



## Crave: A Novel of the Fallen Angels

By J.R. Ward

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Isaac Rothe is a black ops soldier with a dark past and a grim future. The target of an assassin, he finds himself behind bars, his fate in the hands of his gorgeous public defender Grier Childe. His hot attraction to her can only lead to trouble- and that's before Jim Heron tells him his soul is in danger. Caught up in a wicked game with the demon who shadows Jim, Isaac must decide whether the soldier in him can believe that true love is the ultimate weapon against evil.

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## **Crave: A Novel of the Fallen Angels** By J.R. Ward Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From [Booklist](#)

Fallen angel Jim Heron must help a former fellow special ops soldier in his second outing, following *Covet* (2009). Since going AWOL from XOps, Isaac Rothe has been a marked man. He earns his money as an underground fighter, until he nearly kills a man in the ring and is arrested by the police. The arrest draws the attention of his former commander, the sinister Matthias, as well as Heron, who is determined to save Isaac from both Matthias and a deadly demon who wants Isaac's soul. Isaac's court-appointed attorney, the beautiful Grier Childe, is equally resolute in her efforts to help Isaac, even going so far as to post his bail. Sparks fly between the unlikely duo, resulting in a night of passion that shakes Isaac's determination to flee the charges. After Grier has a frightening encounter with Matthias, Isaac realizes he must protect her, even as Heron urges him to run. The newest in Ward's *Fallen Angels* series offers a sumptuous mix of danger and romance. --Kristine Huntley

### About the Author

J. R. Ward lives in the South with her incredibly supportive husband and her beloved golden retriever. After graduating from law school, she began working in health care in Boston and spent many years as chief of staff for one of the premier academic medical centers in the nation.

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### **Prologue**

*The Desert, Far from Caldwell, N.Y. or Boston, M.A. or... sanity.*

Some two years after the fact, when Jim Heron was no longer in special ops, he would reflect that Isaac Rothe, Matthias the Fucker and he, himself, had all changed their lives the night that bomb went off in the sand.

Of course, at the time, none of them knew what it all meant, or where it was all going. But that was life: nobody got a guided tour to their own theme park. You had to get on the rides as they presented themselves, never knowing whether you would like the one you were in line for... or if the bastard was going to make you throw up your corn dog and your cotton candy all over the place.

Maybe that was a good thing, though. Like back then he would have believed he'd end up duking it out with a demon, trying to save the world from damnation?

Come on now.

But that night, in the dry cold that washed in the second the sun went down over the dunes, he and his boss had walked into a minefield... and only one had walked out.

The other? Not so much...

"This is it," Matthias said as they came up to an abandoned village.

They were fifteen miles northwest from where they were staying in a barracks of Army boys. Being in XOps, they were outside the stream of defined corps which worked to their benefit: soldiers like him carried I.D.s from all branches of the service and used them whenever it suited.

The “village” was more like four crumbling stone structures and bunch of wood and tarp huts. As they approached, his green night vision goggles tracked movement all over the place. He hated those fucking tarps- they flapped in the wind, their shadows darting around like fast-footed people who had guns. And grenades. And other varieties of sharp and shiny.

Or in this case grungy and gritty.

He hated desert assignments; better to kill in civilization. More exposure, true- but at least you had a shot at knowing what was coming at you. Out here, people had resources he was unfamiliar with and that always made him twitchy as fuck.

‘Course, no one wanted to get their balls blown off. So most people felt like he did, including the enemy.

Plus he didn’t trust the man he was with. Yeah, Matthias was his boss. Yeah, he’d trained with the guy way back when. Yeah, he’d been under him for the last decade.

But all of that just made him more certain he didn’t want to be alone with the big man- and yet here they were, at a “village” in the fine township of Nowhere-Anyone-Could Find-A-Body-ville.

A gust of wind went Nike across the flat landscape, sprinting over the sand, picking up those tiny little particles, carrying all of them right smack into the collar of his digi-fatigues. And beneath his black, lace-up boots, the ground was constantly shifting, as if he were an ant walking across the back of a giant and irritating the piss out of the bastard.

You began to feel that at any minute, a great palm could come down of the sky and flatten you.

The meeting had been Matthias’s idea. Something that couldn’t be discussed anywhere else. So naturally, Jim had worn a Kevlar vest and about forty pounds of weapons. Along with water. MRE’s.

He was a pack animal for real.

“Over here,” Matthias said, ducking into the door-less entry of one of the stone structures.

Jim paused and looked around. Nothing but tarps doing the running man as far as he knew.

He got out both his guns before going inside. Bottom-line? This was the perfect locale for a forcible inquisition. He had no idea what he’d done or what he’d learn to warrant it, but one thing he was clear on- there was no reason to run. If that was the reason he’d been brought here, he was going to go in and find another two or three XOps guys in there to work him over while Matthias asked the question. If he bolted? They’d just hunt him down in the desert even if took weeks.

Maybe that was why Isaac Rothe had showed up this afternoon with Matthias’s protégé and second in command, Ezekiel. That pair were straight up killers, a couple of bit bulls ready to go for anyone’s throat.

Yup, this made sense and he should have figured it out sooner. But even if he had, there was no getting anyway from a reckoning. No one got out of XOps alive. Not the operatives, not the fringe-playing Intel guys, not the bosses, either. Die with your boots on was the way you lived- not that you knew that going in.

