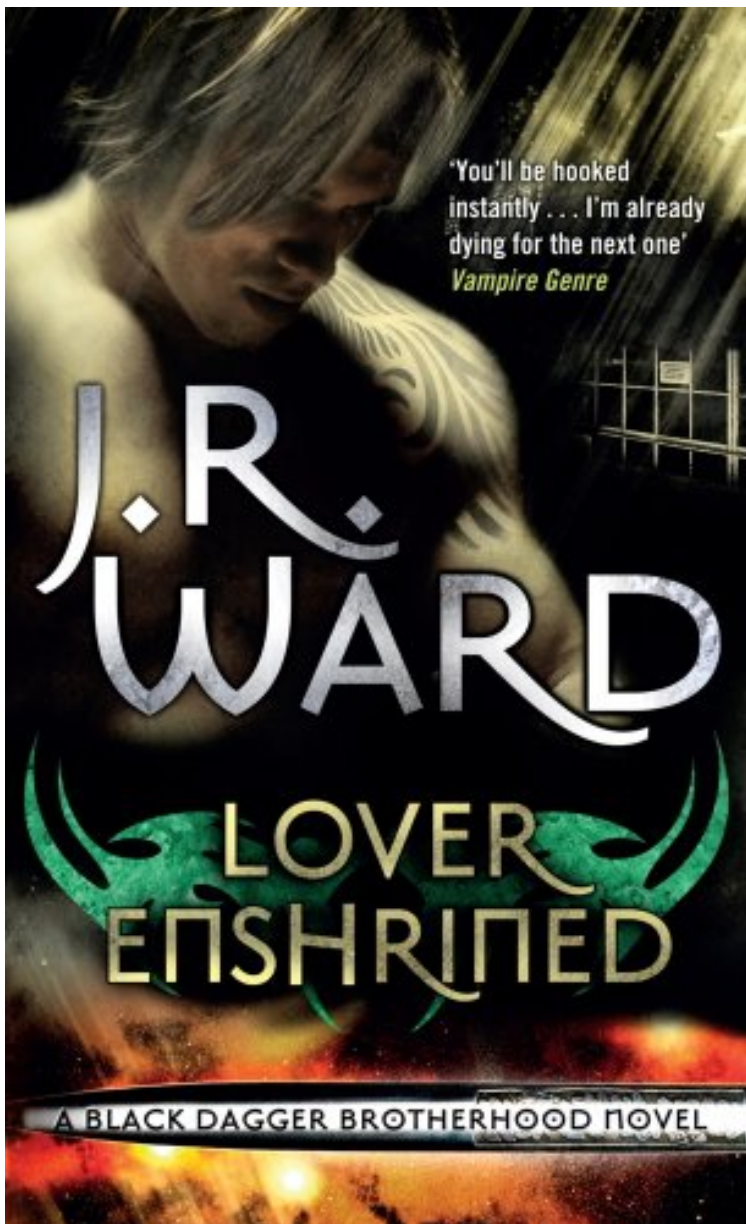


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## Lover Enshrined: Number 6 in series



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### Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurAnd now, a dutiful twin must choose between two lives . . .Phury has sacrificed himself for the good of the race, becoming the male responsible for keeping the Black Dagger Brotherhood's bloodlines alive - he is to father the sons and daughters who will ensure that the traditions of the race survive and that there are warriors to fight those who want all vampires extinguished. As his first mate, the Chosen Cormia wants to win not only his body but his heart for herself - she sees the emotionally scarred male behind all his noble responsibility. But as the war with the Lessening Society grows more grim, Phury must

