

Welcome to The Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 7.

Last time, while searching for his teacher, Shi Jin ran into a major named Lu Da in the town of Weizhou (4,1). As they were drinking, they came across an old man and his daughter, who told them a tale of woe about how a butcher had taken the girl for a concubine on the false promise of giving them just compensation and then was demanding they return the money that he never gave them. Enraged, Lu Da first helped the old man and his daughter escape. Then, he tracked down the butcher and beat the guy to death with just three punches. Soon, the local prefect had issued a warrant for his arrest.

The police inspector tasked with bringing Lu Da in for questioning went to his home with 20 men, but the landlord told them, "Lu Da had just taken off with a bundle and a staff. I figured he was going out on assignment, and I did not dare to question him."

The inspector ordered his men to search Lu Da's room. All they found were some old clothing and such. So the inspector took the landlord along as he went searching around town, but there was no sign of Lu Da anywhere. The inspector then took a couple neighbors and brought them back to the prefect.

"Lu Da has fled," the inspector told the prefect. "No one knows where he went. I have arrested his neighbors and his landlord."

Ah yes, welcome to the mess that was the ancient Chinese legal system in antiquity. You didn't commit a crime, but maybe your neighbor did. But he's not around, so guess what, we're going to arrest YOU. Hey, I gotta arrest somebody, you know. So the prefect ordered that the poor landlord and neighbors be held while he summoned the butcher's family and close neighbors. Along with the forensic examiner, the local officials, and the ward chief, the prefect carefully examined the butcher's corpse to, I don't know, verify that yes the man with his head smashed in and blood and gore hanging out his nose and eyes was really dead. The butcher's family then put his body in a coffin and put him in state at a monastery for the time being.

Once the appropriate paperwork had been filed, the prefect gave his police a deadline for apprehending Lu Da. If they failed to meet the deadline, they were going to get a beating. The plaintiffs were then allowed to go home after paying a bond to ensure that they would stick around for the case. The close neighbors who had witnessed the fight were sentenced to a beating for failing to intervene and save the butcher. And you wonder why nobody in China intervenes to stop anything bad happening even to this day. Lu Da's landlord and neighbors, much to their relief, were not charged.

As for Lu Da, an urgent warrant was issued for his arrest, along with a reward of 1,000 strings of cash. A proclamation containing his age, birthplace, and description of his likeness was posted everywhere. Everyone involved in the case were then released and told to wait for further notice. The butcher's family then went off to conduct his funeral.

Now, let's go catch up with Lu Da on the run from the law. Like a goose separated from its flock, a dog that has lost its home, or a fish that just escaped from a net, he rushed every which way, passing through several towns and prefectures. It was a case of: Any food when you're hungry, When you're cold rags save life; Any road when you're frightened, When you're poor any wife.

So Lu Da was just worried about running away, with no particular thought as to where. After half a month or so, he passed through Yanmen (4,2) County in Dai (4) Prefecture. When he entered the county seat, he found it to be a bustling town, with lots of people, horses, and carriages, all the trades, and lots of different stuff for sale, all neatly arranged. Even though it was just a county seat, it looked more impressive than some prefecture seats.

As he walked down the street, Lu Da noticed a throng of people gathered at an intersection. There were old, young, rich, poor, scholars, illiterate bumpkins. All leaning and pushing against each other as someone read a document posted on the wall. Curious, Lu Da joined the crowd. Now, he was illiterate, so he just listened in as someone read out loud the following:

“By order of the military commander of Taiyuan (4,2), this county hereby publishes the following notice from Weizhou (4,1): Wanted -- the killer of Butcher Zheng (4). Name -- Lu Da, former major in the Weizhou garrison. Anyone who conceals him or gives him food and shelter shall share in his guilt. Anyone who arrests and brings him forward, or offers information leading to his arrest, shall receive a reward of 1,000 strings of cash.”

Just then, Lu Da felt two arms wrapped around his waist while someone behind him called out, “Hey Brother Zhang, what are you doing here?!”

