



The King (Black Dagger Brotherhood, Book 12)

By J.R. Ward

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J.R. Ward's # 1 *New York Times* bestselling Black Dagger Brotherhood continues as a royal bloodline is compromised by a grave threat to the throne.

Long live the King...

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The question is, will true love win out... or tortured legacy take over?

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for the Black Dagger Brotherhood novels:

“I love this series!”—*New York Times* bestselling author Suzanne Brockmann

“The Black Dagger Brotherhood books are a highly addictive mixture of heady romance, hot sex, even hotter vampires and never ending drama.”—LoveVampires.com

“I can’t wait for the next one!”—*New York Times* bestselling author Angela Knight

“It pulls the reader in and will grip your heart...J. R. Ward has created a world that I love...along with characters I can’t get enough of.”—*Night Owl Reviews*

“Will give Brotherhood addicts a powerful rush.”—*Publishers Weekly*

About the Author

J. R. Ward is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of numerous novels, including the Black Dagger Brotherhood series. She lives in the South with her family.

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One

Manhattan’s Meatpacking District, Present

“Give me your mouth,” Wrath demanded.

Beth tilted her head back and leaned into her mate’s arms. “You want it? So take it.”

The growl that came out of that massive chest was a reminder that her man was not, in fact, a man. He was the last purebred vampire left on the planet—and when it came to her and sex, he was fully capable of going wrecking-ball to get at her.

And not in the stupid-ass Miley Cyrus poser-sex way—and provided Beth was willing, of course. Although really, when a woman had the opportunity to get with six feet, nine inches of hard-ass dressed in black leather, who just happened to have pale green eyes that glowed like the moon, and black hair down to the aforementioned concrete posterior?

No was not just out of her vocabulary; it was a foreign concept.

The kiss that came at her was brutal and she wanted it that way, Wrath’s tongue thrusting into her as he shoved her backward through the open doorway of their secret hideaway.

Slam!

Best sound in the world. Well, okay, second-best—number one being what her man made when he came inside of her.

At the mere thought of it, her core opened even further.

“Oh, fuck,” he said into her mouth as one of his hands slipped in between her thighs. “I want this—yeah . . . are you wet for me, leelan.”

Not a question. Because he knew the answer, didn't he.

“I can smell you,” he groaned against her ear as he ran his fangs up her throat. “The most beautiful thing in the world—except for your taste.”

That gravel in his voice, the straining in his hips, that hard length pressing into her—she orgasmed right then and there.

“Fuck me, we need to do this more,” he gritted as she ground herself against his hand, working her hips. “Why the fuck haven't we come down here every night?”

The thought of the mess that waited for them back in Caldwell drained some of the heat out of her. But then he started massaging her with his fingers, working the seam of her jeans against her most sensitive place while his tongue probed her mouth the way he did when he was . . . um, yeah.

Gee whiz, what do you know, surprise, surprise—everything about his being King and the assassination attempt and the Band of Bastards just floated away.

He was right. Why the hell didn't they make time for this slice of heaven on a regular basis?

Giving herself up to the sex, her hands tangled in his waist-length hair, its softness at odds with the harshness of his face, the strength in his incredible body, that iron core of his will. She'd never been one of those silly chippies who dreamed about a Prince Charming or a fairy-tale wedding or any of that Disney musical bullcrap. But even for someone who had had no illusions and no intention of ever signing a marriage certificate, there was no way she would have pictured herself with Wrath, son of Wrath, King of a race that as far as she had known back then was nothing more than a Halloween myth.

Yet here she was, head over heels with a straight-up killer who had a trucker's vocabulary, a royal bloodline as long as his arm, and enough attitude to make Kanye West look like a self-esteem reject.

Okay, he wasn't quite that egocentric—although, yup, he probably would cut Taylor Swift off in a heartbeat, but that was because rap and hip-hop were his music of choice and not 'cuz he was being a hater.

Bottom line, her hellren was a his-way-or-no-way kind of guy, and the throne he sat on meant that personality defect was embraced on bended knee as the law of the land.

Talk about a perfect storm. The good news? She was the sole exception, the only person who could talk sense into him when he really got his hackles up. It was like that with all of the Brothers and their mates: Members of the Black Dagger Brotherhood, the race's elite group of fighters and meatheads, were not known for being easygoing. Then again, you didn't want pussies on the front line of any war, especially when the bad guys were of the ilk of the Lessening Society.

