

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 5.

Last time, we were introduced to Shi (3) Jin (4), who, thanks to his tattoos, had the moniker Nine Dragons. He honed his fighting skills under the tutelage of Wang Jin, the former drill instructor of the imperial guards. After Wang Jin left and his father died, Shi Jin became the head of his household. Then, he caught wind of a group of bandits from Huayin (2,1) Mountain who were probably going to start coming around his village asking to “borrow” his stuff, so he got his fellow villagers to start preparing for that eventuality.

Sure enough, pretty soon, one of the bandit chieftains, Chen (2) Da (2), aka the Stream-Leaping Tiger, came calling with 150 men, with the expressed purpose of putting this young punk Shi Jin that he had heard so much about in his place. When Shi Jin’s workmen informed him of this, he was right in the middle of tidying up his weapons and horses. So he had his men sound the alarm, and 300-some villagers immediately gathered at Shi Jin’s manor with spears and staffs in hand.

As for Shi Jin, he put on a ridged turban, a vermilion coat of mail, an iron breastplate and backpiece, an embroidered black robe, green boots, and a leather belt. He wore a bow and a quiver of arrows and wielded a three-pointed, double-edged saber with four holes and eight rings. By the way, I have [linked to an image of this weapon](#) on the website for this episode, in case you’re wondering what it looks like. Anyway, Shi Jin mounted a fiery red horse. About 30 stout workmen led the way, while about 90 peasants followed behind his horse as they marched out to the road north of the village and lined up to face the bandits.

Across on the other side, Chen Da wore a red concave hat, a golden suit of mail, a red robe and boots with thick soles. Around his waist, he wore a long plaited girdle. He rode on a tall white horse and wielded a steel-tipped spear 18 feet long. Both sides lined up and let out a loud roar, and the two leaders greeted each other.

Chen Da bowed to Shi Jin from his saddle, but Shi Jin shouted, "You all have been killing, burning, looting, and pillaging. Those are capital crimes, and you deserve to die. Have you not heard of me? You've got some gall coming here to pull on a tiger's whiskers!"

Chen Da replied, "Our fort needs some provisions and we want to go borrow some from Huayin County. We have to go by your honorable manor to get there. If you can let us pass, we will not damage a single blade of grass, and we will offer our gratitude upon our return."

"Nonsense!" Shi Jin scoffed. "We are an upstanding family and were just planning to go capture you crooks! Today, you have come here demanding to go through my village. If I don't apprehend you and instead allow you to pass, I'd be caught up as well when the authorities find out."

To that, Chen Da quoted a line from Confucius: " 'Within the four seas, all men are brothers,' " he said to Shi Jin. "May we trouble you to let us through?"

"Enough chatter," Shi Jin shot back. "Even if I consent to it, someone else does not. If you can convince him, then you may go."

"Who do I have to convince?"

"If you can convince the saber in my hand, then I'll let you through."

Well, there's clearly fighting words, and Chen Da was not going to shrink from a fight.

"Don't push me too far! You'll force me to retaliate!"

Shi Jin also put on his angry face, and the two of them rode toward each other, ready to strike. They traded blows for quite a while. Their horses neighed and kicked. Their weapons clanged as they thrust and parried. In the midst of this back and forth, Shi Jin left part of himself exposed, and Chen Da thrust his spear toward Shi Jin's chest. But that was exactly what Shi Jin was hoping for. He dodged the thrust, and before Chen Da could pull his spear back, Shi Jin reached out, wrapped one arm around Chen Da's waist, and pulled him off his saddle. Shi Jin then flung Chen Da to the ground and ordered his men to tie up the bandit chieftain. They then charged Chen Da's men and put them to flight.

Victorious, Shi Jin returned to his manor and had Chen Da tied to a pillar in the courtyard. His plan was to wait until he had captured the other two bandit chieftains from Huayin Mountain and then turn them all into the authorities for a reward. In the meantime, he rewarded everyone with wine and told them to go home for the time being. As they drank, everyone praised his valor.