decide between duty and love. Extrait PROLOGUE twenty-five years, three months, four days, eleven hours, eight minutes, and thirty-four seconds ago TIME WAS NOT, in fact, a draining loss into the infinite. Up until the very second of the present, it was malleable, not fixed. Clay, not concrete. Which was something for which the Omega was grateful. If time had been fixed, he would not be holding his newborn son in his arms. Children had never been his goal. And yet in this moment, he was transformed. Is the mother dead? he asked as his Fore-lesser came down the stairs. Funny, if you had asked the slayer what year he thought it was, he would have said 1983. And he would have been correct, in a way. The Fore-lesser nodded. She didn't survive the birth. Vampires rarely do. It's one of their few virtues. And in this case apropos. Killing the mother after she had served him so well seemed ungracious. What do you want me to do with her body? The Omega watched as his son reached out and grabbed hold of his thumb. The grip was strong. How odd. What? It was hard to put into words what he was feeling. Or perhaps that was the point. He hadn't expected to feel anything. His son was supposed to be a defensive reaction to the the Destroyer Prophecy, a calculated response in the war against the vampires, a strategy to ensure the Omega survived. His son would do battle in a new way and kill off that race of savages before the Destroyer chipped away at the Omegas being until there was nothing left. Up until this moment, the plan had been executed flawlessly, starting with the abduction of the female vampire the Omega had inseminated and ending here with this new arrival in the world. The infant looked up at him, budding mouth working. He smelled sweet, but not because he was a lesser. The Omega didn't want to let him go, suddenly. This young in his arms was a miracle, a living, breathing loophole. The Omega had not been granted the act of creation as his sister had, but reproduction had not been denied him. He might not have been able to bring a whole new race into being. But he could bring a part of himself forward from the genetic pool. And he had. Master? the Fore-lesser said. He really did not want to let the baby go, but to have this work, his son had to live with the enemy, be raised as one among them. His son had to know their language and their culture and their ways. His son had to know where they lived so he could go and slaughter them. The Omega forced himself to give the infant over to his Fore-lesser. Leave him at the gathering place I forbade you to sack. Swaddle him and leave him, and when you return here I shall draw you forth unto me. Whereupon you shall die as I so will it, the Omega finished to himself. There could be no leaks. No mistakes. As the Fore-lesser did some fawning, which would have interested the Omega at any other time, the sun came up over the cornfields of Caldwell, New York. From upstairs, a soft fizzling sound bloomed into a full-blown fire, the burning smell announcing the incineration of the female's body along with all the blood on that bed. Which was just lovely. Tidiness mattered, and this farmhouse was brand-new, built especially for the son's birth. Go, the Omega commanded. Go and carry out your duty. The Fore-lesser left with the infant, and as the Omega watched the door shut, he yearned for his offspring. Positively ached for the boy. The solution for his angst was at hand, however. The Omega willed himself into the air and catapulted what corporeal form he had to the present, to the very living room he was in. The change in time registered in a rapid aging of the house around him. Wallpaper faded and peeled off in lazy strips. Furniture ratted and became worn in patterns consistent with over two decades of use. The ceiling dulled from bright white to dingy yellow, as if smokers had been exhaling for years. Floorboards curled up at the corners of the hallway. In the back of the house, he heard two humans arguing. The Omega drifted down to the filthy, wilted kitchen that merely seconds ago had been shiny as the day it had been built. As he came into the room, the man and the woman stopped their fighting, freezing with shock. And he got on with the tedious business of emptying the farmhouse of prying eyes. His son was returning unto the fold. And the Omega needed to see him almost more than he needed to put him to use. As the evil touched the center of his chest, he felt empty and thought of his sister. She had brought forth into the world a new race, a race engineered through a combination of her will and the biology that was available. She'd been so proud of herself. Their father had, as well. The Omega had started to kill the vampires just to spite them both, but had quickly learned he fed off deeds of evil. Their father couldn't stop him, of course, because, as it turned out, the Omegas deeds nay, his very existence were necessary to balance his sister's goodness. Balance had to be maintained. It was his sister's core principle, the justification for the Omega, and their father's mandate from his father. The very basis of the world. And so it was that the Scribe Virgin suffered and the Omega drew his satisfaction. With each death wrought on her race she hurt, and well he knew it. The brother had always been able to feel the sister. Now, though, that was even truer. As the Omega pictured his son out there in the world, he worried about the boy. Hoped that the twenty-plus years had been easy for him. But that was a proper parent, was it not. Parents were supposed to have concern over their offspring and nurture them and protect them. Whatever your core was, whether it be virtue or sin, you wanted the best for what

