

Grand Ancestral Bloodlines #Chapter 11: Folk Lore (2) - Read Grand Ancestral Bloodlines Chapter 11: Folk Lore (2)

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The four old monsters of the previous generation spoke leisurely. Even though they didn't restrain the volume of their voices, not a single word floated outside of their vicinity. With the tacit understanding between them, it was impossible for anyone to overhear their conversation.

"According to Little Ryu, about a few hundred years ago, he stumbled upon a folk tale. Usually, these folk tales describe fanciful and embellished stories of the past while holding the barest modicum of truth, if that. Often, you could read a thousand lies before unknowingly sweeping past a factual recollection of events. However, Little Ryu found something interesting within this tale, something you might raise an eyebrow at, Merula."

Mistress Kunan took a pause before continuing. "Like many other folk tales, this one recounted stories of the Sky Gods. In fact, there were hundreds of tales depicting adventures of at least half a dozen of these legendary figures. The one that caught Little Ryu's attention was one about the Fire Sky God.

"According to the tale, unlike the other Sky Gods, Gracchus was born feeble and weak. Not only was he unable to fend for himself, he was doomed to live a short life due to his frail body."

Ryu's grandparents couldn't help but tremble when they heard these words. They were all experts who had lived through billions of years of life, how could they not immediately pick up why this story caught their grandson's attention? The reality of the matter made them feel powerless and weak.

Taking a deep breath, Vorena managed to stabilize her emotions.

"This folk lore, instead of telling a tale of glory, it told one of sadness and despair. The story simply ended with the death of Gracchus, alone and destitute, having committed suicide due to his own uselessness."

"But then... Isn't it obvious to ignore this story as a lie?" Priest Saint Kunan couldn't help but ask his wife. "Sky God Gracchus obviously became a great man, he was among the pioneers that led the human race to subvert the rule of the Ancestral Beasts. How could his life have simply ended like that?"

"If finding the puzzle pieces that connected to this ruin was so simple, wouldn't someone have found it long before our Little Ryu?" Vorena glared at her husband. She

was trying to tell a touching story yet this blockheaded man wanted to interrupt. One should never stop a grandmother when she's in the middle of praising her grandson.

Kunan shrunk back, the blue and gold lightning flickers in his eyes and hair dimming considerably.

"Anyway. Little Ryu also ignored this tale originally. However, a few decades later, he was doing research on Spiritual Foundations in order to help Little Titus breakthrough to the next stage. He wanted to find what heavenly treasures were capable of solidifying an already mature Spiritual Foundation..."

The three grandparents listened to Vorena's tale intently, hanging on her every word, not because she was a good storyteller, but because they loved their grandson very much. His short lifespan only made them cherish him all the more. Even if he had turned out to be a useless debauchee, they would have loved him regardless.

To them, the words 'Spiritual Foundation' were practically taboo for that exact reason. Ryu was born with talent that could shake the very foundation of the Shrine Plane. The momentum of his birth was so momentous that the entire Plane was shrouded in dark clouds for months. Yet, all of that talent was wasted on account of the fact he was born with a False Spiritual Foundation.

In the Martial World, it could be said that there were four pillars that decided one's future. The first was bloodline grade. The second was skeletal grade. The third was meridian grade. Yet, the place where all of these things took root, and the fourth and most important aspect, was one's Spiritual Foundation.

As the Legatee of four Ancestral Grade bloodlines, Ryu passed this first test with flying colors. For this same exact reason, his skeletal grade was off the charts, also being of the Ancestral Grade. Finally, his meridian grade fell behind in no way, also being evaluated at the Ancestral Grade.

These rankings might seem meaningless to many, but for those of the Shrine Plane, this sort of event was unprecedented!

Common grade, Black grade, Earth grade, Heaven grade, Sovereign grade, Ancestral grade and the legendary Origin grade. These seven rankings alone decided the future of young geniuses everywhere, yet Ryu topped them time and time again.

One had to understand that the Origin Grade was rare even among the Sky Gods. In fact, only one of them could claim to have reached such a level! Only a single person in history! For all intents and purposes, Ryu was unmatched in talent.