And those goddamned Bastards.

“I'm not going to make it to the bed,” Wrath moaned. “I gotta be in you now.”

“So take me on the floor.” She sucked on his lower lip. “You know how to do that, don't you?”

More growling, and a big shift in the planet's orientation as she was popped off the ground and laid out on all that polished wood. The loft that Wrath had once used as a bachelor pad was right out of central casting: It had a cathedral ceiling, an empty warehouse's decor, and the matte black paint job of an Uzi. It was nothing like the Brotherhood mansion where they lived, and that was the point.

As beautiful as that place was, all the gold leaf and crystal chandeliers and antique furniture could get a little stifling—

Riiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.

With that happy noise, she lost another outfit in her wardrobe—and wasn't Wrath proud of himself: Flashing fangs long as daggers and white as the driven snow, he proceeded to turn her silk button-down into a Swiffer, shredding the thing off her naked breasts, buttons flying everywhere.

"Now, that's what I'm talkin' about." Wrath tore off his wraparounds and smiled, exposing his dental hardware. "Nothing in the way . . ."

Looming over her, he latched onto her nipple while his hands went to the waistband of her black jeans. All things considered, he was pretty polite as he unhooked the catch and unzipped, but she knew what was coming. . . .

With a violent jerk, he laid waste to what had been a two-week-old pair of Levi's.

She didn't care. Neither did he.

Oh, God, she needed this.

"You're right, it's been way too long," she hissed as he went after his own fly, popping the buttons free, unleashing an erection that still managed to take her breath away.

"I'm sorry," he bit out as he grabbed her behind the neck and mounted her.

As she opened her thighs wide for him, she knew exactly why he was apologizing. "Don't be—Jesus!"

The blazing possession was exactly what she wanted—and so was the rough ride he gave her, his heavy weight crushing her, her bare ass squeaking against the floor as he pounded into her, her legs straining to link around so he could go even deeper. It was total domination, his great body pistoning in an erotic pump that got ever faster and more intense.

But as good as it was, she knew how to take things to the next level. "Aren't you thirsty yet?" she drawled.

Total. Molecular. Stoppage.

Like he'd been hit with an ice ray. Or maybe a truck.

As he lifted his head, his eyes lit up so brightly, she knew if she looked on the floor next to her, she'd see her own shadow.

Digging into his shoulders with her nails, she arched up to him and cocked her head to the side. "How about something to drink?"

His lips curled off his fangs and he let out a cobra's hiss.

The bite was like being stabbed, but the pain faded into a sweet delirium that carried her to another dimension. Floating and grounded at the same time, she moaned and pushed her fingers into his hair, yanking him even closer as he sucked at her throat and thrust into her sex.

She orgasmed—and so did he.

Duh.

God, after a dry spell of how long? At least a month—which was unheard of for them—she realized how much they both had to have this. Too much static from all the demands around them. Too much stress polluting the hours. Too much toxic crap they didn't have time to process with each other.

Like, after he'd been shot in the neck, had they really talked about it? Sure, there had been the OMG, you're alive, you made it stuff . . . but she was still flinching every time a doggen opened a bottle of wine in the dining room or the Brothers played pool after hours.

Who knew that a cue ball smacking into a rack sounded exactly like a gun going off?

She hadn't. Not until Xcor had decided to put a bullet into Wrath's jugular.

Hardly the kind of education she'd been looking for—

For no good reason, tears flooded her eyes and broke free, tangling in her lashes and seeping down her cheeks even as another round of pleasure flooded her body.

And then the image of Wrath's gunshot wound billboarded her vi-sion.

Red blood on the bulletproof vest he'd worn. Red blood on his muscle shirt. Red blood on his skin.

The dangerous times come home, the ugliness of reality no longer a hypothetical bogeyman in her mental closet, but a scream in her soul.

Red was the color of death to her.

Wrath froze for a second time and jerked his head up. "Leelan?"

Opening her eyes, she had a sudden panic that she couldn't see him right, that that face she looked for in every room no matter the hour was gone, that that visual confirmation of his life wasn't going to be there for the taking anymore.

Except all she had to do was blink. Blink, blink, blink . . . and he was back with her, clear as day.