Meanwhile, the other two bandit chieftains, Zhu Wu (3), the Resourceful Strategist, and Yang Chun (1), the White Flower Serpent, were sitting in their mountain fort, feeling uneasy about Chen Da's chances after he had stormed off to teach Shi Jin a lesson. They even sent out some scouts to check on him. Soon, they saw some of Chen Da's men, coming back with his horse but missing its rider. The men sprinted to the foot of the mountain and said, "Bad news! Brother Chen refused to listen to you two and has thrown away his life!"

Upon being questioned, the men told their bosses how valiant Shi Jin was and how Chen Da was no match for him.

"He didn't listen to us, and sure enough, he has met with disaster," Zhu Wu said.

"What if we all go and fight it out with Shi Jin?" Yang Chun suggested.

"That won't do. Even Chen Da lost to him, so how can you be a match? I do have an idea. It's risky, and if it doesn't work, you and I will both be doomed."

Yang Chun asked what the idea was, and Zhu Wu whispered in his ears.

"Great plan!" Yang Chun said. "Let's go at once!"

A little later, back at his manor, Shi Jin was still all worked up about the audacity of these bandits to encroach upon his village when suddenly, a workman rushed in and said, "The bandits Zhu Wu and Yang Chun have arrived."

“Those scoundrels’ time is up!” Shi Jin said. “I’ll turn them all in to the authorities. Prepare my horse at once!”

He then sounded the alarm again and gathered the villagers. He rode out of his manor and saw the two bandit chieftains approaching. But they were on foot and alone. When they got near, Zhu Wu and Yang Chun fell to their knees and wept.

Caught off guard by this display, Shi Jin dismounted and shouted, “Why are you kneeling?!”

In between sobs, Zhu Wu replied, “We three were forced into banditry by government officials. We swore an oath in the beginning: We need not be born on the same day, but we only ask to die on the same day. Even though our bond might not match that of Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei, our hearts are equally sincere.”

So a quick timeout here. If you have listened to my Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast, then you no doubt already know the names Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei. But if you don’t, here’s a 30-second summary: They were historical figures from the Three Kingdoms era, which was a roughly 100-year period spanning the second and third century. In the novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms, they became sworn brothers and pledged to work together to restore order to the land. Thanks to the glorification by the novel, the brotherly bond between them has become legendary in Chinese culture and is basically a synonym for fraternal love. In fact, they were already legendary by the time of the Song Dynasty, which was about 900 years later, hence this reference by Zhu Wu.

Anyway, Zhu Wu continued, “Today our brother Chen Da ignored our advice and offended you, and you have already captured him. We have no way to save him, so we have come to die with him. We hope, hero, that you will turn all three of us over to the authorities and claim your reward. We swear that we will not even frown. We will gladly die by your hands.”

Upon hearing this little speech, Shi Jin thought to himself, "What impressive honor! If I turn them in, every valiant man in the land will scorn me. As the old saying goes, 'A tiger does not eat supine prey.'"

So Shi Jin told the two chieftains to get up and come with him. Zhu Wu and Yang Chun showed no sign of fear and followed Shi Jin to the rear hall of the manor, where they kneeled down again and asked to be bound. Shi Jin asked time and again for them to stand up, but they steadfastly refused. As the saying goes, the astute spare the astute, and the brave know the brave. Shi Jin now told them, "Since you are such honorable men, I would be no hero if I handed you over to the authorities. How about I give Chen Da back to you?"

"No, we must not implicate you, hero," Zhu Wu said. "You should turn us in."

"That will not do!" Shi Jin said. "Do you dare to eat my food and drink my wine?"

"We are not afraid of death, much less wine and food," Zhu Wu replied.

Shi Jin was delighted. He immediately released Chen Da and put on a feast for the three chieftains. The three of them bowed to thank him for his kindness. After downing a few cups of wine, they were all in a happier mood. After the banquet, the chieftains thanked Shi Jin and returned to their mountain fort. Shi Jin saw them out to the manor gates before turning back.

Upon returning to their fort, Zhu Wu said to his comrades, "If not for this idea, we would be dead. We managed to save Chen Da, and Shi Jin showed uncommon gallantry in releasing us. In a few days, we should send him some presents to thank him for his mercy and kindness."

So about a dozen days later, the three of them gathered up 30 bars of gold and dispatched two men to Shi Jin's manor in the dark of a moonless night. They arrived around 7 p.m. and knocked. When he got word of their visit, Shi Jin hurriedly put on a coat and came out.