However... The Spiritual Foundation was all encompassing. It was difficult to explain in just a few words, but it was the method by which all cultivation took root. Those born

with False Spiritual Foundations were doomed to a life of mediocrity no matter how profound their remaining talent was.

"... During this research, Little Ryu managed to succeed, of course, making Little Titus practically unmatched in the Shrine Plane, but, at the same time, he came across something curious.

"Once more delving into folk lore to find clues about these magical herbs, Little Ryu found another tale about the Gracchus. It was seemingly disconnected. In fact, it seemed like a completely different story entirely, as though it wasn't even the same character at play.

"The first portrayed Gracchus as a poor, but loving boy. He couldn't bear the idea of his parents struggling to keep him alive, so he committed suicide when he realized that his efforts toward becoming stronger were useless.

"However, the second folk lore described him as a cruel war lord. A man who took women as he pleased and killed men for leisure.

"The entire tale was disgusting and off-putting, however, the curious part was that at the end of his life, Sky God Gracchus reached a level of being where his Will was accepted and melded into the Will of the Heavens. Just like the other Sky Gods, he became immortalized and as such, became capable of choosing successors by Spiritual Foundation Rebirth.

"What caught Little Ryu's attention was the fact that the requirement for this Second Awakening was suicide!"

Chapter 12: Folk Lore (3)

The old monsters collectively sucked in a cold breath.

This so-called Second Awakening was an incomparably rare opportunity to gain the Legacy of one of the Sky Gods.

At birth, one would have a particular grade of Spiritual Foundation attached to you. This grade would decide your life in many aspects and often weighed heavier than the grades of your other talents. It acted as a bottleneck of sorts for how much potential you could glean from your abilities.

In ten thousand out of ten thousand cases, it was impossible to change your Spiritual Foundation. The herbs that Ryu found to improve his father's foundation didn't directly raise the grade of Titus' Spiritual Foundation, instead, it increased the strength of the cultivation he built atop of it, deepening their roots and allowing Titus to build higher.

However, in very rare instances that only occurred once every several epochs, one would successfully undergo a Second Awakening, causing a qualitative change in their Spiritual Foundation. After this, this person would come to be known as a Sky God Descendent, gaining access to a door holding the understandings of their Sky God.

According to ancient texts, there were two facets to this Second Awakening. The first was to have been lucky enough to be chosen by a Sky God. The second was to successfully complete the trial set out by this Sky God.

As for what these trials would be, there were numerous possibilities, most of which were lost in time. However, they all shared the characteristic of being mind numbingly difficult. Even the number one expert of the Shrine Plane, Ryu's father, wouldn't dare take on these trials lightly.

This said, there were a few trials that had survived the test of time. The Lightning Sky God required one to bathe in the highest form of tribulation lightning, White Lightning. The Wind Sky God required her successor to breathe in the Heavenly North, South, West and East Winds located at the end of existence. In fact, the Fire Sky God's trial was thought to have survived as well. According to ancient texts, one was meant to immerse themselves in the Core Flames of an Immortal Plane.

What was truly troubling about these trials, aside from their high fatality rate, was the fact that one wouldn't know if they were chosen until after completing it! Many had been forced to cast aside their lives on a simple gamble...

"I know what you're all thinking. The Fire Sky God's trial is well documented. There are even records of the last legend to successfully undergo a Second Awakening. However, this is where things become interesting... In this tale, although they also referred to this Sky God as Sky God Gracchus, instead of being known as the Fire Sky God, he's known as the Phoenix Sky God!"

When Vorena reached this point, Merula unconsciously trembled. The Phoenix Sky God was an absolute existence, transcending the elemental Sky Gods and reaching a plane beyond. Sky Gods who took on the namesakes of Ancient Beasts were the true rulers of their time! Whether it be the Dragon Sky God, the Qilin Sky God, or the numerous others, they could only be matched by the Sky Gods of quintessence that embodied heavenly laws.

The reason the Phoenix Sky God was so special was because he or she was both! Not only did the Phoenix Sky God embody an Ancient Beast, he or she also embodied the three pillars of existence, Life, Death and Reincarnation.

Whether it was the Ice or Fire Phoenix Clan, they knew very little about this entity, but worshipped them regardless.

