

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 11.

Before we go on, I just want to take a minute and thank everyone for all your support so far. The response to the new podcast has been terrific, and I can't say thank-you enough to everyone who has listened to the show, rated the show, and made a gift to support the show. You guys are awesome, and you're the reason I keep doing this. So once again, thank you.

Last time, our monk buddy Lu Zhishen took time out from his journey to the capital to conduct some premarital counseling, catch up with an old friend, make a new friend, steal a bunch of gold and silver utensils from both of them, and then resume his journey. He then discovered a dilapidated monastery, where a few emaciated old monks told him that a crooked fat monk and his Daoist priest accomplice had ruined everything. Lu Zhishen went to confront the two, and found them sitting under a tree, getting ready to drink with a young woman. Crashing their party, Lu Zhishen demanded an explanation.

The fat monk, the one nicknamed Iron Cast Buddha, told him, "This monastery used to be a very good place, with ample farmland and many monks. But those old monks in the cloisters liked to eat and drink and carouse, and they spent money keeping women for themselves. The abbot could not do anything about them, and they pushed him out. So the monastery fell into ruin. All the other monks have left, and all of the monastery's farmland has been sold. This priest and I have recently arrived to preside over this place, and we are getting ready to restore it to its former glory."

"And who is that woman?" a skeptical Lu Zhishen asked. "Why is she sitting here drinking?"

"She is the daughter of a rich man named Wang from a nearby village. Her father used to be a frequent patron of this monastery, but has since fallen on hard times and had to sell all his property. All her relatives are dead, and her husband is sick, so she came to beg our monastery for some rice. Because of her father's past generosity, we were welcoming her with some wine. There was no intent other than a show of respect. Don't listen to those old bastards."

Hearing this, and seeing how deferential the fat monk was, Lu Zhishen said, "So those old monks were playing me!"

He now stomped back into the kitchen, where the old monks were scrounging up the porridge he had left behind. He pointed at them and said, "So it was you who ruined this place; how dare you lie to me?!"

But the old monks all said, "Don't listen to them! They are keeping a woman with them. They saw that you were armed and they weren't, so they did not dare to fight you. If you don't believe us, then go back and see what kind of reception you get then. Think about it: They are eating meat and drinking wine, while we didn't even have porridge and were afraid you would eat it all."

This made Lu Zhishen go, "Hmm, I see your point," so he turned and headed back to the rear of the abbey. But this time, the door in the corner of the wall had been shut. Feeling played, and not appreciative of being played, Lu Zhishen kicked the door open and stomped inside.

This time, he was greeted by the fat monk and the priest, each wielding a long-handled broadsword. Letting out a thunderous roar, Lu Zhishen raised his staff and charged toward the monk.

After trading blows for 15 bouts, the fat monk knew he couldn't handle Lu Zhishen and was starting to falter, reduced to only dodging and deflecting while he tried to disengage and run. Seeing this, the priest rushed in behind Lu Zhishen with broadsword in hand. Lu Zhishen could hear footsteps behind him as he fought, but he did not dare to turn around. When he saw a shadow close in from behind, he shouted, "A cheap shot?! Take this!"

Hearing that, the fat monk thought a blow was coming, so he leaped backward. That gave Lu Zhishen the breathing room he needed to turn and meet the priest. He then fought both the priest and the fat monk for another 10 bouts. But now, he was running into trouble. He was starving, and he had

walked a great distance that day, while his opponents were fresh. And all of that was starting to catch up with him.

Feeling shaky, Lu Zhishen now feigned a blow, turned, and ran, dragging his staff behind him. His foes chased him past the monastery gates, where they fought for another 10 bouts before Lu Zhishen was forced to turn and run again. The fat monk and the priest chased him back across the stone bridge before stopping and sitting down on the bridge to make sure he didn't come back.

After running for almost a mile, Lu Zhishen stopped to catch his breath. That's when it occurred to him that all his stuff were still back at the monastery. He had left his bundles sitting next to the idol of the kitchen god before he went to fight the monk and the priest, and in his hasty retreat, he had no time to collect his belongings. Now, he was penniless and starving. And he didn't even have his recommendation letter on him. He COULD try to go back and fight the monk and the priest again, but we already saw how that went.

So ... now what?