“Our three chieftains once again offer their respects, and they have sent us to deliver these minor gifts to thank you for your mercy,” the messengers said. “Please accept them with a smile rather than refuse.”

Despite what the messengers said about not refusing the gifts, that was exactly what Shi Jin did at first, because he’s Chinese. But after a little bit of modest refusal and “no no, I can’t take this” and “please, please take it,” he thought to himself, “Since they have already brought the present, I should accept it.” So he accepted the gold, and told his men to treat the messengers to wine. After serving them drinks for half the night, Shi Jin rewarded them with some loose pieces of silver and sent them back to the mountain.

Another half month passed, and Zhu Wu and company sent another messenger to present Shi Jin with a strand of large pearls. Of course, I don’t know if they mentioned that they, you know, acquired those pearls by less than legal means. In any case, Shi Jin once again accepted.

Another half month passed, and Shi Jin was thinking to himself, “The three of them have shown me such respect; I ought to return the gesture, too.” So the next day, he personally went to the county seat and bought three bolts of red brocade, which he had a tailor make into three gowns for the chieftains. He also cooked three fatty sheep and put them in a large box. He then sent two workmen to deliver those gifts.

Now, among Shi Jin’s more trusted workhands was a guy named Wang the Fourth. That guy was such a smooth talker that he could chat with officials -- you know, the educated elite. He was one of the two guys that Shi Jin sent to deliver the gifts, along with a stout workhand who helped carry the presents. They went to the foot of Huayin Mountain and told the bandit sentries why they had come. The sentries brought them to see the chieftains, who were delighted with the gifts and rewarded the two couriers with 10 taels of silver and gave them each more than 10 bowls of wine before letting them go home.

From that day forth, Shi Jin had frequent back-and-forths with the three bandit chieftains and often sent Wang the Fourth to deliver this and that, and the chieftains always returned the favor the next day by sending their own men to deliver gold and silver to Shi Jin, which probably made him an accessory to whatever means by which they came to possess said gold and silver.

Time flew by, and soon it was August, and the Mid-Autumn Festival was approaching. On the Chinese holiday calendar, this would be the equivalent of Thanksgiving, so a major holiday. Shi Jin wanted to hang out with his new friends at his house on the night of the festival to partake in some drinking and moon-watching. And by the way, people in China still do the moon-watching thing on the 15th day of August on the lunar calendar, not to mention have delicious mooncakes.

Shi Jin sent Wang the Fourth to deliver an invitation to the bandit chieftains. Zhu Wu and company were delighted and promptly wrote a reply saying they'll be there. They then gave Wang the Fourth 5 taels of silver and the customary 10-plus bowls of wine before letting him go. Upon descending the mountain, Wang the Fourth bumped into the two bandits who often delivered presents to Shi Jin. And they dragged him to a roadside wine shop, where he quaffed another dozen or so bowls.

After parting ways with his drinking buddies, Wang the Fourth headed home. As he walked, he felt a strong mountain breeze blowing in his face, and he started buzzing big time. After staggering forward for 3 miles or so, he came across some woods. He hurried into the woods, flopped down on a patch of grass, and passed out.

Moments later, a figure appeared on the scene. This was Li Ji (2), the rabbit hunter who was hanging around Shi Jin's manor in the last episode. Now, Li Ji (2) knew Wang the Fourth, so he came into the woods and tried to help Wang up, but he could not. But as he was trying, he noticed the bulge of the silver in Wang's fanny pack.

"Hmm, he's drunk," Li Ji thought to himself. "Where did he get all that money? Why don't I take some?"

And so he did. Li Ji grabbed Wang's fanny pack and gave it a shake. Out came the silver, along with the letter that the chieftains had written to Shi Jin. Li Ji vacuumed up the silver, but he also grabbed the letter. He could read a little bit, so while he didn't understand most of the letter's content, he did recognize the names Zhu Wu, Chen Da, and Yang Chun, and he immediately smelled an opportunity.

"A fortune teller told me I was going to strike it rich this year. This must be it. Huayin County has put out a bounty of 3,000 strings of coins for these three bandits. No wonder Shi Jin thought I was spying on him the other day when I went to his house looking for my drinking buddy. Turns out he's chummy with the bandits."

