the first book was the presence of any major human female characters – which kind of comes with the premise and I accepted it, but Otter's appearance was a very welcome surprise anyway. Loved her attitude and the rapport she had with Skjaldwulf. Can we hook her up with Isolfr please? Those two kids both deserve something good.

Fargrimr was another character I enjoyed, although I was somewhat torn about the sworn-son arrangement – it was fascinating as a concept but in a world already so heavily male-focused, it'd have been extra-awesome if s/he could have held a position and commanded respect without having to completely deny her actual gender.

I'm still struggling with the naming conventions in these books. I like intricately built societies with their own languages in fantasy, but I also really like clarity in world-building, so I wish these books had a glossary, given the sheer wealth of foreign-language concepts that are frequently used but less frequently explained. After two books, I'm still not entirely sure of the exact differences between a wolfheofod and a wolfheall and a wolfthreat, to name just one example. And a lot of the characters are not fleshed out enough to be particularly distinguishable, which isn't exactly helped by the fact that every single man is named something that ends in "wulf" or "olfr". Some terms (like "Franangfordthreat") are also just ridiculously unwieldy but that's a minor nitpick.

All in all, this had a bit of a "middle book" vibe but it was still solid entertainment and I enjoyed it thoroughly, criticisms notwithstanding. Next, please!

Jamie Collins says

A pretty good read, but not as compelling as the first book. The point of view changes from Isolfr to that of Vethulf and Skjaldwulf, which I was looking forward to, but I was a little disappointed in the external view of Isolfr.

Plotwise (the sex is a minor element in this one) the wolf pack is worried that they'll become obsolete since there are no more trolls to fight (another parallel with Dragonriders of Pern). Luckily a new enemy appears in the form of a pseudo-Roman invasion force. The ending paves the way for a third book, which seems to be a bit slow in coming.

I continue to enjoy the human-wolf interaction, and there's plenty of humor. For instance, when Skjaldwulf assures a nervous farmer that the wolves won't eat his goats if they're asked not to, his wolf grumpily communicates a series of images, essentially complaining about the long list of things he's been asked not to eat.

April says

(Originally posted @ CSI:Librarian.)

3.5 Stars - What both authors gave me was well worth reading and waiting for and everything about the

book was solid and well-executed. And yet while virtually every page had something for me to highlight, applaud, commend, and/or appreciate in terms of writing or world-building skills... There just wasn't a lot that I could just flat-out love, gush, and/or rant about in a happy, gleeful way.

For example, I appreciated the importance of the wolves as well as the men as individuals because I feel like that definitely made them all vivid and believable. But I didn't love --or even like-- being relentlessly teased over and over again with the promise of the possibility of something happening between the male human characters gaining more forward momentum or at least a focus.

Since finishing *A Companion to Wolves* over a year ago I had been very eager to learn what had happened with Isoflr, Skjaldwulf, and Vethulf. The results were certainly interesting and very well done over all, but I found a lot of the side effects to be quite an unwelcome, disappointing surprise. For one thing, Isoflr was even less likable here in the second book than he ever was in *A Companion to Wolves* and nothing was really even from his point of view. Even when I got over the fact that the three of them were never going to have a very worthwhile relationship all together, Skjaldwulf was constantly very far away somewhere and had maybe two scenes total with Vethulf. Two great scenes, mind you, but I wouldn't have minded more of them.

Similarly, I wanted to see more of whatever was going on between Brokklfr and Kari at the beginning but that too went in a very different direction than I'd hoped. which isn't the same thing as not liking what the authors did, but I find it extremely tragic that the one book where I would have liked something romantic to be allowed to flourish was the one book where it was never allowed to really do so. I know there were hints of that or even the occasional interlude, but I didn't find that to be particularly satisfying.

I also have to note that the original terms which, while interesting, were sort of jarring as they were used rather relentlessly throughout the length of this fairly short novel. I already know beyond a shadow of a doubt that both authors are accomplished and skilled. I already know that the world they're writing about is, quite literally, made of awesome. I also know I feel quite idiotic even bringing this up **but** having every single page littered with original terms in addition to original names I couldn't pronounce or often tell apart in some cases gave me a headache. So while this might not bother other readers, I have to admit that this aspect of the writing and world-building definitely kept me from ever getting completely lost or immersed in the story.

In conclusion, *The Tempering of Men* was quite good. It was quite frustrating too, but I still think the Iskryne series is worth checking out if only for the world Monette & Bear have created. I definitely think that the third book has the potential to be totally awesome given what happened in the second book and I'll be eager to revisit Iskryne once it comes out.

Kari says

While I liked learning more about the world, and what comes after the trolls, I had some big issues with this book that marred my enjoyment. Number one, it definitely falls prey to middle-book syndrome. There was no resolution, just more and more problems. Two, as much as I enjoyed the POV characters we get, Isoflr is not one of them.

And number three, and my biggie: WTF is up with Vethulf, Skajldwulf, and Isoflr? I get that Isoflr is uncomfortable with attraction to men, but in *A Companion to Wolves*, I thought it was quite clear that he

was both attracted to and had feelings for Skajldwulf, at the very least, though by the end I saw him also attracted to Vethulf. For crying out loud, one of the first things he says when he returns from Iskryne is lamenting how he's not as pretty any more! If that doesn't scream attraction, I don't know what does. I was expecting this book to have him (and them) coming to terms with that. (view spoiler)

In the end, I rather wish I hadn't read this sequel. Considering my fandom history, however, I have quite a bit of experience pretending parts of canon haven't happened, and I think that will be my defense here.

Jacqie says

The was the middle-bookiest of middle books.

I came into this series kind of ass-backwards. I read the third one first, loved it and then went back and read the first book in the series. Hm, looking at my reviews that was about one and a half years ago. Then I got to this book.

I figured my way out through the third book with no problems- characters and relationships made sense and the authors did a good job with letting me know who they were without anything feeling like an infodump. In this book, I couldn't figure out who anybody was, and I'd read the book in which they'd been introduced already! Eventually I started remembering some things, but it was not easy for me to get into the book, partly because of that.

The other reason was that not much happened. In my opinion, you could go directly from the first to the third book and not miss anything of importance. There's LOTS of trekking through the cold wilderness, being hungry and smelling horrible because you can't wash. Maybe that's your jam, but it's not mine. I suppose the theme of the books is "what are warriors good for when they've vanquished their enemy?" but I wasn't really interested in the answer to that question.

Also, Isolfr is really only seen at a distance. I liked him a lot as a character and missed him- the other characters didn't fill the void for me.

heidi says

My what a middle book this middle book is. There's nothing wrong with it, mind you. It's just, middly. We change focus from Isolfr, who was a pretty appealing character, to Vethur, who no one really liked in the first book, and Skajldwulf, who I kind of liked, and how they find comfort in each other. For a few pages at least, and then it's all roadtrip.

We see the problems of the third book building, how will they remake themselves, what are we going to do about the not!Romans, etc. I think the third book has the potential to be pretty spiffy.

I think my favorite part of the book was the sworn-son. The jarl lost his heir to the wolfheall, so he took the most promising of his daughters and raised her as a son. It is a super interesting extension of the Albanian sworn-man theory. She is awesome, not because she is a woman, or not entirely, but because of the way you can see all the dudes in this very dudely series parsing out what jarl/woman/man/peer means to them.

The plot, on the other hand, was sort of there was a road trip, and some bad guys, and a party at the end?

Read if: You read and loved the first and plan to read the third. You will forgive it for only have two, relatively short, wolfboy sex scenes.

Skip if: you are a patient person. Wait until the third book comes out and read all three at once.
