

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 6.

Last time, Nine Dragons Shi Jin had befriended three bandit leaders from Huayin (2,1) Mountain, but then a local hunter caught wise to their chumminess and tattled on Shi Jin. The local authorities crashed a party at Shi Jin's house, looking to arrest the bandits. To save his friends, Shi Jin set his own manor on fire, and he and his bandit friends fought their way out, killing the snitch and a couple constables in the process. After spending a few days crashing on his friends' couch, Shi Jin decided he couldn't relegate himself to a life of banditry. So instead, he set off toward Yan'an (2,1) Prefecture to look for his teacher, Wang Jin (4), in the hopes of getting a fresh start with the garrison there.

After being on the road for more than half a month, Shi Jin arrived at the town of Weizhou (4,1), and he noticed that this place, too, had a garrison. It occurred to him that his teacher might have settled down here instead. So he entered the town and saw that it was a bustling little place, with its share of streets and marketplaces. Shi Jin spotted a small teahouse at an intersection, so he went inside, sat down, and asked for a cup of steeped tea. When the waiter brought him his order Shi Jin asked where the garrison was located.

"It's straight ahead," the waiter told him.

"Is there a drill instructor from the capital named Wang Jin in the garrison?" Shi Jin asked.

"There are a lot of drill instructors in the garrison," the waiter said. "A few of them are named Wang; I don't know which one is Wang Jin."

Just then, a tall man stomped into the teahouse. He looked like an army officer. His head was bound in a bandana, buckled in the back with twisted gold rings. A raven-black plaited sash was strapped around his parrot-green battle robe at the waist. He wore yellow boots embossed with four welts of brown leather in hawk talon design. He had large ears, a straight nose, and a broad mouth. A full beard framed his round face. He stood about 6 feet tall and had quite a girth.

This man sat down in the teahouse and the waiter told Shi Jin, "Sir, if you want to find Instructor Wang, you should ask this major. He should know."

So Shi Jin quickly got up and greeted the major. "May I invite you to have some tea with me?"

The major sized up Shi Jin and saw that he was a big, stout guy who looked like man of valor -- in other words, a man worth his time. So the major returned his greetings and the two sat down.

"May I be so bold as to ask for your honorable name?" Shi Jin said.

"I am called Lu (3) Da (2). I am a major in this garrison. And who might you be, brother?"

"My name is Shi Jin. I am from Huayin County in Hua (2) Prefecture. Sir, I have a teacher named Wang Jin. He was a drill instructor with the imperial guards in the capital. Did he ever come through here?"

Lu Da now asked Shi Jin, "Are you that Young Master Shi from Shi Family Village, the one they call Nine Dragons?"

"Indeed I am."

Lu Da quickly bowed and said, "Meeting a man is better than just hearing his name. The Instructor Wang you were looking for, is he the Wang Jin who ran afoul of Marshal Gao in the capital?"

"That's him!"

"I have heard of him, too," Lu Da said. "But he's not here. I heard that he is serving in the garrison under the Old General Zhong (1) at Yan'an. This little town here is under the command of the Young General Zhong. Instructor Wang is not here. But since you are Young Master Shi and I have heard much about you, we should go get a cup of wine."

So Lu Da took Shi Jin by the hand and walked out of the teahouse. On their way out, Lu Da told the waiter, "Put the tea on my tab."

"Major, no worries; just go," the waiter said.

So Lu Da and Shi Jin headed down the street arm in arm. After about 50 steps, he saw a throng of people, crowded around a plot of open ground, and they decided to go have a look for themselves. As they pushed through the crowd, they saw that the people were watching a man in the center who was holding a dozen or so staves. On the ground, he had laid out a tray with various salves and ointments, all with prices marked. This guy was a medicine peddler, in other words, a snake-oil salesman. In China, such peddlers typically attracted a crowd by showing off some martial arts, in part to give people something to look at and in part to show how their medicine could work wonders for a stout body.

As Shi Jin watched, he suddenly recognized this peddler. It was his first arms instructor, Li (3) Zhong (1), who had the nickname the Tiger-Slaying General. Now, as far as I could tell, this Li Zhong had actually never fought a tiger, much less slain one, so I guess he just earned the nickname because he looked the part.

“Teacher, it’s been too long since I’ve seen you!” Shi Jin called out from the crowd.