"How can this be... Any mention of the Phoenix Sky God has long since been taken into our families. How did Little Ryu find this? And why is this tale so cruel?..." Merula muttered to herself.

These old monsters didn't need much prompting. They understood very well how cruel a trial that required you to take your own life was.

Since you had no idea whether you were chosen or not beforehand, how many people had sent themselves to death in vain? Although the other trials were difficult, at least there was a sliver of a chance for survival! The Phoenix Sky God's trial had no such backdoor...

"This was what Little Ryu had to speculate about." Vorena explained. "The words Phoenix Sky God were never explicitly stated."

"Then..."

"How did Little Ryu know? When he explained, this old woman couldn't help but hold her grandson in awe. It was truly too shameful." Despite her self-deprecating words, Vorena's smile was so wide you'd think she had just received a compliment.

"The first folk lore was written in the Sky God Era, but the second was written in the Shrine Era, several trillion years apart and the ancient characters were several dialects apart.

"In the first folk lore, Gracchus was spelt with the ancient characters for pitiful and weak. However, in the second folk lore, Sky God Gracchus was written with the characters for life, death and reincarnation!

"Little Ryu speculated that this was an embedded clue, so he began to cross reference words that were similar between the two folk tales. Over time, he came to find that these weren't just two connected stories across eras, but exactly nine of them.

"Nine tales. All about the same man. Written across three different Eras. The Sky God Era, the Shrine Era and the Blossoming Era.

"What all nine of these ancient texts had in common was that they didn't just detail two Phoenix Clans, they detailed three of them! The Ice Phoenix Clan, the Fire Phoenix Clan, and the Dark Phoenix Clan. Little Ryu believes that he's found the Death Shrine!"

Chapter 13: Ventus Clan Heir

While the old monsters spoke of serious matters, Elena and Ryu continued to float around from social group to social group.

It wasn't difficult for Ryu to notice the jealousy in the eyes of the young men he interacted with, but not many dared to show it outright. Although Elena was a young maiden in many of their hearts, it wasn't as though Ryu was a country bumpkin. In fact, if there was ever a direct opposite of such a term, Ryu would likely be the first choice for such a title.

Normally, after more than six-hundred years since their engagement, the hearts of these young men would have cooled off by now. However, it was exactly because it had been so long that such sparks relit.

Who didn't know about Ryu's limited lifespan? Who didn't know about the Light Shrine's dissatisfaction with their young Saintess? Many began putting pieces together and fabricating stories to help themselves sleep at night.

Some believed that Elena was a kind-hearted goddess who simply pitied Ryu's plight. They thought that Ryu had likely confessed to her, causing her to feel uncomfortable rejecting him. To them, Elena just saw this as a small investment for her conscience. After all, this cripple wouldn't live that much longer anyway.

Other, slightly older individuals remembered past circulated rumors about Elena's grandmother. According to these stories, Elena's grandmother had forced Ryu's grandfather into a corner utilizing a potent aphrodisiac even after he had married Mistress Kunan. As the theory went, they believed that Elena wanted to repay the debt of pain her grandmother had caused to Ryu's family by promising herself to Ryu.

Although these beliefs were somewhat reasonable, there were obviously foolish reasonings among them as well. For example, some thought that Ryu's parents, being blindly despondent with their poor son's plight, were willing to use their influence in evil ways. So, they had pressured the Holy Wing Clan and the Light Shrine into betrothing their Saintess to their son on threat of war.

The worst of these conspiracy theories were always centered around Ryu being a good-for-nothing who only relied on his parents since he couldn't build up any power of his own. These foolish individuals didn't even realize that if the Tatsuya and Kunan Clans were even a tenth as despicable as these rumors claimed, anyone even thinking these thoughts would be grinded to dust under their rage.

"Well, if it isn't Sister Elena and Brother Ryu. I have to say, you two truly match the image of a heavenly couple. This poor Wind Shrine Heir toasts to you two."

A young man with light green hair reminiscent of distilled tea bowed slightly toward the couple, his handsome features gleaming with arrogance. To his left and his right were two close friends of his.

