

Legend of the Rising Phoenix

Several decades into the reign of Jin (The Jade Emperor), Lung Shu had been flourishing in an era of prosperity never before seen. The people willingly obeyed Jin, his rule marked with harmony and fairness for all. Conflicts ceased and small clans came together to form larger, intimate tribes that were granted land, becoming defenders of the region and delegates of the Emperor. Jin's wife, Lian, was a "Queen of the People", traveling the land and bringing word back to her husband concerning the issues that those on the continent worried about the most. Da Shu had morphed into a sprawling city, its buildings rising hundreds of feet into the air with a growing population that contained numerous cultures and customs. Jin's council advised him well and helped the Emperor rule Lung Shu in an honorable manner that pleased everyone across the land.

Such was the case for the continent of Jenjo that lay to the south of Lung Shu on the same landmass, though the people there were restless. A bloodthirsty folk, the Jenjo tribes were building up a unified army to conquer Lung Shu despite Jin reaching out repeatedly to establish peace between the two continents. They viewed it as their right to prevent Lung Shu from growing too rapidly, that such an ascent would rival Jenjo's and potentially destroy them.. They would destroy Lung Shu no matter the cost, and if their people fought back, ruin would come to them as well. Following years of assembling and recruiting forces, the Jenjo tribes launched an attack across the border of southern Lung Shu, catching its citizens by complete surprise.

The invasion was swift and precise. Jenjo targeted the livelihood of Lung Shu, burning its forests and farmland. Houses were destroyed while temples and towns lit aflame to burn uncontrollably. Thousands upon thousands were slaughtered when they refused to convert to Jenjo's way of life, many crying out for the Jade Emperor as they died. Jin couldn't believe the carnage. He was stunned the Jenjo tribes would take such a course and became heavily depressed seeing what was happening to his people. Lian tried to get him to act, but Jin knew the truth, something he'd realized from the day he was crowned Emperor by the civilians of Lung Shu: he was no fighter and had constantly rebuffed his council's desire to build a proper military. Jin was a man of peace and had borne no ill will toward anyone; what he was seeing shook him to his core.

It only took a year, but Jenjo had marched across nearly the entire surface of Lung Shu,

ransacking and destroying everything they touched. The continent had turned into a smoldering, barren land of ash and bone, the only untouched area being Da Shu, its walls now a sanctuary for all those able to make the journey for asylum. They held against numerous Jenjo attempts to bring the city to its knees, but sustained massive damage nonetheless. Satisfied

with their blight, the Jenjo clans returned to their corner of the world and celebrated en masse at Lung Shu's collapse. Never again would they rival Jenjo in resources or power, nor could they recover from the devastation unleashed upon them, at least not for several more generations. And if they rose too mightily all over again, Jenjo would be waiting.

When it was apparent that the tribes of Jenjo had withdrawn, Jin left the safety of his palace and roamed the countryside, soaking in the charred remains of trees, grasses and foliage that had made the continent so ripe and bountiful. Burnt bodies of animals and people lay scattered amongst the ground, some in fetal positions, others clearly having tried to escape. In some areas, there were fires still burning without end, devastating the territory and spoiling any chance at a recovery. It was when Jin mounted a hill and observed the brutal carnage of a vast plain that had been obliterated by the Jenjo, did he collapse onto the dirt and weep for his people, tears cascading down his nose and dripping into the ash that covered the ground. He prayed for a miracle, for something- anything- to save his people and the land they lived on. And it was then that the most remarkable event took place.

As the Jade Emperor continued to cry onto the ashes, the embers, themselves, started lighting in color. First a dull yellow, the hue morphed into a deeper orange that spread throughout the plain and its surrounding area, releasing a strange warmth from underneath Jin that increasingly rose, yet did not burn his feet. In awe at the shifting shades- now a blazing red-, the Emperor backed away onto a rise, witnessing a magnificent sight before him. From the ashes of the plain, a giant shape was materializing and rising from the ground, taking the form of what looked like an enormous bird. Its yellow, orange and red feathers shone like the sun's rays, blinding Jin and causing him to shield both eyes. Through peeking fingers, he could make out the body of this avian creature curling and dancing in licking flames. Its eyes were a raging inferno and the cry that emitted from its beak was mesmerizing and terrible all at once. The creature rose higher and higher until its shadow was of colossal size and covered the land like a dark blanket. Before Jin could deduce anything further, however, it took off in flight, heading

southward and calling out in its hypotonic screech.

Once Jin returned to Da Shu, it didn't take long for the city to begin discerning rumors of something that was happening in Jenjo. According to their spies, a giant bird-like creature was gliding over the continent of Jenjo, spitting flames from its body and shadow scorching everything it touched. The land of their enemy was falling to ruin, just as they had brought upon Lung Shu. Disturbing reports continued to flood in, speaking of burnt bodies, smoldering remains of fauna, and Jenjo's resources having gone from bountiful to complete depletion. And the giant bird was ever present, soaring over the land and wiping out every speck of life that persisted through its flames. Fear began to grip survivors in the land that whatever this creature was, it would return and annihilate the remaining population of Lung Shu, though Jin wasn't so sure. While he couldn't say with certainty, the Jade Emperor believed firmly that this bird meant no harm to Lung Shu itself.

His theory was proven correct when days later, the massive creature returned to the skies of their continent, hovering in the sky and causing mass panic for those in Da Shu. Jin was quick to notice that its shadow was causing no harm to those on the ground while, furthermore, its fiery form continued to blaze without end, growing redder and redder as the wings shot flames in various directions. The bird climbed higher and higher until everyone across the dilapidated terrain of Lung Shu was able to see its floating outline. With a final cry that reverberated across the land, the bird exploded brilliantly in an enormous fireball that showed across their skies like a thousand suns. Yet, from the blast came something extraordinary: rain. Advancing with speed unheard of, sheets of water spread throughout Lung Shu without a single cloud in the sky. The fires throughout the continent were immediately extinguished as the ash turned to mud and the skeletal frames of buildings and people melted away into nothingness. As the ground absorbed such a copious downpour, greenery started to erupt, slowly at first, then faster with a robustness that was difficult to accept. Trees, bushes and grasses sprung forth from the mud, fresher and more pristine than ever before. The forests returned to their original proportions while the depleted resources of Lung Shu returned in abundance; more so, according to many who bore witness to the feat. Towns miraculously sprung to life again and animals that were previously thought to have died in the scourge were bounding across fields with beautiful precision.

As Jin, Lian, his council, and the people of Da Shu stared out over their walls, taking in the majesty of such a sight, the Jade Emperor came to the realization of what the creature had been: a phoenix. As much as it was able to destroy, so too could it provide rebirth. Jin's prayers had been answered and his kingdom was restored to its former glory. Still, Jin was no fool to recognize that Jenjo would potentially return for revenge, yet this wouldn't take place for many years to come. They would be ready, though, and the people of Lung Shu would defend their home, no matter what it took. For it was evident in that moment that whatever existed beyond their perception cared for the people more than even they realized. And as the generations moved and changed like seasons, Lung Shu was blessed with nutrients and resources from that magical growth while Jenjo remained parched and barren, a grueling reminder that unjust actions would be met with swift retribution.