you had brought forth into the world. It was stunning to find that he had something in common with his sister, after all the shock to know that they both wanted what children they begot to survive and thrive. The Omega looked at the bodies of the humans he had just laid to waste. Of course, that was a mutually exclusive proposition, wasn't it. Chapter One THE WIZARD HAD RETURNED. Phury closed his eyes and let his head fall back against his headboard. Ah, hell, what was he saying. The wizard had never left. Mate, sometimes you take the piss out of me, the dark voice in his head drawled. You truly do. After all we've been together? All they'd been together wasn't that the truth. The wizard was the cause of Phury's driving need for red smoke, always in his head, always hammering about what he hadn't done, what he should have done, what he could have done better. Shoulda. Woulda. Coulda. Cute rhyme. The reality was that one of the Ring-wraiths from The Lord of the Rings drove him to the red smoke sure as if the bastard hog-tied him and threw him in the back of a car. Actually, mate, you'd be the front bumper. Exactly. In his mind's eye, the wizard appeared in the form of a Ring-wraith standing in the midst of a vast gray wasteland of skulls and bones. In its proper British accent, the bastard made sure that Phury never forgot his failures, the pounding litany causing him to light up again and again just so he didn't go into his gun closet and eat the muzzle of a forty. You didn't save him. You didn't save them. The curse was brought upon them all by you. The fault is yours. The fault is yours. Phury reached for another blunt and lit it with his gold lighter. He was what they called in the Old Country the ex-hile dhoble. The second twin. The evil twin. Born three minutes after Zsadi, Phury's live birth had brought the curse of imbalance to the family. Two noble sons, both born breathing, was too much good fortune, and sure enough, balance had been wrought: Within months, his twin had been stolen from the family, sold into slavery, and abused for a century in every manner possible. Thanks to his sick bitch mistress, Zsadi was scarred on his face and his back and his wrists and neck. Scarred worse on the inside. Phury opened his eyes. Rescuing his twin's physical body hadn't gone far enough; it had taken the miracle of Bella to resurrect Zsadi's soul, and now she was in danger. If they lost her then all is proper and the balance remains intact for the next generation, the wizard said. You don't honestly think your twin will reap the blessing of a live birth? You shall have children beyond measure. He shall have none. That is the way of the balance. Oh, and I'm taking his shellan, too, did I mention that? Phury picked up the remote and turned up Che Gelida Manina. Didn't work. The wizard liked Puccini. The Ring-wraith just started to waltz around the field of skeletons, its boots crushing what was underfoot, its heavy arms swaying with elegance, its black shredded robes like the mane of a stallion throwing its regal head. Against a vast horizon of soulless gray, the wizard waltzed and laughed. So. Fucked. Up. Without looking, Phury reached over to the bedside table for his bag of red smoke and his rolling papers. He didn't have to measure the distance. He was the rabbit who knew where its pellets were. While the wizard whooped it up to La Bohème, Phury rolled up two fatties so he could keep his chain going, and he smoked while he readied his reinforcements. As he exhaled, what left his lips smelled like coffee and chocolate, but to put a dull on the wizard, he would have used the stuff even if it had been like burning trash in the nose. Hell, he was getting to the point where lighting up a whole fucking Dumpster would have been fine and dandy if it could get him some peace. I can't believe you don't value our relationship more, the wizard said. Phury focused on the drawing in his lap, the one he'd been working on for the last half hour. After he did a quick catch-up review, he dipped the tip of his quill into the sterling silver pot he had balanced against his hip. The pool of ink inside looked like the blood of his enemies, with its dense, oily sheen. On the paper, though, it was a deep reddish brown, not a vile black. He would never use black to depict someone he loved. Bad luck. Besides, the sanguinary ink was precisely the color of the highlights in Bella's mahogany hair. So it fit his subject. Phury carefully shaded the sweep of her perfect nose, the fine lashes of the quill crisscrossing one another until the density was correct. Ink drawing was a lot like life: One mistake and the whole thing was ruined. Damn it. Bella's eye wasn't quite up to par. Curling his forearm around so he didn't drag his wrist through the new ink he'd laid, he tried to fix what was wrong, shaping the lower lid so the curve of it was more angled. His strokes marked up the sheet of Crane paper nicely enough. But the eye still wasn't working. Yeah, not right, and he should know, considering how much time he'd spent drawing her over the last eight months. The wizard paused in mid-pli and pointed out that this pen-and-ink routine was a shitty thing to do. Drawing your twin's pregnant shellan. Honestly. Only a right sodding bastard would get fixated on a female who was taken by his twin. And yet you have. You must be so proud of yourself, mate. Yeah, the wizard had always had a British accent for some reason. Phury took another drag and tilted his head to the side to see if a change in viewing angle would help. Nope. Still not right. And neither was the hair, actually. For some reason he'd drawn Bella's long, dark hair in a chignon, with wisps tickling her cheeks. She always wore it down. Whatever. She was beyond lovely anyway, and the

rest of her face was as he usually depicted her: Her loving stare was to the right, her lashes silhouetted, her gaze showing a combination of warmth and devotion. Zsadist sat to her right at meals. So that his fighting hand was free. Phury never drew her with her eyes looking out at him. Which made sense. In real life, he never drew her stare, either. She was in love with his twin, and he wouldn't have changed that, not for all his longing for her. The scope of his drawing ran from the top of her chignon to the top of her shoulders. He never drew her pregnant belly. Pregnant females were never depicted from the breastbone down. Again, bad luck. As well as a reminder of what he feared most. Deaths on the birthing bed were common. Phury ran his fingertips down her face, avoiding that nose, where the ink was still drying. She was lovely, even with the eye that wasn't right, and the hair that was different, and the lips that were less full. This was done. Time to start another. From Publishers Weekly Starred . Ward's terrific latest picks up the Black Dagger Brotherhood of vampires where *Lover Unbound* left off. Phury, a sworn Brother who has also become the Primale, is wrestling with a destiny he doesn't want, an addiction he can't handle and an insurmountable feeling of inadequacy that bleeds over into his love for Cormia, his Chosen First Mate. He holes up at the Brotherhood's rural New York base. The Omega, bent on destroying the vampire race, is meanwhile growing ever stronger, and his long-held plan to destroy the Brothers, via the Lessening Society, is coming to fruition. Younger Brotherhood trainees John Matthew, Qhuinn and Blaylock are learning what it means to come of age and are immersed in their own drama with Qhuinn's malicious cousin, Lash. The stories all reach a shared climax, leading to explosive revelations that set up the next book beautifully. Focusing less on Phury and Cormia and more on the Omega's plot amps the tension on all sides. A subplot involving Rhevenge, John Matthew and the female symphath Xhex is particularly exciting, with Ward diving into varied subspecies, sexual predilections and questions of identity. Ward has outdone herself with this latest Brotherhood novel. (June) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.