The young man himself was the leader of the current generation of his Ventus Clan, Gale Ventus. As for his friends, one was the heir of a subordinate Clan of the Ventus –

similar to the relationship the Tatsuya Clan shared with the Scarlet Clan – The Eurus Clan's Zephyr Eurus. The other had status equal to that of Gale, having a family that controlled the Water Shrine, the Unda Clan's Lacus Unda.

Ryu emotionlessly looked toward the three young men before him. Although they could be considered members of the younger generation, they were several million years older than Ryu. Truth be told, someone Ryu's age wouldn't normally be allowed to come to such events as they spent much of their early lives training. But, for obvious reasons, Ryu couldn't do this.

The short of it was that these young men essentially grew up along with Elena, so the reason for their clearly fake smiles was evident.

That said, Ryu didn't care about this, what he was actually noting was the arrogance of this young man. One had to understand that naming yourself the Heir of a Clan and naming yourself the Heir of a Shrine were two wholly different concepts. The fact this Ventus Clan Heir dared to say that he would inherit the Wind Shrine, and in front of one of his competitors, Zephyr, made this young man's personality clear and obvious.

Calling himself "poor" before directly contradicting this statement mere syllables later to raise up his status so high... This young man liked to lay traps within his words.

"I see..." Ryu spoke slowly. "I have long since heard the name of the Ventus Clan's young rising star. I believe it won't be long before you surpass your elder brothers. A great talent indeed! It's unfortunate that I won't be alive to see you sprout your wings fully."

Although Gale's face remained neutral, there was a clear flash of anger in his eyes. Not only did Ryu diminish his role to "rising star" of the Ventus Clan, he even mentioned his elder brothers in making it clear that his road wasn't easy by any stretch. Then, to top it all off, Ryu removed the best counter Gale had available to him by mentioning his inability to cultivate outright. At the same time, this implied that Gale was very far away from succeeding in his ambitions since Ryu wouldn't even live to see it.

How could there be such airtight words?!

Elena smiled lightly as he looked toward this fiancé of hers. Getting into a war of words with Ryu? It was like attacking an impenetrable empire from their strongest point. Nothing but the epitome of foolishness.

Of course, Gale didn't see it this way. After all, to him, Ryu was not only a cripple, he had barely lived a millennium. Gale himself had already lost count of the sets of thousand year spans he had lived through. How could he take Ryu seriously? Yet, it was clear to everyone that he had suffered a loss.

To the side, while Zephyr displayed a fiercer anger than Gale, Lacus' eyes shone with a sparkle of intelligence as he calmly gazed toward Ryu. 'This Ryu... Why does he seem so unfathomable?'

Before Gale could retort, the sound of a soft chime rang through the ceremonial halls.

"It's about time that we begin the festivities!" Titus Tatsuya stood out grandly, the beautiful Mistress Tatsuya by his side wearing an unblemished white gown. "First, we eat. And then, I'll present my gift to my son and Sole Heir!"

Chapter 14: Unfilial Grandson

"How is it?"

This voice floated through the hall seamlessly, completely undetected. It had been several hours since exotic delicacies the likes of which even these immortals had yet to see began being served, so the atmosphere was very lively and warm. No one had time to pay attention to such trivial secret conversations because there were easily hundreds occurring just like this one.

That said, even if someone wanted to detect this conversation, it would be near impossible. This was because the speaker of the voice was the Shrine Plane's foremost expert in the Laws of Wind! The air was his domain, even Ryu's parents and grandparents would have to concede this fact.

Of course, this man was none other than Priest Saint Ventus, Gale's grandfather.

"He's an arrogant bastard!" Gale did his best to hold back from gritting his teeth, trying to keep his practiced smile plastered on his face.

Priest Saint Ventus almost couldn't refrain from rolling his eyes as he ingratiated himself with the older generation. He loved this grandson of his, but Gale was too arrogant. Truth be told, Gale often had the ability to back up his words. His talent surpassed his elder brothers, so he had earned his place in his grandfather's heart. But... It's because all he knew was success that he was so vulnerable to those who were his equal.

One had to understand that familial love like what Ryu experienced was incredibly rare on the Shrine Plane. These experts were practically immortal so they often watched those less talented individuals of their families rise and fall through the epochs. Over time, those of the elder generation grew calloused hearts. It was just a form of self-protection.

