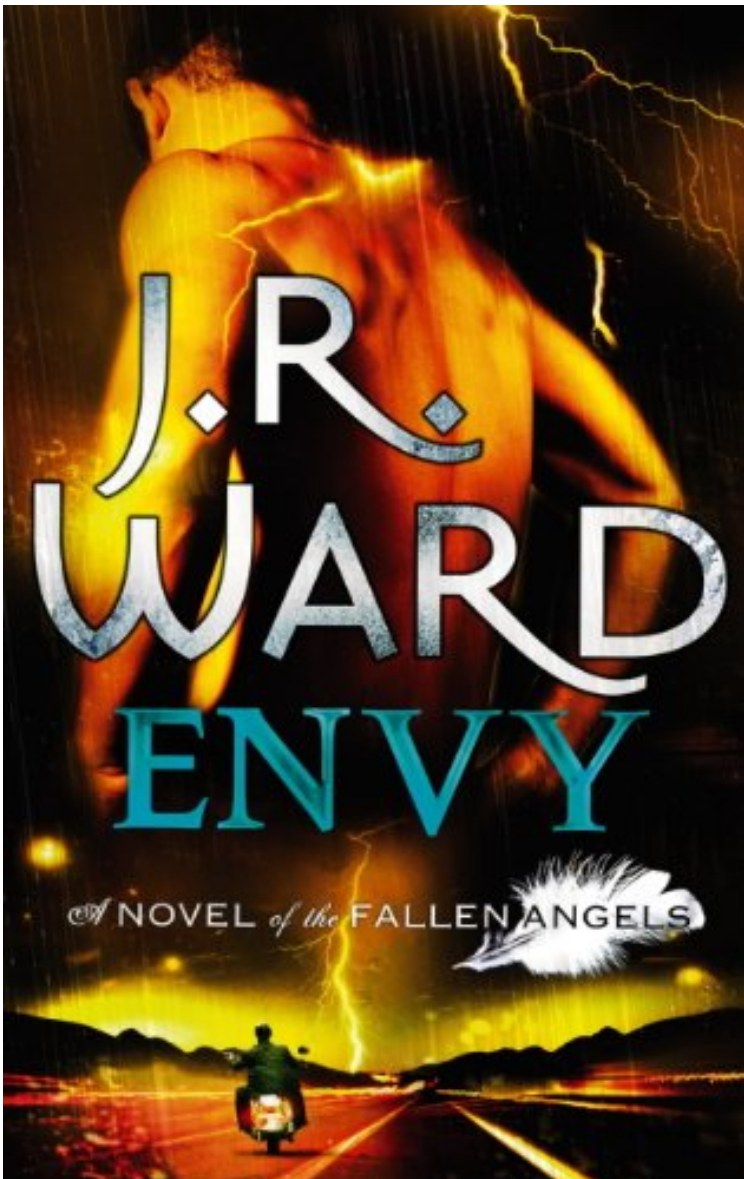


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Envy: Number 3 in series



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurSeven deadly sins. Seven souls to save. And a man and a woman treading the lines of danger, desire and deliverance . . .As the son of a serial killer, homicide detective Thomas 'Veck'

DelVecchio, Jr, grew up in the shadow of evil. Now, on the knife-edge between civic duty and blind retribution, he atones for the sins of his father - while fighting his inner demons. Assigned to monitor Veck is Internal Affairs officer Sophia Reilly, whose interest in him is both professional and arousingly personal.

And Veck and Sophia have another link: Jim Heron, a mysterious stranger with too many answers . . . to questions that are deadly. When Veck and Sophia are drawn into the ultimate battle between good and evil,