And that made her cry more. Because her strong, beloved man was blind—and though that didn't make him handicapped in her opinion, it did cheat him out of some fundamentals, and that just wasn't fair.

"Oh, fuck, I hurt you—"

"No, no . . ." She took his face in her hands. "Don't stop."

"I should have gone over to the bed—"

The sure way to get him refocused was to arch under him, and she did, undulating and rolling her hips so that

her core stroked him. And Hello, big boy, the friction registered, rendering him tongue-tied and torn.

“Don’t stop,” she reiterated, trying to draw him back down to her vein. “Ever . . .”

But Wrath held off, stroking a piece of hair away from her face. “Don’t think like that.”

“I’m not.”

“You are.”

There was no reason to define what “like that” meant: Treasonous plots. Wrath at that ornate desk, strangled by his position. The future unknown and not in a good way.

“I’m goin’ nowhere, leelan. You don’t worry about a goddamn thing. Understand me?”

Beth wanted to believe him. Needed to. But she feared it was a promise far harder to keep than speak.

“Beth?”

“Make love to me.” It was the only truth she could put out there that wouldn’t burst the bubble. “Please.”

He kissed her once. Twice. And then started to move again. “Always, leelan. Always.”

Best. Night. Ever.

As Wrath pushed himself off of his shellan an hour later, he couldn’t breathe, he was bleeding at the throat, and his Man of Steel cock had finally gone wet—noodle.

Although knowing the damn thing’s stamina? He had five, maybe ten minutes before Mr. Happy got to grinnin’ again.

The big bed in the center of the loft’s vast space had been upgraded since his Beth had mated him, and as he stretched out on his back, he had to admit that having sex on the thing was so much better than doing it on the floor. That said, as he recovered, its sheets were unnecessary as he could have fried an egg on his chest from the exertion. Blankets were an absolute hell—no. Pillows had been lost quickly because there was no headboard, but the advantage was leverage from any compass point.

Sometimes he liked to put a foot down and really dig in.

Beth let out a sigh that was longer and more satisfying than a Shakespearian sonnet—and talk about a hell—yeah? Wrath’s chest inflated like a hot-air balloon.

“I do you okay?” he drawled.

“God. Yes.”

More with the smiling. It was The Mask all over again, nothing but Jim Carrey, Pepsodent white over here. And she was right: The sex had been beyond fantastic. He’d fucked her across the floor until they were in range of the mattress. Then, like the gentlemale he was, he’d put her on the bed . . . and had her another three times. Four?

He could do this all night—

Sure as an eclipse could wipe out the moon, his cosmic relaxation disappeared and took all warmth with it.

There was no all night for him anymore. Not when it came to kickin' it with his female.

"Wrath?"

"I'm right here, leelan," he murmured.

As she rolled onto her side, he could feel her staring at him, and even though his vision had finally given up the ghost and conked out on him entirely, he could picture her long, thick black hair and her blue eyes and her beautiful face.

"You're not."

"I'm fine."

Shit, what time was it? Had it been longer than the hour it had felt like? Probably. When it came to the grind with Beth, he could lose moth-erfucking days.

"It's after one," she said softly.

"Fuck me."

"Would it help to talk? Wrath . . . can you tell me where you're at?"

Ah, hell, she was right. He had been checking out a lot lately, retreat-ing to a place in his mind where the chaos couldn't get to him—not a bad thing, but it was a solo trip.

"Just not ready to go back to work."

"I don't blame you." She found his mouth and brushed her lips against his. "Can we stay a little longer?"

"Yeah." But not long enough . . .

A subtle alarm sounded on his wrist.

"Goddamn it." Putting his forearm across his face, he shook his head. "Time flies, huh."

And responsibilities waited for him. He had petitions to review. Proc-lamations to draft. And e-mails in his inbox, those fucking e-mails that the glymera pulled out of their asses on a nightly basis . . . although those had been drying up lately—probably a sign that that bunch of fruit loops were talking among themselves. Not good news.

Wrath cursed again. "I don't know how my father did this. Night after night. Year after year."

Only to be killed brutally too young.

At least when the elder Wrath had been on his throne, things had been stable: His citizenry had loved him and he had loved them. No treasonous plots cooking in back rooms. The enemy had been from without, not within.

"I'm so sorry," Beth said. "Are you sure there aren't some things you can put off?"