As he was contemplating his next move, he staggered ahead. After about a mile or so, he came across a large red pine forest that looked quite shady, and I don't mean shady as in lacking sunlight. Just as he was checking it out, Lu Zhishen spotted someone poking his head out from the woods. This guy took a look at Lu Zhishen, spat in his direction, and ducked back among the trees.

"That bastard must be a robber, waiting to do some business," Lu Zhishen said to himself. "He saw that I'm a monk and figured I wasn't worth it, so he spat at me and left. Well, it's his rotten luck that he ran into me! I'm stewing on a volcano of rage right now, with nowhere to vent. Let me go take that bastard's clothes and sell them for some wine money."

So he grabbed his staff , rushed over to the edge of the forest, and shouted, “Hey you, the bastard in the woods! Get out here, now!”

From inside the woods came a loud chuckle as a man said, “I’m down on my luck, and yet he’s picking a fight with me!”

The guy in the forest now leaped out with long broadsword in hand.

“Bald donkey! I didn’t go looking for you; you came looking for death!”

“I’ll show you who I am!” Lu Zhishen answered as he charged with staff in hand.

His opponent, meanwhile, raised his broadsword to meet him, but was thinking to himself, “That monk sounds awfully familiar.”

“Hey you, monk!” the man shouted. “You sound familiar; what’s your name?”

“I’ll tell you after 300 bouts!” Lu Zhishen shot back.

That ticked off his opponent, and the two now traded blows for a dozen bouts or so. The man from the forest was impressed by Lu Zhishen’s skills. After a few more bouts, he shouted, “Stop for a sec. I have something to say.”

So the two men both jumped away from each other, and the man once again asked Lu Zhishen for his name. Lu Zhishen answered him straight this time, and the man immediately tossed his broadsword aside and kneeled, saying, “Do you recognize Shi (3) Jin (4)?”

“So it’s you!” Lu Zhishen said with a laugh.

So in case you need a refresher, the man from the woods was none other than Nine Dragons Shi Jin, the guy who got his nickname from his full-body dragon tattoos. We were introduced to him in episode 4, and his adventures were the reason we ran into Lu Zhishen in the first place. He was there when Lu

Zhishen found out about the bullying butcher, whom he eventually dispatched, and after that, we hadn't heard anything about Shi (3) Jin (4), until now.

Shi Jin and Lu Zhishen now went into the woods and sat down, and Lu Zhishen asked Shi Jin what he had been up to.

"After we parted ways at the tavern that day, the next day I heard that you had killed Butcher Zheng (4) and fled," Shi Jin said. "Some of the investigators found out that you and I had given money to Old Mr. Jin (1), so I, too, left Weizhou (4,1) and went to look for my master Wang Jin (4). I got to Yan (2) Prefecture, but could not find him there, so I returned to the Daming (4,2), the Northern Capital. I stayed there for a while but then ran out of money. So I came here to get some. I never expected to run into you. How did you come to be a monk?"

Oh and by the way, in case you missed it, when Shi Jin said he came here to get some money, of course he meant he was here to shake down some unlucky passer-by. I mean, it's not like there's an ATM around here. And remember, this was the guy who supposedly absolutely refused to become an outlaw earlier in the novel.

Anyway, Lu Zhishen summarized the last few episodes of the podcast for Shi Jin, up through his troubles just now. Shi Jin told him, "Brother, since you're hungry, I have some meat buns here. And since you left your bundle at that monastery, I'll go with you to get it back. If those bastards refuse to return it, then we'll just take them out."

"Quite right!" Lu Zhishen said. So he and Shi Jin ate their fill, then grabbed their weapons and headed back to Crock Pot Monastery. As they approached, they saw the fat monk, aka Iron Cast Buddha, and his priest friend sitting on the bridge.

"You bastards!" Lu Zhishen roared, "Come over here! I'll fight you to the death!"

The Iron Cast Buddha laughed and mocked him. "I already beat you once. How dare you come back for another beating?"

Enraged, Lu Zhishen raised his staff and charged onto the bridge. Iron Cast Buddha picked up his long-handled broadsword and came to meet him. With Shi Jin getting his back and lots of meat buns in his belly, Lu Zhishen fought with renewed vigor. After just eight or nine bouts, his opponent was faltering fast and trying to flee.