their fallen angel saviour is the only thing that stands between them and eternal damnation. Extrait Two houses down from Detective Thomas DelVecchios, Internal Affairs Officer Sophia Reilly was behind the wheel of her unmarked and partially blinded. By all that is holy... She rubbed her eyes. Do you not believe in curtains? As she prayed for the image of a spectacularly naked colleague to fade from her retinas, she seriously rethought her decision to do the stakeout herself. She was exhausted, for one thing or had been before she'd seen just about everything Veck had to offer. Take out the just. One bene was that she was really frickin awake now, thank you very much she might as well have licked two fingers and shoved them into a socket: a full-frontal like that was enough to give her the perm she'd wanted back when she was thirteen. Muttering to herself, she dropped her hands into her lap again. And gee whiz, as she stared at the dash, all she saw... was everything she'd seen. Yeah, wow, on some men, no clothes was so much more than just naked. And to think she'd almost missed the show. She'd parked her unmarked and just called in her position when the upstairs lights had gone on and she had gotten a gander at the vista of a bedroom. Easing back into her seat, it hadn't dawned on her exactly where the unobstructed view was going to take them both she'd just been interested that it appeared to be nothing but a bald lightbulb on the ceiling of what had to be the master suite. Then again, bachelor pad decorating tended to be either storage-unit crammed or Death Valley barren. Veck's was obviously the Death Valley variety. Except suddenly she hadn't been thinking about interior decorating, because her suspect had stepped into the bathroom and flipped the switch. Hellllllllo, big boy. In too many ways to count. Stop thinking about it... stop thinking about Closing her eyes again didn't help: If she'd reluctantly noticed before how well he filled out his clothes, now she knew exactly why. He was heavily muscled, and given that he didn't have any hair on his chest, there was nothing to obscure those hard pecs and that six-pack and the carved ridges that went over his hips. Matter of fact, when it came to manscaping, all he had was a dark stripe that ran between his belly button and his... You know, maybe size did matter, she thought. Oh, for chrissakes. In an attempt to get her brain focused on something, anything more appropriate, she leaned forward and looked out the opposite window. As far as she could tell, the house directly across from him had privacy shades across every available view. Good move, assuming he paraded around like that every night. Then again, maybe the husband had strung those puppies up so that his wife didn't get a case of the swoons. Bracing herself, she glanced back at Veck's place. The lights were off upstairs and she had to hope now that he was dressed and on the first floor, he stayed that way. God, what a night. Was it possible Veck had torn apart that suspect? She didn't think so. But he did even though he couldn't remember a thing. Whatever, she was still waiting for any evidence that came from the scene, and there were coyotes in those woods. Bears. Cats of the nonMeow Mix variety. Chances were good that the suspect had come walking through there with the scent of dried blood on his clothes and something with four paws had viewed him as a Happy Meal. Veck could well have tried to step in and been shoved to the side. After all, he'd been rubbing his temples like he'd had pain there, and God knew head trauma had been known to cause short-term memory loss. The lack of physical evidence on him supported the theory; that was for sure. And yet... God, that father of his. It was impossible not to factor him in even a little. Like every criminal justice major, she'd studied Thomas DelVecchio Sr. as part of her courses but she'd also spent considerable time on him in her deviant-psych classes. Veck's dad was your classic serial killer: smart, cunning, committed to his craft, utterly remorseless. And yet, having watched videos of his interviews with police, he came across as handsome, compelling, and affable. Classy. Very non-monster. But then again, like a lot of psychopaths, he'd cultivated an image and sustained it with care. He'd been very successful as a dealer of antiquities, although his establishment in that haughty, lofty world of money and privilege had been a complete self-invention. He'd come from absolutely nothing, but had had a knack for charming rich people as well as a talent for going overseas and coming back with ancient artifacts and statues that were extremely marketable. It wasn't until the killings had started to surface that his business practices came under scrutiny, and to this day, no one had any idea where he'd found the stuff he had it was almost as if he'd had a treasure trove somewhere in the Middle East. He certainly hadn't helped authorities sort things out, but what were they going to do to him? He was already on death row. Not for much longer, though, evidently. What had Veck's mother been like? The knock on the window next to her head was like a shot ringing out, and she had her weapon palmed and pointed to the sound less than a heartbeat afterward. Veck was standing in the street next to her car, his hands up, his wet hair glossy in the streetlights. Lowering her weapon, she put her window down with a curse. Quick reflexes, Officer, he murmured. Do you want to get shot, Detective? I said your name. Twice. You were deep in thought. Thanks to what she'd seen in that bathroom, the flannel shirt and academy sweats he had on seemed eminently removable, the kind of duds that wouldn't resist a shove up or a pull down. But