As Li Ji was parsing those thoughts, the screen faded to black.

When the picture faded back in, Li Ji was gone and Wang the Fourth was coming around. It was now 1 a.m., and the faint moonlight was shining on him. Wang startled to his feet and saw that he was surrounded by pine trees. When he reached for his waist, he noticed that both his fanny pack and the letter were gone. He looked around and saw his fanny pack on the ground, but it was empty.

Ah crap.

It was about 5 a.m. when Wang got back to the manor. Shi Jin asked him what took him so long, and Wang said the chieftains had kept him in their fort drinking all night.

"Did they send a reply?" Shi Jin asked.

"The chieftains wanted to write a reply, but I told them, 'Since you are definitely coming to the banquet, what need is there for a letter? And I've been drinking. If I slip up on the way back, it would be no laughing matter.'"

Shi Jin was quite happy when he heard this. "No wonder everyone praises your smarts. You're really on the ball," he said to Wang.



“Your servant would never dare to shirk his duty,” Wang said. “I did not stop on the way home and came straight back.”

And so Shi Jin told Wang to send some men to go buy food and wine in preparation for the banquet, blissfully ignorant of what had actually transpired.

Soon, it was the 15th of August, the Mid-Autumn Festival. Shi Jin had his men cook a large sheep and slaughter more than 100 chickens and geese for that night’s banquet.

As dusk approached, a round moon began to climb into the sky. On Huayin Mountain, the three chieftains left most of their men behind to watch over the fort, taking only four or five bodyguards. They each carried a long broadsword and wore a short broadsword on their waist. They then proceeded to Shi Jin’s manor on foot. Shi Jin received them, exchanged greetings, and invited them into the rear garden, where a feast had been laid out. Shi Jin had the three chieftains take the seats of honor, while he sat across from them. They then shut the manor gates and began drinking. Shi Jin’s workhands took turns pouring wine for them while serving up delicious lamb.

Just as they were enjoying their little private party, they suddenly heard a loud ruckus outside the walls, accompanied by the light of many torches. Alarmed, Shi Jin leaped to his feet and told his guests, “My friends, stay here for now. Let me go take a look.”

Shi Jin then told his men to keep the gates shut while he leaned a ladder against the wall, climbed up, and looked outside. There, he saw the magistrate of Huayin County seated on a horse, leading two constables and about 400 local militiamen. They had surrounded the manor. In the light of the torches, Shi Jin could see a forest of pronged spears, halberds, five-tined forks, and barbed spears.

“Don’t let the bandits escape!” the two constables shouted.

Ah crap.

“What should we do?” Shi Jin asked his guests.

The three chieftains kneeled and said, “Brother, your hands are clean. Don’t let us bring you down. You can tie us up and take us outside to claim your reward. Don’t get dragged in and have your name besmirched.”

“No way!” Shi Jin said. “Then it would look like I lured you here to capture you for a reward. I would be scorned by the world. We will live or die together. Get up and don’t worry. There’s no need to sacrifice yourselves. Let me go see what this is all about.”

Shi Jin then climbed back up the ladder and asked the two constables, “Why are you disturbing my home in the middle of the night?”

“Young master, stop pretending,” they shouted back. “Your accuser, Li Ji, is right here.”

Shi Jin now shouted to Li Ji, “Why are you slandering an honest man?”

“I didn’t know anything about this until I found the letter on Wang the Fourth in the woods,” Li Ji said. “I turned the letter over to the authorities, hence all this.”

Shi Jin now turned to Wang the Fourth and said, “You told me there was no letter, so what is this about a letter?!”

Umm, umm, umm. Wang now tried to pass it off. “I was drunk and forgot about the letter,” he said.

“You wretch! Now what am I supposed to do?” Shi Jin fumed.

While he was talking, the militia outside was staying put. They all knew Shi Jin’s reputation, and nobody really wanted to press his luck by going into the manor to apprehend the wanted men. The chieftains now gestured for Shi Jin to give the people outside an answer to buy a little more time, so he said to the constables, “No need to make a ruckus. Take a step back. I’ll tie up the bandits and bring them out to claim my reward.”

The two constables were afraid of Shi Jin, too, so they just said, "It's all the same to us. We will wait for you to bring them out and we can all go to collect the reward together."

