

The War God's Favorite by Jhonny Fox

Chapter 2

#2 The Six Princes

Amongst the terrified crowd, Cassandra alone remained completely calm and silent. Everyone else around her was trembling with fear, trying to avoid the gazes of the enormous dragons. The six beasts surrounding them were obviously intrigued by the large group, and two of them were already ferociously growling.

It was a common and eagerly anticipated spectacle called "The Offering". The public waited enthusiastically to see the gruesome display as the six dragons would maul and kill people. None of them were even given a weapon to defend themselves because the beasts were considered as sacred as their masters. They were here to die in the most horrendous way possible, and solely for the entertainment of the Dragon Empire's finest subjects.

They all knew it. Some had tried to escape their fate and were killed on the spot. Those who remained were terrified, but they had no choice. How could they hope to survive this? The arena was fully enclosed and the lowest stairs still stood about thirty feet above them. Any second now, six winged monsters would hunt them down, even though one alone would have been enough to wipe them all

out.

Someone from the Palace was announcing the upcoming entertainment, showering the Imperial Princes and their beasts with praise, pausing from time-to-time to let the crowd applaud and cheer loudly.

Yet, Cassandra could not hear a word he spoke. Too many people around her were crying or desperately praying. Most had their eyes on the dragons, wondering if they had any chance of escape. Some girls were even glancing up in the Princes' direction, hoping one might be enticed by their looks and save them.

In contrast to the hopeless despair around her, Cassandra was looking calmly towards the vast sky. It was a sunny morning with few clouds, but it was extremely cold. All she wore was an old shredded dress and chains showcasing her enslavement, but she didn't really care. Wasn't she about to die soon, anyway? Who would care about comfort or clothes now? Death was standing less than ten feet away, watching with six pairs of hungry eyes. All Cassandra wanted was for this massacre to end quickly.

Years of servitude had left her with no room for hope in her heart. The Minister was a cruel and violent man, and she had seen and suffered much worse before him too. Cassandra had been a slave for half of her life, with

experiencing more cruelty, hardship, and death than a girl her age should. Even now, the tight cuffs around her wrists were leaving her in pain. She envied the dead who were free from all the torment and suffering. Thankfully, soon, she would join them.

Her eyes came down to contemplate one of the beasts. The large, unchained dragon was the calmest of them all. As she was not scared, Cassandra couldn't help but think that it was truly a beautiful creature. This one had completely jet black scales that shone like diamonds, and crimson-colored eyes. Unlike its restless peers, this beast stood still, nonchalantly looking around. It did not care about the scared humans close by or the loud audience. The magnificent dragon seemed to sense her gaze, because he turned his huge head towards the group, and his eyes wandered until they found hers.

They both calmly studied each other, mesmerized by one another. She, a weak human, and it, a powerful beast that was meant to take her life. 10

The exchange caught the attention of someone else. From his seat, the Third Prince took a while to find what his dragon was observing so intensely. After a few minutes, he finally found the skinny figure among the crowd, and watched her too, intrigued. The young woman appeared to be very frail, pale, and scrawny. She wore a ragged dress, her long hair a tangled mess, and chains binding her neck and wrists.

His fingers started slowly caressing the pommel of his sword. There was something intriguing about this woman that made it impossible for him to take his eyes off her, though he couldn't name what it was. It would be foolish of him anyways. That slave was about to die. So he averted his eyes and let go of any further thoughts of the woman.

Soon, the speech came to an end and the speaker left the arena. Some of the slaves started screaming in fear as the guards left them too. The dragons' cages were opened, though three of them were still chained and their movements restrained. Hell was unleashed in the arena, and the crowd went wild.

The massacre had started. Slaves started running, trying to avoid the predators. But, one by one, they were pinned to the ground by gigantic claws or torn apart by enormous fangs. The dragons were not even bothering to eat the humans. They just played with them, chasing the living and fighting over the bodies. Blood and screams flew through the air as five of the gigantic beasts massacred their prey. The carnage went on for a few more minutes before anyone noticed that something was amiss. One of the dragons wasn't acting like its peers.

The darkest beast was walking very calmly towards a lone slave. That woman, too, was acting peculiar. Unlike the other slaves, she wasn't screaming, running around, or showing any signs of fear. No, the young woman was standing very still on the sand, her eyes focused on the large dragon that was slowly approaching. But the beast showed no hostility towards her, nor did it seem eager to attack 2

With few remaining slaves still alive, the other dragons started to settle down or bicker between themselves. Thus, most of the crowd's attention was drawn to the strange duo. Whispers started to grow in the arena. How was that woman still alive? Why wouldn't the dragons attack and kill her like the other slaves? Everyone in the arena held their breath, waiting to see what the Black Dragon would do.