Seeing this, the priest now came to help, but Shi Jin leaped out from the woods and shouted, "Stop!" He pushed back his broad-brimmed hat and charged. The four men now tangled in two pairs. Lu Zhishen suddenly spotted an opening, and with a shout and a swing of his staff, he struck the Iron Cast Buddha and sent him flying off the bridge.

Seeing his comrade get the business end of Lu Zhishen's staff, the priest lost his heart for battle and tried to flee. But Shi Jin shouted, "Where are you running to?" And the next thing you know, the priest crumbled to the ground with Shi Jin's broadsword protruding from his chest. Shi Jin now placed one foot on him and riddled him with holes. Meanwhile, Lu Zhishen rushed to under the bridge, found his wounded foe, and with one blow from his staff, broke the Iron Cast Buddha's back and sent him off to see the real Buddha.

Having vanquished the two villains, Lu Zhishen and Shi Jin tied their corpses together and chucked them into the ravine under the bridge. They then went into the monastery to tell the old monks there that hey, great news! We've killed your tormentors and you're now fr ... oh, I see that you're just hanging there ... from the rafters ... and not moving ... ah crap.

So as it turned out, after Lu Zhishen ran away from the first fight, the old monks thought the two villains would come kill them, so they hanged themselves. Lu Zhishen and Shi Jin now searched the room behind the abbey and found that the woman that the two villains had abducted had also killed herself by jumping into a well. So I guess this turned out to be a good-news-bad-news kind of day.

Lu Zhishen and Shi Jin searched around the monastery and did not see anyone else. But in the one of the rooms, they found Lu Zhishen's bundle, which had been moved there from the kitchen but not yet opened. So Lu Zhishen put the bundle back on, and then they saw a few other bundles of clothing on the bed. Shi Jin opened those and found some gold and silver inside. He picked out some good pieces, wrapped them into a new bundle and strapped it to his back. Hey, money problems solved. And all it took was six or seven lives.

The two of them now made their way to the kitchen, where they found meat and wine that were now unspoken for. So they helped themselves. After that little feast, they lit a couple torches and set the entire monastery on fire, consuming all evidence of what had transpired.

As they watched the place go up in flames, they joked to each other, "This place is pretty, but it is no place to call home. I guess we'll have to leave."

So the two traveled through the night. As first light began to break, they saw a few buildings in the distance. It looked like a small village, so they headed that way. Next to a single-plank bridge, they spotted a tiny tavern. They went in and asked for wine, as well as some rice and meat to cook with. As they drank and ate, they recounted to each other their own experiences from their travels.

After the meal, Lu Zhishen asked Shi Jin where he was headed.

"Right now my only option is to return to Shaohua (4,2) Mountain to join up with the outlaw Zhu (1) Wu (3) and company for a while, and then see what's next," Shi Jin said.

Lu Zhishen opened his bundle and took out some money to give to Shi Jin. The two then gathered their stuff, paid their bill, and left the village. After a couple miles, they came upon a fork in the road.

"Brother, we must take leave of each other now," Lu Zhishen said. "I'm heading to the capital. No need for you to escort me. You have to head in the other direction to get to Huazhou (2,1) Prefecture. We shall meet again. If you know of anyone coming in my direction, have him bring me a message."

And so the two of them parted ways again. We'll leave Shi Jin on his presumably uneventful journey back to Shaohua (4,2) Mountain and instead follow Lu Zhishen to the capital. It took him another eight or nine days before the capital Kaifeng (1,1) came into view. He entered the city and was greeted with a noisy, bustling scene. It was the capital, after all, and at this time, as many as 1.5 million people lived within its walls.

Lu Zhishen greeted a passer-by and asked for directions to the Great Xiangguo (4,2) Monastery, his destination. The man told him it was straight ahead by the bridge, so he headed that way and soon found himself inside a grand monastery. This Great Xiangguo Monastery is actually still around today, and it's one of 10 great Buddhist monasteries in China. It was already a famous ancient monastery in the time of the novel. It was originally a temple for a prince from one of the kingdoms in the Warring States period from the third century B.C. Then, in the year 555 A.D., it was converted to a Buddhist monastery. So by the time of the novel, it was already almost 600 years old. At this time, this monastery was not only a center of Buddhist thought in the empire, but also a center of commerce and trade -- quite a departure from the quiet life at the monastery on Wutai Mountain.