Li Zhong looked to see who it was and then said, “Brother, what you doing here?”

Lu Da now chimed in, “Since you are Shi Jin’s teacher, then come have a few cups of wine with us.”

“I’ll join you once I’m done selling my medicine and gotten paid,” Li Zhong said.

“Who has that much time? Let’s go already!” Lu Da said impatiently.

“Alas, this is my living,” Li Zhong told him. “Major, please go on ahead, and I’ll come find you in a little while.”

But Lu Da was having none of that. He shoved and pushed the onlookers away, cursing them, “You bastards! Get your ass out of here or I will beat you to a pulp!”

Now, just about everyone in this town knew Lu Da and were afraid of his temper, so all the onlookers scrambled. Li Zhong wasn’t happy about losing potential customers, but in the presence of such a ferocious ... umm ... friend, he had no choice but to swallow any complaints and put on a happy face, merely saying, “What an impatient guy.” He then packed up his stuff and the three men wound

their way through the streets until they came to a famous tavern run by a family by the name of Pan (1) at the foot of a bridge. In front of the tavern stood a pole with a fluttering flag that bore the character for wine, indicating the purpose of the establishment.

The three men went inside and climbed up the stairs, picking out a clean room. Lu Da took the seat of the host, while Li Zhong sat across from him and Shi Jin sat on the side. The waiter, who knew Lu Da, came and asked how much wine they wanted.

“Let’s start with 4 horns,” Lu Da said.

Now, let’s hit pause here to talk about how much wine that is. So, the “horn” mentioned here was basically the ladle they used to get wine out of the wine jars. From my research, apparently there were two sizes of horns. A big horn held 1 catty, while a small horn held half a catty. And a catty is a unit of weight commonly used in China and other parts of Asia. A catty is about 600 grams, which is about 20 fluid ounces. Now, I’m going to assume that brawny men of valor like our heroes here used big horns rather than small ones, so 4 big horns of wine would be about 80 fluid ounces. So imagine five 16-ounce soda bottles, but filled with grain alcohol instead of cola.

Anyway, back to the story. The waiter brought out some fruits and vegetables, and then asked Lu Da, “What would you like to eat, sir?”

“So many questions!” Lu Da said impatiently. “Whatever you have, just bring it. I’ll pay for it all. Quit blabbering!”

So the waiter went and heated the wine and then covered the table with platters of meat and other food. The three heroes began drinking and talking shop about martial arts and such. Just as the conversation was getting good, they could hear the sound of someone sobbing in the next room.

Lu Da, always quick to anger, swept the bowls and dishes to the floor with one swing of his arm. The waiter heard the loud crash and rushed upstairs to find Lu Da fuming. The waiter bowed and said, “Sir, what else would you like; just tell me.”

“What would I like?!” Lu Da said angrily. “You know who I am, so why did you have someone sit in the next room and cry, disturbing me and my brothers? It’s not like I have ever underpaid you!”

“Sir, please calm down,” the waiter said. “I would never dare to have someone disturb your meal with their weeping. The people crying are a father and his daughter who sing in the taverns. They did not know you were here and they broke down in tears thinking about their problems.”

“Well that’s strange. Go ask them to come see me,” Lu Da demanded.

The waiter left and soon returned with two people. One was a woman about 18 or 19 years old, and behind her was a man in his late 50s, and both held wooden clappers used to keep beats when singing or playing music. The woman may not have qualified as a real beauty, but she did have some appeal. Wiping away tears, she made three deep curtsies, and the old man also greeted Lu Da and company.

“Who are you? Why were you crying?” Lu Da asked.

“Sir, let me tell you our story,” the girl said. “We are from the capital. I came here with my parents to stay with relatives, but our relatives had already left and moved to the Southern Capital. My mother then fell ill and died, leaving my father and I to scratch out a living here.