And the thing was, he had been thinking of ways to get out. Killing people for a living was all he knew how to do, but it was starting to fuck with his head. Maybe Matthias had somehow figured that out.

Time to the face the music, Jim thought as he went through the doorway with both his guns up.

Might as well give 'em a fight-

Just Matthias. No one else.

Jim slowly lowered his guns and looked around the cramped space just to make sure. Turned out, it was true: According to his night goggles, there was just the man and no one else. With a flick of a switch, he went to heat seeking mode. Nothing but Matthias. Still.

“What’s going on?” he demanded.

Matthias was over in the far corner, about ten feet away. When the man’s hands came up from his sides, Jim flipped his weapons back into firing position... but all his boss did was shake his head and loosen up his gun belt. A quick toss and it was in the sand.

And then he opened his mouth and said something softly—

#####

Jim came back to consciousness sometime later. The explosion had thrown him against the stone wall, knocking him cold, and going by how stiff he was, he could have been out for a while.

After a couple minutes of what-the-fuck, he sat up cautiously, wondering if anything was broken-

Across the way, there was a pile of rags where Matthias had once been.

“Jesus Christ...” Jim repositioned his night goggles and retrieved his weapons then crawled through the sand to his boss.

“Matthias... oh, fucking A...”

The man’s lower leg looked like a root that had been torn up out of the ground, the limb nothing but a ragged stump that was shredded at the end. And there were patches of darkness on his fatigues that had to be blood.

Jim checked the pulse at the neck. There was one, but it was faint and uneven.

Unbuckling his belt, he cranked the leather around Matthias upper calf and pulled hard, tourniquing the leg. Then he quickly searched for other inj-

Shit. When Matthias had been tossed back, he’d fallen onto a wooden spike. The damn thing went right through him, the toothpick to his pig-in-a-blanket.

Jim pretzeled up and tried to see whether it could stay in place-

It appeared to be free standing. Good.

“...dan... ny... boy...”

Jim frowned and looked at his boss. “What?”

Matthias’s eyes opened like his lids were steel shutters he could barely raise. “Leave me.”

“You’re blown to shit-”

“Leave me here-”

“Fuck that.” Jim reached for his transistor and prayed that Isaac, not that freak Ezekiel, answered. “Come on... come on...”

“What ya’ll needin’?” The soft Southern drawl that came over his earpiece was the only good news he was going run across until he got them both back to camp.

Thank God for Isaac. “Matthias is down. Bomb. Coming in. Look out for us.”

“How bad?”

“Bad.”

“Where ya’ll at? I’ll come and get you.”

“We’re forty-six degrees n-”

The gun went off right next to Jim’s ear and at first he assumed he’d been hit in the head and the pain had yet to register. As he braced himself on one palm, Matthias let his gun fall to the side... and what do you know, Jim did not follow suit thanks to some kind of head wound. Warning shot, evidently.

His boss’s eyes shone with unholy light. “Get yourself... out... alive.”

Before Jim could tell Matthias to shut the fuck up, he became aware that something was biting into his palm. Lifting his hand up, he found... part of the bomb’s detonator.

Turning it over and over, at first he didn’t understand what he was looking at.

And then he knew all too well what it was.

Narrowing his eyes, he focused on Matthias. Then he put the fragment in his front pocket, and leaned down to his boss.

“You’re not playing me like this,” Jim said grimly. “No fucking way.”

Matthias started to babble, but Jim didn’t give a shit what the guy went on about.

“I’m okay,” he said to Isaac’s squawking curses. “Misfire. I’m starting for camp. Make sure we’re not shot as we approach.”

The southerner’s voice became instantly strong and steady, just like the guy’s killing hand. “Where you at. I’ll get a truck-”

“No. Stay put. Find a medic on the QT and make sure the doc can keep his mouth shut. And we’re going to need a chopper. We need to airlift him out- discretely. No one can know about this.”

The last thing he needed was Isaac out in the middle of the night looking for them. The guy was the only thing standing between Jim and an accusation that he’d murdered the head of XOps, the deadliest shadow org in the U.S. government.

He’d never live that one down. Literally.

And the hush-hush was not going to be a newsflash to the solider. Keeping quiet about shit was the M.O. in XOps- no one knew exactly how many operatives there were or where they went or what they did or whether they went by their own name or an alias.

“Do you hear me, Isaac,” he demanded. “Get me what I need. Or he’s a dead man.”

“Roger, that,” came the reply over the ear piece. “Over and out.”

After confiscating the gun that had been put to use, Jim picked up his boss, settled the dead, dripping weight on his shoulders and started hoofing it.

Out of the stone shack. Out into the blustering, frigid night. Across the sand dunes.

His compass kept him right, the true north orientating him and leading him on through the darkness. Without it, he would be utterly lost because the desert looked the same.

Fucking Matthias.

God damn him.

Then again, assuming the guy lived, he’d just given Jim his ticket out of XOps... so in a way, he owed the guy his life.

Guess Jim wasn’t the only one who wanted to be free.

Surprise, surprise.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Tawny Morgenstern:**

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#### **Alfred Wolff:**

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**Sandra Gregory:**

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**Barbara McGowan:**

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