Lu Zhishen looked around the monastery a little bit, and then went to the guest quarters. A servant announced him, and the reception monk soon came out to greet him. The sight of this fierce looking visitor carrying a steel staff, a knife, and a huge bundle alarmed the reception monk, and he asked where Lu Zhishen was from.

Setting down his stuff, Lu Zhishen greeted the monk and said, "I am from Wutai (3,2) Mountain. I have a letter from my master, the Abbot Zhizhen (4,1). He sent me to seek a position here with Abbot Zhiqing (4,1)."

"Oh, in that case, please come with me to the abbey," the reception monk told him.

So they now headed to the abbey, where Zhishen took out the letter and held it in his hand. While he waited, the reception monk said to him, "Brother, do you not know the custom? The abbot will be



here momentarily. You should take off your knife, take out your robe and mat, and light the incense of faith. You'll need to use them when you pay your respects to the abbot."

"Why didn't you say so earlier?" Zhishen said. So he did as the monk instructed. He took out his robe and mat and the incense, but after fumbling around with them for a good while, he still wasn't sure exactly what he was supposed to do. The reception monk sighed and helped him put on his robe, and then told him to sit down on his mat.

"Where is your incense of faith?" the reception monk asked.

"What incense of faith? I just have this one stick of incense here."

Sigh. The reception monk did an invisible eyeroll, stopped trying to explain, and just kept his skepticism about this newcomer to himself.

Momentarily, Abbot Zhiqing (4,1) arrived with two attendants and took his seat. The reception monk stepped forward and said, "This monk is from Wutai Mountain and has a letter from Abbot Zhizhen (4,1)."

"Excellent," the abbot said. "It's been long time since I've received a message from my brother."

The reception monk now told Lu Zhishen to present the letter. Zhishen first placed his stick of incense in the incense burner, bowed three times, and then presented the letter, all without making any serious faux pas. The abbot read the letter, and it said:

"Greetings from Zhizhen to my brother. With the great distance between us, it has been too long since we last saw each other. Even though we are far apart, our minds are one. I have a small request: A patron of our monastery, a Squire Zhao (4), sponsored a monk named Zhishen. He used to be a major under Old General Zhong (1) at Yan'an (2,1) Prefecture. After he killed a man, he decided to become a monk. But twice he got drunk and caused a ruckus in the monastery, and the other monks cannot get along with him. So I have sent him to your honorable sanctuary. I hope you can give him a position on

your staff. It would be his great fortune. Please do not refuse. He has an incredible future as a monk. Please, please keep him. Take care.”

Um, ok then. After reading the letter, the abbot told Lu Zhishen to go to the monks’ quarters to get some rest and have some food. Zhishen gave his thanks, gathered his belongings, and followed a novice out.

As soon as he was out sight, the abbot summoned his staff and said, “Look at this ridiculousness from my brother, Abbot Zhizhen (4,1). That monk used to be a military man. He only became a monk because he killed someone. And then he caused two disturbances at his monastery and wore out his welcome. Oh ok, you can’t put up with him at your place, so you push him over to me. If I don’t keep him, it would mean denying my brother’s repeated request. But if I do keep him, what would we do if he breaks our rules?”

The reception monk chimed in and said, “Exactly! In our view, he doesn’t look like a man of religion at all. How can we keep him here?”

But then the deacon had an idea. “It just occurred to me,” he said. “We have a vegetable garden outside Sour Date Gate, behind the compound for retired working monks. It’s plagued by soldiers from the garrison and 20-some street rats. They often go there to cause lots of trouble. The old monk overseeing the garden does not dare to stop them. Why don’t we send Lu Zhishen there to oversee the garden. He might be up to the task.”

“You’re quite right,” the abbot said. “Tell the attendant to go to the monks’ quarters to summon him after his meal.”

The attendant returned a short while later with Lu Zhishen. The abbot told him, “Since my brother Zhizhen recommended you to me, then you shall have a position on my staff. We have a large vegetable

garden next to the temple outside Sour Date Gate. You shall oversee that garden. Each day, tell the gardeners to pick 10 loads of vegetables. The rest is at your disposal.”