“There’s a rich man here, a Master Zheng (4) who goes by the title the Lord of the West. He saw me and wanted me as a concubine. He sent people to pressure us and threaten us until we agreed, and he signed a contract promising my father 3,000 strings of coins in exchange for me. And so he took me. The contract was real, but the promise was fake. Within three months, his wife, a really mean woman, drove me out of the house. What’s more, Master Zheng (4) then ordered the innkeeper to demand that we ‘return’ his 3,000 strings of cash. My father is feeble and cannot stand up to him. Besides, he’s rich and well-connected. We never got a single coin from him to begin with, so where would we get the money to pay him back? We were all out of options, and my father had taught me some songs as a child, so we have been performing in the taverns. Whatever we earn each day, most of it goes to him, and we keep whatever little is left for our own expenses. These last couple days, business has been slow, so we

missed his deadline and were afraid that he would abuse us when he comes to ask for the money. Ours is a hard lot, and we have no place to seek redress. That's why we were weeping. We did not mean to disturb you, sir. Please forgive us."

Lu Da now asked, "What are your names? Which inn are you staying at? Where does that Master Zheng live?"

The old man answered, "My last name is Jin (1), and I am the second oldest among my siblings. My daughter is named Cuilian (4,2) (which by the way means Jade Lotus). That Master Zheng (4) is the Butcher Zheng who sells meat at the foot of Zhuangyuan (4,2) Bridge. His nickname is Lord of the West. We are staying at the Lu (3) Family Inn up ahead by the east gate."

When Lu Da heard the identity of this "Master Zheng," he spat and scoffed, "I was wondering which Master Zheng you were talking about. Turns out it's that pig-sticker who runs a butcher shop under the patronage of our garrison commander the Young General Zhong. Who knew he would cheat and bully people like this!"

He now turned to Li Zhong and Shi Jin and said, "You two stay here. Let me go beat that bastard to death quick."

Shi Jin and Li Zhong, though, wrapped him up by the waist to restrain him, saying, "Brother, calm down. Deal with it tomorrow."

After much pleading, Lu Da finally relented.

"Old man, come here," he said to old Mr. Jin (1). "How about I give you some travel money so you can go home to the capital tomorrow?"

"If you can help us return home, then you would be giving us a new lease on life!" Mr. Jin and his daughter said. "But there's no way the innkeeper would let us leave. Master Zheng would then ask him for the money."

“Don’t worry about that; I’ll take care of it,” Lu Da said.

He then pulled out 5 taels of silver and put them on the table. He turned to Shi Jin and said, “I didn’t bring a lot of money with me today. If you have silver, then lend me some. I’ll pay you back tomorrow.”

“Brother, just take it; no need to repay me,” Shi Jin said as he pulled out a bar of silver worth 10 taels and put it on the table.

Lu Da then looked at Li Zhong and said, “You lend me some, too.”

Li Zhong reached into his pocket and that sleeve for a good while before pulling out a measly 2 taels of silver. When Lu Da saw this, he scoffed, “So generous of you.” So he didn’t even bother taking Li Zhong’s money and instead just handed the 15 taels from himself and Shi Jin to Old Mr. Jin, telling him, “Take this for your travel money and go pack your stuff. Tomorrow morning I’ll come see you two off. Let’s see that innkeeper try to stop you!”

Old Mr. Jin and his daughter bowed to express their gratitude and left. Lu Da and his two friends then drank another couple horns of wine before leaving. As they departed, Lu Da shouted to the owner of the restaurant, “I’ll pay you tomorrow!”

“No worries!” the restaurant owner shouted back. “You can drink here on credit any time. Our only fear is that you won’t come.”

So the three heroes parted ways, with Shi Jin and Li Zhong each going off to find an inn. As for Lu Da, he returned to his quarters near the garrison. He was still fuming so much about Butcher Zheng that he skipped dinner and went straight to bed, and his landlord didn’t dare to ask him what was wrong, and I can’t say I blame him.

Meanwhile, Old Mr. Jin and his daughter returned to their inn. He then went way outside of town to hire a cart. Next, he went back to the inn to pack up their luggage and settle the tab for their lodging. Then, they pined for morning.

The night passed without incident, and Old Mr. Jin and his daughter got up around 5 a.m., ate breakfast, and got their stuff ready to go. As the sky lightened, Lu Da stomped into the inn and thundered, "Attendant! Where is Old Mr. Jin's room?!"

"Mr. Jin, the major is looking for you," the attendant shouted.

Old Mr. Jin opened his door and said, "Major, please come in and have a seat."

"Whos' got time to sit?!" Lu Da said roughly. "If you're going to go, then go! Quit waiting around!"