Having bought an extra couple minutes, Shi Jin climbed down the ladder and told Wang the Fourth to follow him into the rear garden. There, Shi Jin calmly explained how even though he was very disappointed at his employee's mistake, he knew it was a one-time thing and that Wang will do better in the futu ... oh wait, no, it was the other thing, where Shi Jin ran him through with a blade.

Having done that, Shi Jin now told the rest of his men to pack up any light valuables they could carry. He then had about 40 torches lit. He and the three chieftains all put on armor and grabbed short and long broadswords. The workhands all packed up their own bundles of stuff as well. Then, they set the thatched buildings in the back of the manor on fire. When the militia outside saw flames coming from the rear of the manor, they all ran back there to see what was going on.

Shi Jin then set the main hall on fire as well. Next, he flung open the front gates, let out a mighty roar, and charged out. Shi Jin led the way, followed by Zhu Wu and Yang Chun, with Chen Da bringing up the rear, along with the few bandits and the host of workhands. They charged to and fro, storming through the militia. Shi Jin, of course, was unstoppable, as he and his companions carved out an escape route amid the flames.

Just as they were making their way out, they ran into the two constables and the hunter Li Ji. The sight of the man who ratted him out enraged Shi Jin. The constables and Li Ji went oh crap and immediately turned to flee, but Shi Jin's blade had already cut Li Ji in half, while Chen Da and Yang Chun chased down the two constables and finished them off as well.

The magistrate was scared out of his mind by this turn of events, and he scurried away on his horse. And since the boss turned and ran, his militiamen also scattered and ran for their own lives. Shi Jin and company kept on the move, fighting as they went, and none of the militiamen dared to chase them.

Soon, Shi Jin and his friends had arrived at the bandit fort on Huayin Mountain. After catching their breath, Zhu Wu ordered his men to go slaughter some oxens and horses and put on a feast to celebrate their escape.

A few days later, Shi Jin thought to himself, "In order to save my friends, I burned down my home. Even though I have some valuables here, all the big stuff is gone." So he now started to fret about where to go from here. He told Zhu Wu and the other chieftains, "My teacher, drill instructor Wang, is serving in the garrison at Yan'an Prefecture. I had been meaning to go find him, but was sidetracked by my father's death. Now, since my manor has been destroyed, I want to go look for him."

But his friends said, "Brother, don't go. Stay here with us for a while and then we'll discuss what's next. If you are not willing to become a bandit, then wait till things have died down, and we will rebuild your manor, and you can be a law-abiding citizen again."

So just a side note here: I love the implication here that if you just laid low for a while, you could just shrug off minor transgressions like killing at least four people, including two cops, and go back to business as usual, like how your wanted level goes down in Grand Theft Auto if you just didn't commit any more crimes for a while.

Shi Jin, however, was steadfast in his resolve. "I appreciate your good intentions, but my mind is made up. My property is all gone, so it won't be feasible to rebuild the manor. I am going to find my teacher and make something of myself there, so that I can enjoy the rest of my life."

"Brother," Zhu Wu said, "you can enjoy life by staying here as our leader. Our fort may be small, but it's enough."

"My reputation is spotless," said Shi Jin, missing the part where he, you know, killed all those people the other night. "How can I sully the body my parents have given me? Do not ask me to become a bandit anymore."

With his mind made up, Shi Jin insisted on leaving after staying a few more days, despite the best efforts by Zhu Wu and company to make him stay. All of Shi Jin's former workmen, though, were staying at the fort. Shi Jin packed a bundle with some loose pieces of silver. He put on a broad-brimmed felt hat topped by a red tassel, which went over a black bandana that covered his head. Around his neck, he donned a yellow scarf. He wore a white silk military gown tied at the waist by a plum-colored sash about five fingers wide. He legs were wrapped with alternating strips of blue and white. On his feet were hemp sandals that were good for mountain climbing. He then hung a sword from his waist, strapped his bundle to his back, grabbed a long broadsword, and said goodbye to Zhu Wu and company. The chieftains and a bunch of their men went to see him off at the foot of the mountain before bidding him a teary goodbye.

To see what sort of adventures slash trouble Shi Jin will get into on his journey, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we will examine the dangers of ground pork. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!