Wrath sat up, brushing his long hair back. As he stared off ahead, seeing nothing, he wanted to be out fighting.

Not an option. In fact, the only thing on his dance card was going back to Caldie and rechaining himself to that desk. His fate had been sealed many, many years ago, when his mother had gone into her needing, and his father had done what a hellren should . . . and against all odds, the heir had been conceived, and birthed, and then nurtured long enough so he could see both of them killed by lessers right in front of his still-functional, pretrans eyes.

Crystal clear, the memories were.

It hadn't been until after his change when the ocular defect had begun to manifest itself. But that weakness was, like the throne, part of his hereditary due. The Scribe Virgin had had a prescribed breeding plan, one that had amplified the most desirable traits in males and females and created a caste-like system of social hierarchy. Good plan, up to a point. As usual with shit like Mother Nature, the law of unintended consequences had decided to slap a bitch—and that was how this King with his “perfect” lineage had ended up blind.

Frustrated, he jacked out of bed—and naturally hit one of those pillows instead of the floor. As his foot flipped out from underneath him and his balance went carnival funhouse, he threw out hands to catch himself, but didn't know where he was in space—

Wrath slammed into the floor, the pain exploding on his left side, but that wasn't the worst part. He could hear Beth scrambling through the messed-up sheets to get to him.

“No!” he barked, shoving himself out of her range. “I got it.”

As his voice ricocheted around the open space of the loft, he wanted to put his head through a plate-glass window. “Sorry,” he muttered, yanking his hair back.

“It's okay.”

“I didn't mean to bite your head off.”

“You've been under a lot of stress. It happens.”

Christ, like they were talking about him going soft during sex?

God, when he'd started in with the King shit, he'd done that internal-resolution bullcrap and made a commitment to rock that crown, be a standup guy, step into his daddy's boots, blah, blah, blah. But the unfortunate reality was, this was a marathon that was going to last his entire breathing life—and he was flagging after only two years. Three. However long it had been.

What the hell year was it anyway?

Shit knew he'd always had a short fuse, but being locked in the mid-night of his blindness with nothing except demands he didn't jones over was making him volcanic.

No, wait, that was a little more temperate than where he was at—and the underlying issue was his personality. Fighting was his first and best calling, not ruling from a chair.

The father had been a male of the pen; the son was of the sword.

“Wrath?”

“Sorry, what?”

“I asked if you wanted something to eat before we leave.”

He pictured going back to the mansion, doggen everywhere, Brothers in and out, shellans all around . . . and felt like he couldn't breathe. He loved them all, but goddamn, there was no privacy there.

“Thanks, but I'll just catch something at my desk.”

There was a long silence. “All right.”

Wrath stayed on the floor as she got dressed, the soft shifting of her jeans going up those long, luscious legs like a funeral dirge.

“Is it okay to wear your muscle shirt?” she asked. “My blouse is done for.”

“Yeah. Abso.”

Her sadness smelled like autumn rain and felt just as cold in the air to him.

Man, to think there were people out there who wanted to be King, he thought as he got to his feet.

Fucking. Crazy.

If it weren't for his father's legacy, and all those vampires who had truly, deeply loved his sire, he would have blown it all off and not looked back. But pulling out? He couldn't do that. His father had been a King for the history books, a male who had not just commanded authority by virtue of the throne he sat on, but had inspired honest devotion.

Wrath lost the crown? He might as well piss all over his sire's grave.

When his shellan's palm slid into his own, he jumped. “Here are your clothes,” she said, putting them into his hands. “And I have your wraparounds.”

With a quick shift, he pulled her against him, holding her to his naked body. She was a tall female, but even so she barely came up to his pecs, and as he closed his eyes, he curled himself around her.

“I want you to know something,” he said into her hair.

As she went still, he tried to pull something worth hearing out of his ass. Some string of words that were even in the same zip code as what was doing in his chest.

“What,” she whispered.

“You are everything to me.”

It was so incredibly, totally not enough—and yet she sighed and melted into him like that was all she'd wanted to hear. And a bag of chips.

Sometimes you got lucky.

And as he continued to hold her, he knew he'd do well to remember that. As long as he had this female by his side?

He could get through anything.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Olga Snider:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open as well as read a book eligible The King (Black Dagger Brotherhood, Book 12)? Maybe it is for being best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can wiser than before. Do you agree with the opinion or you have other opinion?

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