So Old Mr. Jin carried their luggage on a shoulder pole and came out with his daughter. They thanked Lu Da and were just about to step out of the inn when the attendant blocked their way and asked, "Mr. Jin, where are you going?"

"Does he owe you money for the lodging?" Lu Da asked the attendant.

"No, he paid me last night for the lodging," the attendant said. "But he still owes Master Zheng for the money for his daughter, and it's my responsibility to watch him."

"I'll pay Butcher Zheng his money," Lu Da said. "You just let them go."

But the attendant, foolishly, refused, which promptly earned him a slap to the face from an infuriated Lu Da. In fact, Lu Da smacked the guy so hard that he spat out blood. That was followed by a fist to the mouth, which knocked out two teeth. Pulling himself to his feet, the attendant ran and hid. The innkeeper, meanwhile, made himself scarce as well. Old Mr. Jin and his daughter now rushed out of the town to find the cart they hired yesterday.

Even though Old Mr. Jin and his daughter had gone, Lu Da was worried that the attendant would chase after them and stop them. So he pulled over a bench and sat down in the inn, basically keeping the attendant and innkeeper in their place.

After sitting for 4 hours, Lu Da was reasonably sure that Old Mr. Jin had gone far enough away. Now, he got up and headed toward Zhuangyuan (4,2) Bridge. There, he found Butcher Zheng's business. It was



a two-room shop with two chopping blocks, and a few sides of pig hanging on display. Butcher Zheng was sitting behind a counter by the door, watching his dozen or so assistants as they cut and sold meat.

Walking to the front door, Lu Da called out for Butcher Zheng, who hurried outside and greeted him and told an assistant to bring him a bench to sit on. Lu Da made himself at home on the bench and said, "The garrison commander ordered me to come and get 10 catties of lean, finely minced pork. There must not be a speck of fat in it."

"No problem," Butcher Zheng said. He turned and told his assistants, "Go pick out 10 catties of good meat."

But Lu Da said, "I don't want those filthy bastards to handle it. You do it!"

"Quite right," Butcher Zheng said. "I'll cut the meat myself."

So he went and picked out 10 catties of lean pork and chopped it until it was finely minced. While this was happening, the attendant from the inn showed up, holding a handkerchief over his head where Lu Da had left a mark. He was coming to tell Butcher Zheng what happened, but the sight of Lu Da sitting by the door of the butcher shop put him on notice, and he stayed far back.

Now, if you've ever made ground meat by hand rather than with a machine, then you know that mincing pork with a knife was time-consuming work. After an hour of nonstop chopping, Butcher Zheng finally finished. Now, 10 catties were the equivalent of about 13 pounds, so this was A LOT of chopping. But at last, he was done, and he wrapped the minced meat in a lotus leaf.

"Major, shall I have someone deliver this to the commander?" he asked Lu Da.

"Not so fast!" Lu Da said. "I want another 10 catties of pork, all fat, without a speck of lean meat in it. I also want it minced."

Now this threw the butcher for a loop, and he asked, "I figured the commander wanted the lean minced meat to make wontons, but what does he want minced fat for?"

“That’s what he ordered me to do; who the hell dares to question him?!” Lu Da replied with eyes wide.

“Well, since he needs it, I’ll take care of it,” Butcher Zheng said.

So he picked out 10 catties of fatty pork and, after another hour or so, finished mincing it and wrapped it in a lotus leaf. All this mincing took the better part of the morning, and it was now lunch time. All this while, that attendant from the inn remained far away, as did anyone else who actually wanted to buy pork, since everyone knew of Lu Da’s temper and didn’t want to get involved in whatever he was up to.

“I’ll have someone deliver these to the commander’s home for you,” Butcher Zheng said.

“Wait,” Lu Da said. “I also want 10 catties of cartilage, also finely minced, without any meat on it.”

Uhhh, even under normal circumstances that would be a joke of a request, much less right after all the chopping Lu Da had already requested. Butcher Zheng laughed awkwardly and said, “Are you playing me?”

Lu Da now leaped to his feet, held one lotus leaf full of minced meat in each hand, and glowered at Butcher Zheng. “That’s right! I AM playing you!”