Still, when talented youths like Gale were born, all of this pent of affection they withheld from others of their family poured outward. This led to youths like Gale being pampered and protected from birth. Unfortunately, this often had ill effects including overwhelming haughtiness.

Today, Priest Saint Ventus sent his grandson on an important mission to probe the limits of Ryu. But how was this response helpful? It was practically nothing.

"You unfilial little brat!"

The roar of his grandfather made Gale's countenance pale. He knew that if his grandfather hadn't held back, that simple roar could have directly killed him. Still, although it was simple, it was effective so Gale managed to recollect his emotions.

"Grandfather, I don't know why you're so worried about this cripple. And, even if you want to be worried, just wait another thousand or so years. No matter how many heavenly treasures they pump into him, he'll become an old, decrepit man with one foot in the grave at that point."

"You think putting a simple pause on things is so simple? Do you believe reversing the flow of Fate is so easy?! Such things are more profound than a boy with his lips still wet from his mother's milk could understand." Priest Saint Ventus scolded ferociously.

Thinking about it, Ryu's birth truly was ill-timed. Their plans had started well before his birth. In fact, hundreds of thousands of years before. Yet, he was born at the perfect, key moment to flip everything.

This was why reversing the tides of faith was so difficult. Even though they had succeeded for so long, the Heavens had thrown them a curve ball at the final moment, lodging the wrench that was Ryu into their gears.

If they stopped now and waited for Ryu's death, everything would be for naught. On top of this, they'd suffer a severe backlash that would result in all of their deaths! In fact, to balance all of the Chaos they had caused, the prosperity of the Tatsuya and Kunan Clans would skyrocket. Stopping now wasn't something they could afford.

"I still don't get it." Gale said defiantly. "What waves could a cripple cause?"

"You fool! Did you fill your head with nothing but shit and water?! Where did all of your brains go?!" Priest Saint Ventus began hyperventilating. He downed an entire glass of strong wine just to regain his composure. This grandson really could be the end of him.

"Who is responsible for the revival of several thousand long extinct heavenly treasures? Who is the sole reason that bastard's son Titus and his slut wife Himari have already matched us of the oldest generation in cultivation? Who allowed that whore's granddaughter Elena to monopolize the long-lost Holy Ruin? Who cracked the final three layers of the Nine Core Enigmatic Sphere? WHO?!"

"I've told you this many time you unfilial grandson of mine, you're talented, but you're far too arrogant! You'll run my Ventus Clan into the ground if I were to hand it to you! You can forget about becoming the official heir until I see some true changes in you!"

"What I fear isn't that cripple Ryu. I could pinch him dead with a single fart! What I fear are the eyes he was born with! Do you believe that they're the first ranked heavenly pupils for show?!"

"But grandfather..." Gale's voice was decidedly softer. His grandfather's refusal to name him the heir of the Clan had always been a sore spot for him. "Don't you need profound cultivation to make use of heavenly pupils? He has none to speak of..."

"That's exactly what's so fearsome about it, brat. He doesn't have an ounce of cultivation, yet he's accomplished so much. This is the prowess of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth Pupils.

"Even the best Fate Readers would be unable to derive our plans. But, everything is laid bare before these first ranked pupils. Nothing can be hidden from them! Our only saving grace is that he is a cripple and as such, is unable to use their true abilities. However, he is still intelligent and resourceful..."

"I need you to probe him appropriately. I want to understand the extent of his abilities. If he is deft in their use, we need to make countermeasures immediately or else our Clans are doomed..."

"... It's time for the Golden Era to come to an end. We'll burn everything down if we have to because when they come back... It's either we're on their side, or we die."

Chapter 15: Heavenly Pupils

Ryu ate leisurely. His plate was different from others since he couldn't withstand strong, spiritually rich dishes. However, he enjoyed many delicacies as well.

His mother, despite her calm demeanor, was far more overprotective of him than his father, so it was often her that arranged his meals. Such a thing was unheard of for a woman of her stature, but she refused to allow others the right for fear that they would make a mistake and end up injuring her son.

Currently, the family sat at a long table. Ryu's father sat at the left head while his mother sat at the right. Directly to her right, starting the very edge of this long table, Ryu sat with Elena to his own right. As for the shy and reserved Nuri, Ryu would always sneak food to her against her wishes, resulting in her adorably nibbling away with a happy smile on her face while hidden in the void.