A hundred feet above, the six Princes were also watching the scene unfold with great interest. Their reactions to this unprecedented event varied. The Fifth and Sixth Princes were wondering how this woman escaped the beasts' wrath. The Second Prince was annoyed.

"Why won't they kill her?! Stop playing and finish that woman! Brother, have your dragon kill her!"

The Third Prince ignored him, his eyes fixed on his beast. He was staring intensely, waiting to see what his dragon would do.

The reason the others didn't attack was evident to him. That woman showed no fear, no sign of panic. To the dragons, she wasn't some prey to kill, maybe just a guard that had been left there. After all, this hunt was just a game, why would they pursue a human that didn't play? There was no reason for

Only the Black Dragon showed any interest in the slave girl. Almost everyone in the audience thought it would finally kill her as it slowly approached, but once it was close to the young woman, it became obvious that they were mistaken. Far from attacking her, the dragon was visibly curious and stretched its head out to sniff her. The young woman barely reacted, she just continued to observe him as well.

What was going on? People were waiting, eager to see if this slave was going to be killed or not. The prior massacre had been completely forgotten; what was happening now was far more interesting. After a few more minutes, the dragon suddenly laid down, curling up around the woman like an obedient pet. The stunned crowd started whispering, a wave of shocked voices growing louder within seconds. Surprise at the exchange was evident among all the Princes. The Second Prince was, more than anything, infuriated.

"That woman is a witch! Let's kill her right now!" he yelled.

"How interesting... I have never seen anyone survive The Offering before, but to think this frail woman would be able to stand next to the dragons..." said the First Prince.

"Enough! Brother! Order your dragon to—"

Before he could finish his sentence, he was left frozen by the Third Prince's ice-cold glare. The dark eyes scared him so much that he almost choked on his own words and quickly averted his eyes. The youngest prince chuckled.

“How bold of you, Brother Vrehan! Assuming you could actually give orders to the War God...”

He was absolutely right, but that only made the Second Prince flush red with anger. It was a well known fact throughout the entire empire that out of the six Princes, the third-born was the best dragon-tamer.

Third Prince Kairen, whose perfect partnership with his black beast had allowed him to win many victories in the East for the Emperor as a General, and had earned himself the title of War God. There was no man stronger in the entire Dragon Empire, and certainly no man that could give him orders. Even the Emperor favored him greatly as the prodigal son. That was not the case for the Second Prince, and so he chose to remain silent. The First Prince Sephir, ignoring the short-lived dispute, was still observing the strange duo below.

“A witch...hmm... Whoever she is, brother, it appears your dragon is indeed under her spell. How interesting...”

He turned to observe his brother's reaction, but much to his surprise, the War God's eyes were already back to the arena. Kairen was contemplating over the woman who had subdued his dragon so easily. His fingers were still dancing on his sword. The Fifth Prince, Lephys, noticed it too.

“Brother Kairen, it seems like the dragon isn't the only one entranced. Could it be that the woman has also captured your attention? Judging from here, she isn't too ugly for a slave, is she?”

“Isn't this the first time our brother is showing any interest in a woman?” the youngest brother, Prince Anour, asked excitedly.

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“Correct, Anour. Brother Kairen barely acknowledged any of the women he has been sent in the past. Well...other than to kill them,” whispered Prince Lephys.

“What do you say, Kairen? Should we ask Father to spare this slave?” asked the First Prince, Sephir.

The Third Prince didn't answer. Instead, he stood up, his eyes still fixed on the arena. He was a very tall man, with tan skin, and large shoulders. A number of people in the audience looked his way, noticing that one of the Princes was standing. But he didn't care. The Black Dragon, still curled up around the woman, reacted to its master's stare. Suddenly raising its chin in his direction, the beast growled loudly and stood up. Reacting to it, the other five dragons started growling too, but none of them dared to approach.

Cassandra, standing next to him, wondered what was going on. Was its master ordering the dragon to hurry up and kill her? She had no idea how they communicated, but it was evident that the dragon and its master were having a wordless conversation. All of sudden, the dragon turned to her and spread its black wings. In a split second, its large maw suddenly plunged in her direction, taking the chains that bound her into its mouth. Cassandra gasped in surprise. The dragon suddenly took off towards the skies, carrying her by her chains, rising higher from the ground and forcing her body to contort into a painful position from the pressure on her neck and wrists.

Thankfully, it only lasted a few seconds. She saw the arena move under her as she was quickly brought to a large stone platform. Some people in the audience screamed in horror, but the beast simply placed Cassandra there, releasing her gently to her knees.

The young woman painfully caught her breath before realizing where she was. The Imperial Family's platform! Still feeling the Black Dragon's hot breath close behind her, she conscientiously raised her head, only to discover a man was standing directly in front of her.