come on, like she hadn't seen every aisle in his grocery store already? You want my clothes now? he said as he held up a trash bag. Yes, thank you. She accepted the load through her window and put the things down on the floor. Boots, too? As he nodded, he said, Can I bring you some coffee? I don't have much in my kitchen, but I think I can find a clean mug and I got instant. Thanks. I'm okay. There was a pause. There a reason you're not looking me in the eye, Officer? I just saw you buck naked, Detective. Not at all. She pegged him right in the peepers. You should get inside. It's chilly. The cold doesn't bother me. You going to be here all night? Depends. On whether I am, right. Yup. He nodded, and then glanced around casually like they were nothing but neighbors chatting about the weather. So calm. So confident. Just like his father. Can I be honest with you? he said abruptly. You'd better be, Detective. I'm still surprised you let me go. She ran her hands around the steering wheel. May I be honest with you? Yeah. I let you go because I really don't think you did it. I was at the scene and I had blood on me. You called nine-one-one, you didn't leave, and that kind of death is very messy to perpetrate. Maybe I cleaned up. There wasn't a shower in those woods as far as I saw. Do. Not. Think. Of. Him. Naked. When he started to shake his head like he was going to argue, Reilly cut him off. Why are you trying to convince me I'm wrong? That shut him up. At least for a moment. Then he said in a low voice, Are you going to feel safe tailing me. Why wouldn't I? For the first time, emotion bled through his cool expression, and her heart stopped: There was fear in his eyes, as if he didn't trust himself. Veck, she said softly, is there anything I don't know. He crossed his arms over that big chest of his and his weight went back and forth on his hips as if he were thinking. Then he hissed, and started rubbing his temple. I've got nothing, he muttered. Listen, just do us both a favor, Officer. Keep that gun close by. He didn't look back as he turned and walked across the street. He wasn't wearing any shoes, she realized. Putting up the window, she watched him go into the house and shut the door. Then the lights in the house went out, except for the hallway on the second floor. Settling in, she eased down in her seat and stared at all those windows. Shortly thereafter, a massive shadow walked into the living room or rather, appeared to be dragging something? Like a couch? Then Veck sat down and his head disappeared as if he were stretching out on something. It was almost like they were sleeping side by side. Well, except for the walls of the house, the stretch of scruffy spring lawn, the sidewalk, the asphalt, and the steel cage of her Crown Victoria. Reilly's lids drifted down, but that was a function of the angle of her head. She wasn't tired and she wasn't worried about falling asleep. She was wide-awake in the dark interior of the car. And yet she reached over and hit the door-lock button. Just in case. Laying his hands on Mahone's bloody chest, Caleb closed his eyes. Bullets still fired around him, some coming too damn close. Damn it, Riley's men had to get out before the gas reached them in the crawl space. Get out! he yelled. The vampire teleported, Riley shouted. We're clear. With a sigh of relief, Caleb willed his consciousness into a trance and called to his ancestors for their healing help. He saw them in the colors that swirled behind his eyelids and felt their presence in the heat that immediately suffused his body. Their voices chanted, low and soothing, directing him to keep one hand directly over Mahone's heart and the other over his eyes. Caleb willed the healing heat building within his body to transfer to Mahone. As it did, he took some of Mahone's pain into himself. He felt his own heartbeat slow. His limbs weakened. His body began to shake with the effort of remaining upright, and he forced even breaths, sensing he needed to maintain contact far longer than he ever had. Come on, come on, he urged himself. Hang in there. The dizziness came next. Then the nausea. He could feel his lungs filling with the gas that swirled around them and knew his time was running out. His body jerked as he coughed, and the movement threatened to pull his hands away from Mahone. They had to get out of there, but if he disconnected too soon, it would all be for nothing. Mahone would die. Hell, Caleb would probably die, as well, too weak from the healing to get out on his own. But then he felt Mahone's chest rising strongly and his pulse beating regularly, and he knew the healing had worked. The heat slowly left his body, and the voices of his ancestors faded. Caleb whispered his thanks, then opened his eyes. Swiftly, he reached up and unhooked Mahone's chains from the manacles around his wrists. Mahone groaned and slumped over just as Caleb caught him and threw him fireman-style over his shoulder. Caleb staggered a few steps before he turned, intending to carry Mahone to the doorway. Halfway there, his knees buckled. He lost his grip on Mahone, and the man slipped and rolled a couple of feet away. Grunting, Caleb fell on all fours, his head hanging, his lungs seizing up. He'd waited too long.

They were both going to die in this warehouse, just like the FBI scientists who'd discovered the vamp antidote only to be killed because of it. He looked up, eyes watering, searching the room, thankful that Team Blue had obeyed his orders even as he regretted the fact no one was going to be able to help him. But then he saw her. Wraith. Running toward him. He tried to open his mouth. To yell at her to stop. His heart squeezed. Damn her for putting herself at such risk. He didn't know how the gas would affect a wraith. Since it worked

so well on vamps, immortality had nothing to do with the effects. But he couldn't make a sound, and Wraith kept coming. She knelt beside him and pulled him up. She was yelling something, and he tried to make it out. . . have to walk! I need to get Mahone. Can you walk, O'Flare? She was glancing frantically between him and Mahone, the indecision on her face readily apparent. She couldn't carry them both out of there before the gas ended them. Leave me . . . he tried to say, but again no sound came out. It didn't matter. Wraith understood. She grabbed him by his shirt and shook him, hanging on when he began to slide, practically keeping him on his feet. No fucking way, O'Flare. I didn't survive Korea just to come back and lose you in the States. Stay on your feet and move. You're walking out of here. Got it? The vehemence in her voice roused him enough to nod. She released him, and although he swayed on his feet, he didn't fall. Quickly, she grabbed Mahone, carrying him in the same lift O'Flare had used. Then, amazingly, she positioned herself next to him and ordered, Lean against me if you need to. Start walking. Now. Caleb walked. He didn't know how he did it, but he managed to put one foot in front of the other. At one point, he did have to lean on her, and he sensed how it slowed her down, but she didn't move away. She stayed with him. Until they made it out into the open air. He heard shouts and the sound of stomping feet just as he collapsed. When he came to, he was being loaded into an ambulance. Riley's face hovered above him. Mahone? Caleb rasped out. Still alive, Riley said. But I don't know if he's going to stay that way. From the worried expression on the man's face, Caleb knew his own chance of survival was also in question. Wraith? he asked, grabbing on to the man's shirt when he didn't answer. What about the wraith? Riley shook his head. I don't know. She passed out, same as you. No pulse, remember? No breath. No way to tell if she's alive or dead. They took her in another cab. Your guess is as good as mine. *Revue de presse* Praise for the novels of J.R. Ward Delicious, erotic, and thrilling. *New York Times* bestselling author Nicole Jordan Dark fantasy lovers, you just got served. *New York Times* bestselling author Lynn Viehl Hold on tight for an intriguing, adrenaline-pumping ride. *Booklist* Frighteningly addictive. *Publishers Weekly*