Lu Da turned and looked, and saw that it was none other than Old Mr. Jin (1), the man he had rescued from Butcher Zheng and the cause of his flight from the law. Old Mr. Jin led Lu Da to a quiet corner and said, “Savior, you’ve got some gall. That proclamation on the wall is offering 1,000 strings of cash for your arrest, and yet you dared to go over there to have a look?! If I hadn’t run into you, you would’ve lost your life. The proclamation has your age and likeness on it.”

Lu Da said to the old man, “To tell you the truth, because of you, that day I went to Zhuangyuan (4,2) Bridge and tracked down that rogue, Butcher Zheng. I killed him with just three punches. That’s why I’m on the lam. I’ve been running for some 50 days and ended up here. Why did you come here instead of going back to the capital?”

“Savior,” Old Mr. Jin said, “after you saved us, I hired a cart. We were going to go back to the capital, but then we were afraid the butcher would come after us, and then you won’t be around to save us again. So instead of going to the capital, we headed north. We ran into an old neighbor from our days in the capital who had opened a business here. So he brought me and my daughter here. What’s more, he even played matchmaker and married my daughter to a local rich man as his mistress, with a house outside his home. Thanks to you, now we have more than enough to eat and wear. My daughter often tells her husband about your kindness. That squire also likes to play around with weapons, so he has

often said how much he would like to meet you, but how were we ever going to make that happen? Savior, come stay at our place for a few days first, and then figure out the rest.”

So just a side note here: When the old man said that his daughter had become the mistress of a local rich man and was residing outside of his home, that is actually a fairly respectable lot in life, especially for a woman of low standing. Having multiple concubines or mistresses was a common thing for a man of means, and having one of your mistresses staying separately from your home was also not uncommon. So really, Old Mr. Jin and his daughter had made out pretty well here.

So Lu Da followed Old Mr. Jin to his new home, which was only about a mile away. The old man pulled up the door curtain and called out, “My child, our great savior is here.”

The girl emerged, neatly made up and attractively dressed, looking quite different from before. She asked Lu Da to sit in the middle of the room. Then she kowtowed to him six times as if she were offering a sacrifice to the gods.

“If not for your coming to our rescue, how could we be where we are today,” she said.

After kowtowing, she invited Lu Da to go upstairs and have a seat. Lu Da tried to leave, but Old Mr. Jin said, “Savior, since you’re here, there’s no way we’ll let you go just like that.”

So the old man took Lu Da’s things and invited him upstairs. He then told her daughter, “Child, keep our savior company for a bit while I go make arrangements.”

“No need to trouble yourself too much; anything would be fine,” Lu Da said.

“Sir,” the old man said, “we can never repay your kindness, not even with our lives. So what’s a few simple dishes?”

So while his daughter kept Lu Da company, Mr. Jin went downstairs and asked their newly hired lad to go tell their maid to get the kitchen fire started. Then, he and the boy went out and bought some fresh fish, tender chicken, a cooked goose, a fat fish, and some fresh fruit. They returned home, opened a jug of wine, prepared a few dishes, and brought them upstairs. Three wine cups had already been

placed on a table, along with three pairs of chopsticks and side dishes of vegetables and fruits. The maid brought in a silver wine kettle and heated up the wine. Old Mr. Jin and his daughter took turns offering toasts to Lu Da, and the old man kneeled on the floor and bowed.

“Sir, there is no need for such a gesture,” Lu Da said. “I am embarrassed!”

“Savior, please hear me,” the old man said. “When we first got here, we wrote your name on a strip of red paper and pasted it on a wooden tablet. We burn a stick of incense before it every morning and evening, and kowtow to it. But today, you are here in person, so of course we need to kowtow to you.”

“I am touched by your devotion,” Lu Da said.

The three of them then drank and ate casually. As night began to fall, a ruckus suddenly broke out downstairs. Lu Da peeked out a window and saw about 30 men, all wielding staffs, shouting, “Catch the crook!” Among them was a man seated on a horse, shouting, “Don’t let that crook get away!”