Now, somebody else might have been glad for any job that lets him find a home here after what he did to get himself kicked out of his first monastery, but not Lu Zhishen. He had ambitions. Or just very little sense. Probably the latter.

“My master had sent me here to serve on your staff, so why am I being sent to oversee a vegetable garden instead of being a supervisor or a deacon?” Lu Zhishen asked, in all seriousness.

“You don’t understand, brother,” the elder interjected. “You’re new here and haven’t rendered any service, so how can you be deacon? Overseeing the vegetable garden is an important post, too.”

“No, I don’t want to oversee any vegetable gardens; I just want to be deacon or supervisor.”.

The reception monk now chimed in. “Listen to me: All the members of the staff have our superiors. Take me for instance. I am a reception monk. My job is to receive guests and visiting monks. Positions like the prior, the abbot’s personal assistant, the scribe, or the elder are special ranks that are not easy to attain. The supervisor, the deacon, the director, and the manager are custodians of the monastery’s property. You just got here, so how can you get such a position? And there are jobs like the master of the surras, master of the halls, master of the rooms, master of alms begging, and master of the bath house. Those positions are held by middle-ranking members.

“Then there are the keepers: The keeper of the pagodas, of the kitchen, of the tea, of the vegetable garden, of the toilets. These are overseers’ jobs, and they are relatively low in rank. If you do a good job overseeing the vegetable garden for a year, then you’ll get promoted to keeper of the pagodas. Do a good job there for a year, and you get promoted to overseer of the baths. Do a good job at that for another year, only then might you get to be supervisor.”

Having learned the intricate rungs on the Buddhist career ladder, Lu Zhishen said, “Well, as long as there’s opportunity for advancement, I’ll start working tomorrow.”

See, all Lu Zhishen was looking for was what many of us want in a job -- the chance for growth within the organization. Thus assured that hey we do promote from within, he was appeased and signed the paperwork. Someone was then sent to the vegetable garden to post an announcement about the new hire, and the group broke up for the night.

The next morning, the abbot officially appointed Zhishen to oversee the garden, and Zhishen accepted the documents, took his leave, and followed two monks to the compound outside Sour Date Gate.

Now, as the deacon had mentioned, this vegetable garden was plagued by about 30 riffraffs who made a living on stealing vegetables from the garden. That day, a few of them were helping themselves to ill-gotten produce again when they saw a notice that said, "The Great Xiangguo Monastery has appointed the monk Lu Zhishen to oversee the vegetable garden. He will start tomorrow. Unauthorized individuals are not allowed to enter the garden and cause trouble."

Unauthorized? Hey, are they talking about us? The few street rats who saw this notice reported back to the whole group, and they all decided that they were going to teach this new monk a lesson so as to put him in his place.

"I've got it!" one of them said. "He doesn't know who we are, so how can we pick a fight with him? When he gets here, let's lure him over to the manure pit. We'll pretend that we're there to congratulate him, and then we'll grab him by the arms and legs and throw him into the pit. It'll be a nice little joke."

Everyone agreed that this was a fine plan. Brilliant in fact. And so it was settled. They were going to chuck Lu Zhishen into a big pool of manure. Oh yeah, you can see where this is going.

So the next day, Lu Zhishen arrived at his new post. He stowed his belongings in his room, and then the lay brothers who worked the garden came to pay their respects and gave him the keys to the place.

The two monks who escorted him here took their leave and returned to the monastery with the old monk who used to oversee the garden.

When Lu Zhishen went outside to tour the garden, he saw 20-some men approaching, carrying fruits and wine and wearing huge poop-eating grins on their faces.

“We heard you were newly appointed to oversee the garden,” they said. “We’re your neighbors, so we have come to congratulate you.”

Unaware of any ulterior motives, Lu Zhishen walked over toward this group of ... umm ... well-wishers, who were standing near the manure pit. As soon as he got to the edge of the pit, the whole group of visitors suddenly pounced on him. One lunged for his left foot, and another for his right as they tried to flip him into the pit.

A second later, there was a loud splash.

Ah crap.

To see what kind of poop is going to hit the fan, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, Lu Zhishen tells the raven, “Nevermore.” So join us next time. Thanks for listening!