

# The War God's Favorite by Jhonny Fox

## Chapter 1

### #1 The Dragon Empire

The First Day of the Red Moon Festival.

The streets of the Capital were crowded with people from all over the country, as they all gathered near the Palace to celebrate. For the Dragon Empire, the Red Moon Festival was one of the biggest celebrations of the year, held to flaunt its power and wealth to the neighboring kingdoms. Every wealthy person in the country waited for this day, so they could display their riches, and those who weren't as prosperous found creative ways to appear to be. Warriors in shiny armor, officials in pretty carriages, women dripping in lavish jewelry, and even children in their best attire. If one had any assets, he was to proudly display them, or else, hide in shame. For in the Dragon Empire, money and possessions meant power and power was everything.

In the middle of the crowd were those no one noticed, those no one cared for, following their masters with their eyes glued to the ground. Slaves.

Lines of slaves followed the processions of their masters in pitiful silence. Walking like shadows, the only sounds that could be heard were the clanking of their chains and shackles with each step they took. Among them, one young slave woman's eyes were not downcast like the rest. Hers were fixated on the blinding gold of the Palace roof.

The Palace. Earth's very own piece of Heaven. And while the people of the Capital may have been rich and powerful, there was a higher power above them all; the Emperor. Sovereign to all, the Emperor was the almighty, considered a living deity among mortals. With unrivaled power, he governed the country with an iron fist. No matter what, his word was law. The Emperor never wanted for anything, as everything in the country was his already. He was loved, and worshiped by his people, but most importantly they knew to fear him. And on this Red Moon Festival, the Holy Gates of the Imperial Palace would be opened to those deemed worthy.

A Palace envoy had gone out ten days earlier to deliver the coveted red envelopes; an invitation that any man would kill for.

The slave girl had watched her master hope and pray for this letter to arrive at his door. He was a Senior Minister, but even his seat at the court could not be guaranteed. He was so stressed that he had been treating his household even worse than usual; his concubines, his servants, and especially his slaves. The girl had a fresh l

esion on her back, attesting to his restlessness. Even now, she could still feel the stinging burn of the whip.

Finally, the letter had come. So on the first day of the Red Moon Festival, the old Minister was headed to the Palace in an expensive-looking carriage escorted by his entourage. Seven of his favorite concubines followed in their own carriages, accompanied by their attendants, while twenty slaves walked behind them.

The young female didn't care for all the festivities around her. They walked past delicious smelling food stalls that awoke the painfully empty stomachs of the slaves. Hers was empty too, but it hardly bothered her. She was used to the dull ache of prolonged hunger. She ignored the shops, the food,

even the common nennle admiring their procession, and continued walking.

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As usual, the Minister was welcomed to the Palace. He casually discussed the upcoming events of the festival with his peers and showed off his young and beautiful concubines. For the commoners who could not enter the Palace, the festival was celebrated with grand parties held at the houses of the wealthy, and street shows and fairs. But for the chosen ones, many spectacular events and shows were to be displayed in the Palace's Grand Arena. The large plaza, built like a Colosseum, was big enough to seat a few thousand people. A portion of it had been cordoned off from the rest; a special box, facing south, was richly and lavishly decorated, waiting to welcome the Emperor, his family, and their attendants.

The slave girl had only heard rumors about what takes place in the large arena. Heavenly dances, chariot races, warrior fights, displays of mythical and bizarre creatures, elite performers... Anything that could not be witnessed by commoners was to be displayed for the Emperor and the most honorable guests of the Palace during the seven days of the festival.