Lu Da now picked up a bench and was just about to go bang some heads together. But Old Mr. Jin frantically waved, shouting, “Stop, stop! All of you!” He rushed downstairs to the guy on the horse, said a few words to him. That man started laughing and told his entourage to disperse.

The rider then dismounted and came inside. Mr. Jin invited Lu Da to come downstairs. The man immediately kneeled, saying, “Meeting a man of fame is better than just hearing his name. Please accept my respects!”

Lu Da asked Mr. Jin, “Who is this? I have never met him; why is he kowtowing to me?”

“This is my daughter’s husband, Squire Zhao (4),” Mr. Jin explained. “Just now, he thought I had invited some no good young man upstairs, so he came here with his men to fight. But once I explained, he sent them away.”

“Ah, so that’s it. Well, it’s not his fault,” Lu Da said.

Squire Zhao (4) asked Lu Da to go back upstairs with him, and Mr. Jin prepared another round of food and wine. Squire Zhao offered Lu Da the seat of honor.

"I would not dare," Lu Da objected.

"It's just a token of my respect," Squire Zhao said. "I have heard much about your valor, and it is my fortune to get to meet you today."

"I am but a crude man, not to mention a capital offender. Yet you do not mind my lowly status and are willing to make my acquaintance. If you have any need of my services, just let me know."

Well, Squire Zhao did not have any bullying butchers he needed dispatching at the moment, but he was still delighted by Lu Da's straightforward personality. He now asked about that whole business with Butcher Zheng, then they just shot the bull for a while and talked about weapons and such while spending half the night drinking before breaking up for the day.

The next morning, Squire Zhao told Lu Da, "I worry this is not a safe place for you. Please come stay for a while at my manor."

"Where is your manor?" Lu Da asked.

"It's at Seven Treasures Village, which is about 3 or 4 miles from here."

Lu Da agreed, and so Squire Zhao sent an attendant on ahead to the manor to bring back two horses, and this was done before noon. Squire Zhao told his men to carry Lu Da's luggage. Lu Da bid goodbye to Mr. Jin and his daughter, and accompanied the squire back to his manor. There, the squire took Lu Da by the hand and led him to a thatched hall, where they sat as host and guest. The squire ordered his men to kill a sheep and prepare wine to welcome his guest, and that night, he set Lu Da up in a guest room.

The next day brought more wine and food, prompting Lu Da to say, "Squire, you do me too much honor. How can I ever repay you?"

"Within the four seas, all men are brothers," the squire answered. "Why talk about repayment?"

And in such a way, six or seven days flew by. Then one day, while the squire and Lu Da were chit-chatting in his study, Old Mr. Jin suddenly showed up in a panic and rushed to the study to talk to them. Making sure no one else was around, he said to Lu Da, "Savior, don't think me paranoid. A few days ago, when you were at my house and the squire arrived with his men because of a misunderstanding, that caused a stir in the neighborhood and aroused others' suspicions. Word got out, and yesterday a few cops came by and questioned the neighbors. I worry that they will come here to arrest you. If anything should go wrong, what would we do then?"

"In that case, I'm leaving," Lu Da said.

Squire Zhao, though, said, "If we keep you here, things might turn out badly. But if I don't keep you, I'll lose a lot of face. But I have a foolproof idea that will give you a sanctuary. I just worry that you won't be willing to do it."

"I am a man with a death sentence hanging over my head," Lu Da said. "All I want is a safe refuge, whatever I need to do."

"If that's the case, then great!" Squire Zhao said. "About 10 miles from here is Wutai (3,2) Mountain. On the mountain is Wenshu (2,1) Monastery. It is dedicated to the Bodhisattva Manjusri. There are about 700 monks in the monastery. The abbot Zhizhen (4,1) is a friend of mine. My ancestors were patrons of the monastery and contributed to its upkeep. I have promised to sponsor a novice monk there and had even purchased a blank certificate. I just haven't found a suitable man to fulfill that promise. If you are willing, then I will take care of all the expenses involved. Are you willing to become a monk?"