As he spoke, he pelted the butcher in the face with the two packs of meat, covering him in a shower of minced pork. Butcher Zheng was, naturally, pissed off. Fury shot from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head, and an irrepressible fire roared in his heart. He pulled a butcher’s knife from the chopping block and jumped down from the steps in front of his shop. Lu Da, meanwhile, had already stomped into the middle of the street. Things were about to get real. None of the neighbors or assistants in the butcher shop dared to get between these two, and all the passers-by stopped dead in their tracks. As for the attendant from the inn, he simply looked on, dumbstruck by the scene.

Wielding the knife in his right hand, Butcher Zheng tried to grab Lu Da with his left. But Lu Da seized the outstretched hand, closed in, and sent the butcher sprawling with a swift kick to the groin. Lu Da then stepped forward, put one foot on the butcher's chest, and raised his fist, which was as big as a vinegar keg.

"I was the roving inspector of five western military districts under Old General Zhong," Lu Da said to his foe. "Now THAT may be worthy of the title the Lord of the West. But you! You are a meat-slicing butcher, a mere dog. How dare you call yourself Lord of the West and force yourself on that girl Jade Lotus and cheat her?!"

As he spoke, his fist landed on Butcher Zheng's nose. POW! Zheng's nose was flattened to one side. Blood poured out like the sauces in a condiments shop -- salty, sour, and spicy. The knife fell out of Butcher Zheng's hand, but he was not the type to back down. Trying vainly to get to his feet, Zheng cried out, "Good punch!"

"You mother-raping thief!" Lu Da cursed. "How dare you talk back?!"

POW. Another punch landed on Zheng's face, squarely on the eyebrows, splitting his eyelids and making his eyeballs pop out. Red, black, and purple gore flowed like swatches of cloth in a draper's shop.

Things were not looking good for the butcher, and no one dared to intervene. I mean, who wants any piece of this? Butcher Zheng now began to beg for mercy, but Lu Da simply scoffed.

"You damn riffraff! If you had stood your ground and showed some guts, I might have spared you. But since you are begging like a coward, there's no way I'm letting you off!"

So yeah, basically Butcher Zheng was gonna get his butt whupped no matter what. Just then, BOOM! Another punch came down, hitting him on the temple. His head rang like the clanging of gongs, bells, and cymbals at a funeral service, which was quite fitting.

After landing this third punch, Lu Da looked down and saw Butcher Zheng sprawled out motionless on the ground. Breath was coming out of his mouth, but none was going in.

“Playing dead, huh? I’ll beat you some more then!” Lu Da threatened. But then he saw the color begin to drain from the butcher’s face.

Uh oh.

“Crap!” Lu Da thought to himself. “I was just going to give this bastard a good beating. I didn’t expect I would kill him with just three punches. If I end up in jail, I have no one to bring me food. I better get out of here.”

So he stepped back, pointed at the motionless butcher and cursed, “Go ahead and play dead! I’ll settle this with you later!” As he shouted, he hurriedly stomped off, and of course, no one dared to get in his way.

Once he was back home, Lu Da hurriedly threw a few pieces of clothing and some silver into a bundle, leaving everything else behind. He then grabbed a staff as a weapon and rushed out of town through the south gate.

Meanwhile, back by the bridge, the butcher’s family tried to resuscitate him, but to no avail. So they went to the local prefect and accused Lu Da of murder. Upon reading their complaint, the prefect thought to himself, “Lu Da is a major in the garrison. I dare not issue an order for his arrest on my own volition.”

So the prefect got in his sedan chair and went to pay a visit to the garrison commander. When they met, the prefect said, “I came to let your lordship know that a major in your garrison, Lu Da, beat Butcher Zheng to death without cause. I did not dare to issue an order for his arrest without consulting your lordship first.”

The commander was shocked to hear this and thought to himself, “That Lu Da is a great fighter, but also a brute. Now that he has committed murder, I cannot protect him. I must let him be brought in and questioned.”

So he told the prefect, “That Lu Da served under my father and was sent here because I needed some help. Since he has committed murder, you should arrest and question him according to the law. If he confesses and the crime is proven, you must inform my father before sentencing him, because my father might need his services in the future.”

“I will sort it all out and inform the old general before passing a sentence,” the prefect said. He then took his leave and returned to his office, where he resumed court and summoned the police inspector on duty, ordering him to go arrest Lu Da.

To see if Lu Da will get away, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we will introduce you to the Chinese justice system, where justice means you can get arrested because your neighbor broke the law. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!