For the first three days, she followed her master, attending to one of his concubines as usual. She didn't witness any of the shows, staying in the chambers to clean and await orders, speaking to no one. On the fourth day, the Minister's concubine suddenly sent her to be locked in a cold cage filled with other slaves. They were simply told that they had been taken from their masters to be given as offerings to the Emperor. The young woman stayed there for three more days, with

no idea what was coming next. On the morning of the seventh day, all of the guests waited with bated breath. The last day of the festival was the only day where, along with the Emperor, all six Dragon Princes had to be present. For anyone attending the event, this was the sole opportunity each year to witness the whole Imperial Family together, as not all of the Princes lived in the Palace the rest of the year. O

No one knew which one of these young men would succeed the Emperor. He was rumored to have his favorites, but had yet to name an official heir. From the first born to the youngest, any one of the Princes could one day rule the Empire. Choosing which Prince to support and please was the most difficult decision for the aristocracy to make. Fear of backing the wrong Prince and losing their position was always present.

The seventh day held great importance, for it was also the only day of the festival where the guests could see all of the Imperial dragons. The sacred beasts were feared by all, the very epitome of the power held by the Dragon Empire. Though the Emperor's Golden Dragon could be seen occasionally in the Palace, every guest was waiting for the astonishing sight of all the Imperial Dragons gathered in one place.

They started arriving, one by one, in the Grand Arena, each Prince was accompanied by his dragon. Three of them came from the sky, flying their magnificent beasts. The remaining Princes entered the arena by foot, their dragons following close behind them. The sight of the enormous, scaled creatures frightened most of the crowd, yet they could not bear to take their eyes off of them. Each dragon was at least eight times the size of a man, up to twelve or thirteen times for the largest of them. Two of the dragons were brought in cages, while the others were chained or muzzled. For each of these dragons, three to ten servants came to guard them, but the last dragon was led completely free and unattended. He wore only a chain collar around his neck and he followed his master closely like an obedient dog. Leaving them in the center of the arena, the Princes, one after another, took their seats, all aligned on a broad platform beneath the Emperor's throne

As the crowd chatted about the six beautiful creatures displayed in the arena, some of the Emperor's sons joined the conversations as well. The Fifth Prince was bragging about how he had fallen for a minister's concubine the previous day, and had eventually beheaded the old man so he could have them all.

"How many did you get in the end, brother?" asked the Second Prince with a sneer.

"Seven. But I don't need that many... I will only take the most beautiful of them!"

"How generous of you..." muttered the Fourth Prince, looking bored.

“How about you leave some beauties for our third brother?” the Second Prince jested. “He has yet to take any women in.”

“Not all of us need that much company, brother,” grumbled the youngest Prince in defence of his brother.

They all waited to hear their third brother’s response, but were greeted with silence. He was the one who had arrived upon the unrestrained dragon. The enormous beast obediently stood still and the Prince’s obsidian eyes were set on the arena, ignoring his siblings completely. His brothers stopped chatting and followed his gaze.

A hundred feet beneath them, a young man was introducing the upcoming show, the first of the day: an offering to the Imperial Dragons. Behind him, a large group of people were waiting to be sacrificed, surrounded by armed men. Any time one of them dared to cry out, the guards would lash out and whip them, cutting deep into their flesh. So the group remained silent. They were all condemned to death. Criminals, war prisoners, and slaves – each of them were condemned to die that day. Some of the slaves present formerly belonged to an old Minister. As their master had died, the people of the Palace had just decided to get rid of them, along with the other slaves that had been offered as tributes.

Among them was the young slave girl with emerald–green eyes. She had just turned seventeen this past winter, but had the manner and charms of a woman. She was a diamond amongst charcoal, beautiful despite the dust and grime covering her. Under the layer of dirt, she had very pale skin and was so thin that her bones were clearly defined and protruding beneath her dress. Her long, disheveled hair fell from her shoulders to her hips, like a waterfall. Her face was beautiful, diamond–shaped with a small nose and thin cheeks. Her lips had taken on a light pink shade due to the cold, which had also left her shivering. Her temple was sporting a cut crusted with dried blood and surrounded by fresh bruising. A remnant from a guard who had struck her earlier while pushing them into the arena.

Her name was Cassandra.