Lu Da thought to himself, "If I were to leave now, where would I go? I might as well take this route." So he told Squire Zhao, "Thank you for sponsoring me. I am willing to become a monk. I will depend entirely on your kindness."

And so it was settled. That night, they packed up his clothing, money, and some gifts. The next morning, the squire had his men carry all that stuff, and he and Lu Da headed out toward Wutai (5,2) Mountain. Before mid-morning, they arrived at the foot of the mountain. From here, the squire and Lu Da proceeded up the mountain on two sedan chairs, while a workman went on ahead to give the monastery a heads up.

By the time the squire and Lu Da arrived at the monastery, they found the deacon and supervisor already waiting by the gate to welcome them. So they got out of the sedan chairs and sat down in a small pavilion outside the monastery doors. When the abbot heard that they had arrived, he came out with his assistant and the elder to welcome them.

Squire Zhao and Lu Da offered their greetings. The abbot returned them and said, "Patron, it is good of you to travel all this way."

"I have come to trouble you about a small matter," the squire said.

"Please come to the abbey and have some tea," the abbot told them.

So Squire Zhao took the lead and Lu Da followed behind as they entered the impressive monastery. The abbot led them to the abbey. The abbot asked the squire to take the seat for guests. Lu Da, meanwhile, sat himself down on a couch facing the abbot, which was apparently a faux pas. The squire whispered in his ear, "You are here to become a monk. How can you sit facing the abbot?"

"Oh, I didn't know that," Lu Da said as he got up and stood beside the squire instead. In front of him, the elder, the prior, the abbot's assistant, the supervisor, the deacon, the reception monk, and the scribe all arranged themselves in two rows according rank on the east and west sides of the hall.

Momentarily, the squire's men had put the sedan charis away and brought in several boxes and sat them down at the front of the hall.

"Why did you bring presents again?" the abbot said. "You have already made so many donations to our monastery."



“It’s a trifle of a gift, no need to thank me,” the squire replied as some lay brothers and novices took the presents away.

The squire now rose and said, “I have something to ask of you, Great Abbot. I once made a promise to sponsor a new monk here and had even purchased a blank certificate. I just had not found the right person. But now, I have this cousin of mine. His name is Lu Da, and he was an officer. But having witnessed all the difficulties of an earthly existence, he is willing to leave that life behind and become a monk. I hope you will exercise mercy and compassion and take him in as a favor to me. I will pay for all the expenses. I hope you will consent to it; it would make me very happy.”

“Gladly,” said the abbot, who clearly knew who was paying the bills. “This will add luster to our monastery. No problem at all. Please have some tea.”

A novice now poured tea into finely crafted cups. After everyone drank, the novice removed the cups. The abbot then consulted with the elder and the prior about the ceremony for inducting Lu Da into their order, and he instructed the supervisor and the deacon to prepare a vegetarian meal. But these other monks were not quite as keen as the abbot was about taking in Lu Da.

“That guy does not look like a monk,” the elder said to the others in private. “He has the fiery eyes of a crook.”

The others now told the reception monk to get Lu Da and Squire Zhao out of here for a bit while they went to voice their concerns with the abbot. So the reception monk invited the squire and Lu Da to the guest house, and the other monks went to the abbot and said, “That new applicant is a savage-looking brute. If we take him in, he will surely cause trouble.”

“But he is a cousin of Squire Zhao’s, and Squire Zhao is our patron,” the abbot said. “How can I refuse him? Hold your doubts while I look into the matter.”

Then, the abbot lit a stick of incense and sat cross-legged on a couch. Muttering incantations, he went into a trance. When the stick of incense had consumed itself, he came out of the trance and told

the other monks, "We can go ahead and accept him. This man represents a star in heaven. His heart is honest. Even though his appearance is savage and his life has been troubled, he will become purified and attain sainthood in the future. None of you are his equal. Remember my words, and do not resist."

Well, the abbot had spoken, so the monks had no choice but to do what he said. But that didn't stop them from grumbling. The elder said to the others, "The abbot is just covering up this man's faults. We'll have to do what he says. We can only advise him. If he ignores our advice, so be it."