Directly across from Ryu were empty chairs where his grandparents had been, but it seemed that they were taking this time to mingle with friends of theirs. As for Elena's family, they were nowhere to be seen. But, Ryu had expected this. Maybe only the Holy Wing Clan would dare to reject a Tatsuya Clan invitation.

"Little Ryu, do you have something on your mind?" Himari lovingly brush her son's long white hair with a delicate palm. Others might not notice, but how could she not? Ryu's expression seemed to be just as cold as usual, but Himari noticed that something was off.

Himari didn't seem to care that she was perpetuating rumors by treating Ryu like this in public. She wanted to see who dared to tell her to refrain from loving her son just for the comfort of others.

Many saw the Himari that was as gentle as a lake, but Titus knew quite well that his wife was even more domineering than he was. It was a large portion of the reason he fell for her. How could a Mistress of the Tatsuya Clan be weak?

"Your grandmother told me about the ruins... But you shouldn't put too much stock in folk lore, okay?" Himari's words were meaningful and deep. She didn't doubt her son's intelligence for even a moment, but what she did worry about was his wellbeing.

Could it be that her Little Ryu was thinking about seeking out this Second Awakening? After all, who in his position wouldn't be tempted? Ryu had two of three Phoenix bloodlines within him, if the Phoenix Sky God was going to pick someone... Shouldn't it be him? It made sense, no?

Hearing these words, the idle Titus and Elena looked toward Ryu simultaneously. Although Titus tried to hide it, a flash of emotion lit his eyes. As for Elena, she was far less capable, resulting in the air around her becoming slightly misty. Even Nuri stopped nibbling at her food to look at Ryu with a painful sorrow.

Truth be told, Ryu's heart warmed at the reaction of his family. Other large Clans would be clamouring to find out the details of such a large treasure trove, yet Ryu's family only wanted him to not lose himself.

Ryu shook his head, looking toward his mother's beautiful and worried visage. "I have no plans to seek out my end, mother. I'll be by your sides for as long as I can."

Himari's heart ached at these words, but she could only begrudgingly accept them.

"What I'm worried about is something entirely unrelated... The movement of things, isn't it far too odd? I hadn't noticed anything until this morning, but when Elena mentioned the sudden rise in Light Saintesses, a lot of seemingly unrelated events started circulating in my mind..."

"Unrelated events?" Himari's brows furrowed.

"Mm." Ryu fell into what almost looked like a trance. "The Ice Flames' weakening. The Rebirth Flames' weakening. The sudden rise of Supreme Priest Adofo and his Scarlet Clan. Nine Light Saintesses in less than one million years. My birth. Old Mistress Holy

Wing's hatred. My interaction with Gale Ventus. The Unda Clan Heir's gaze. The Grand Elder's eavesdropping. The birth of Gale. The birth of Lacus. The birth of Elena's mother.

"They're all linked by a ribbon of gray, filled with peaks and valleys, bathed in the blood of the heroic and innocent..."

Ryu awoke with a start, a violent cough erupting from his frail chest. If it wasn't for Elena's delicate hand shooting forward to rub his back and send a steady stream of energy to him, Ryu felt that he would have lost consciousness in that instant.

"Little Ryu!" Himari appeared by her son's side. Truthfully, this incident had gone completely unnoticed given the gathering's atmosphere. If even the laugh of a powerful expert like Priest Saint Kunan couldn't interrupt it, how could the cough of a mere mortal like Ryu do so?

However, Himari had to take her son's face in her hands because... His eyes were bleeding!

Titus' frown solidified as his jaw clenched. He didn't understand his son's words either, but he didn't need prompting to know that this was a big matter.

These so-called ribbons of gray... Weren't those the Lines of Karma? What sort of Lines of Karma could possibly tie all of these things together?

They didn't know and neither did Ryu. However, had the Tatsuya Clan not been suspicious themselves, why would they send out invitations for today's event? Even to the point of calling out so many secluded members of the older generation?

Having no choice but to do his best to cover up his son's situation, Titus stood and made an announcement.

"It's about time we begin, honored guests. Bring in the Origin Flame!"