The abbot now invited Squire Zhao and others to the abbey for dinner. After dinner, the supervisor gave them a list of what Lu Da would need as a monk: monk shoes, monk clothes, monk hat, monk cape, monk kneeling cushion, monk coffee mug, monk T-shirts, monk postcards, monk-themed fridge magnets. Squire Zhao paid for it all, and within a couple days, everything was ready.

The abbot then picked an auspicious day and ordered the monks to ring bells and beat drums as they gathered in the preaching hall. All the monks were clad in their special capes as they placed the palms of their hands together as they bowed to the abbot on his dais and then split up into two groups.

Squire Zhao now approached the dais and bowed, bearing gifts of silver ingots and fine clothes and carried a stick of incense. The purpose of the ceremony was announced, and a novice led Lu Da to the dais where the abbot was seated. The prior told him to remove his headscarf and then divided his hair into nine parts and tied them into knots. The barber then came forward and, with just a few waves of his razor, shaved all the hair off.

As the barber reached for Lu Da's beard, Lu Da said, "How about you let me keep that?"

All the monks broke out in uncontrollable laughter at that remark, except for the abbot, who just said, "Hear me! Leave not a single blade of grass, let the six roots of desire be torn out. All must be shaven clean away, lest they manifest themselves again. Off with it."

And with one more wave of his razor, the barber took off Lu Da's beard. The elder now presented the certificate to the abbot and asked him to choose a name by which Lu Da was to be known within the order. Holding the blank certificate, the abbot said, "A spark from the soul is worth more than a thousand pieces of gold. Our Buddhist Way is great and wide. Let him be called Zhishen (4,1)."

By the way, this Buddhist name, Zhishen, is translated as Sagacious, and the Chinese characters, literally translated, would mean something like Deep Wisdom. For the sake of convenience, from now on, I'm going to just call Lu Da by his new name, Lu Zhishen.

The abbot handed the certificate to the scribe, who filled it out and handed it to Lu Zhishen. The abbot then presented Lu Zhishen with his monk clothes and cape, and told him to put them on. The supervisor then led him up to the dais, where the abbot put his hand on Lu Zhishen's head and instructed him in the rules of conduct.

"Take refuge in the Buddha, the law, and the monastic order," the abbot recited. "These are the three refuges. Do not kill, steal, fornicate, drink, or lie. These are the five precepts."

Now, if you're the new monk receiving these instructions, you were supposed to answer, "I shall" to the three do's and "I shall not" to the five don'ts. But Lu Zhishen knew nothing of the rules, so he just answered, "Got it," prompting another round of snickers from the other monks.

The ceremony then concluded, and Squire Zhao invited all the monks to the assembly hall, where he burned incense and offered them a vegetarian meal. Every monk that was a member of the monastery staff, no matter their position, got some swag from the squire, too. The deacon introduced Lu Zhishen to other members of the order and took him to the rear building where everyone meditated to select his spot.

The rest of the night passed without incident, and the next morning, Squire Zhao was heading home. The abbot tried to keep him, but the squire insisted he had to leave. After breakfast, all the monks saw

the squire out. Putting his hands together, the squire bowed and said, "Abbot, teachers, please be compassionate. My cousin Zhishen is a crude, direct man. If he forgets his manners, gives offense, or breaks any rules, please forgive him for my sake."

"Squire, no worries," the abbot said. "I will slowly teach him how to recite prayers and scriptures, perform services, and practice meditation."

"I will repay you in the future," the squire said. He then pulled Lu Zhishen aside and told him in a low voice, "Brother, things are different now. You must be restrained in all things. You must not be arrogant. Otherwise, it'll be hard for us to see each other again. Take care of yourself. I will have someone send you clothing from time to time."

"Brother, you don't have to tell me; I'll behave," Lu Zhishen promised.

And so the squire took his leave of the abbot, got back on his sedan chair, and left with his men. The abbot then led his order back to the monastery.

To see how long Lu Zhishen will last as a monk, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also next time, we will learn a slur against Buddhist monks. Thanks for listening!