

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 20.

Last time, Yang Zhi the Blue-faced Beast was exiled to the garrison at Daming (4,2) Prefecture after killing a thug. The governor of Daming took a liking to him and wanted to promote him to lieutenant. But Yang Zhi had to first prove his skills to the troops in a military tournament. He bested one officer, but then was challenged to a duel by another, a captain named Suo (3) Chao (1), who had the moniker the Impatient Vanguard because of his explosive temper. The two men turned out to be quite evenly matched, as they fought fiercely for 50-some bouts without either gaining the upper hand. Their skills, though, had greatly impressed everyone present.

One of the commanding generals now worried that if the fight dragged on, one of the two would get hurt, or worse. So he immediately ordered the flag officer to signal for a halt to the combat. A clang of the gong rang out from the viewing pavilion, but Yang Zhi and Suo Chao were right in the heat of combat, and both refused to back off.

The flag officer now galloped into the fray and shouted, "Heroes, stop! That's an order from the governor!"

Only now did both men stop, and they each rode back to their own formation and stood under the main banner, waiting for word from Governor Liang.

The two commanding generals now went to the governor and said, "My lord, judging by their skills, both of these men deserve important posts."

This delighted Governor Liang, and he summoned Yang Zhi and Suo Chao to the pavilion. He gave them each a big ingot of silver and a set of fine clothes. And they were both promoted to the rank of major, effective immediately. They bowed in gratitude and descended the pavilion to go remove their armor. Then, they returned to the pavilion to thank the other officers for their cheers. Governor Liang now told them to also officially greet each other and assume their new positions. Then, the soldiers beat victory drums and the tournament concluded.

A feast followed on the pavilion and continued until the sun was hugging the western horizon. Governor Liang then returned to his residence, escorted by his officers, led by the two newly appointed majors. Yang Zhi and Suo Chao rode side by side and each wore a red flower in his hair as a sign of celebration. When they entered the city through the east gate, they were greeted by cheering onlookers who lined the streets.

Governor Liang asked the civilians why they were so happy. A bunch of old men kneeled and said, "We have lived in Daming our whole lives and have never seen a duel between better generals than these two. After seeing their skills in the tournament today, how can we not be happy?"

That delighted the governor immensely as he returned to his residence. The officer corps now all went on their separate ways. Suo Chao was whisked away by a bunch of his friends to go drink and celebrate his promotion. Yang Zhi, meanwhile, did not have any friends yet because he was new. So he just went to his room in the governor's mansion and rested. From that day forth, he served the governor diligently. And having seen Yang Zhi's skills, the governor liked him even more and kept him close by day and night. Oh and since Yang Zhi was now drawing a monthly salary, that naturally attracted people to him. And Suo Chao also held him in high regards, having seen what he can do. So things were looking pretty good for Yang Zhi.

The days flew by, and it was now the fifth month of the year, and summer was approaching. The fifth day of the fifth month was the Duanwu (1,3) Festival, one of the major holidays in China, even to this day. This is what has become the Dragon Boat Festival. On the day of the festival, Governor Liang and his wife, Madame Cai (4), held a private banquet in their rear garden.

After a few cups of wine and a couple courses, Madame Cai said to her husband, "My lord, you have ascended to command armies and wield important powers. Do you know how you came by such fame and fortune?"

“I am a learned man and know my classics,” Governor Liang replied. “And I am a man of feeling, so of course I know that I owe everything to your honorable father’s kindness in lifting me up, and I am forever grateful!”

Now, in case you forgot, Governor Liang was the son-in-law of Cai (4) Jing (1), the premier at the Song court, aka one of the top ministers. Madame Cai now said, “Since you know how kind my father has been to you, why did you forget his birthday?”

“I have not forgotten. Your honorable father’s birthday is the 15th day of the sixth month. I have already sent men to prepare treasures equalling 100,000 strings of coins, which I will send to him as a birthday gift. My men have been working on this for a month and the gift is 90 percent complete. In a few days, it will all be ready to hit the road. There’s just one last thing I’m still trying to figure out. Last year, I also prepared lots of precious things and sent them to the capital. But they didn’t even make it halfway there before they were hijacked by bandits. Everything was lost, and we still haven’t apprehended the robbers. Who can I assign to deliver the gift this year?”

“You have lots of soldiers here, so just pick some that you trust for the job,” Madame Cai said.

“We are still 40-some days out,” Governor Liang said. “I can choose someone when the gift is ready. No need to worry. I will take care of it.”

So we’ll leave the governor with his gift preparation and skip on over to another part of Shandong Province. We are heading to the county seat of Yuncheng (4,2), in Jizhou (4,1) Prefecture, where a new county magistrate had just assumed his post. This guy was a scrupulous official. He was just and merciful in his conduct. He always considered disputes carefully before issuing a ruling. When he had idle time, he would strum his zither and entertain guests. But when he was busy, he worked quickly. In every way, he embodied what a good official should be, unlike pretty every other official we have encountered in our story so far.

One day, the county magistrate held court. On both sides of the hall stood his officers. The magistrate summoned his sheriff and his two constables. Now these two constables were rather well-known in the area. They oversaw the infantry and cavalry, respectively. Of course, their infantry and cavalry consisted of only 20 men each, but still, it sounds nice.

The cavalry constable was named Zhu Tong (2). He stood about 6 foot 3 and sported a beard that was more than a foot long. His face was red like a date, and his eyes were as bright as the stars. In appearance, he resembled Guan Yu, the legendary warrior from the Three Kingdoms era. And everyone in the county took to calling him the Lord of the Beautiful Beard, just like Guan Yu was called in his own time. This Zhu Tong (2) was independently wealthy, so I guess he just did the constable thing to keep busy. But he was chivalrous and generous with his money, and enjoyed making friends with people from the jianghu scene, and he became quite a skilled fighter.

As for the constable in charge of the infantry, his name was Lei (2) Heng (2). He stood about 5 foot 6, so quite a bit shorter than his counterpart. He had a purplish complexion and a beard in the shape of a fan fringing his face. He was uncommonly strong and agile, and he could leap across a chasm 20 to 30 feet wide. For that reason, people gave him the nickname Winged Tiger. He used to be a blacksmith but later opened a grain mill, a slaughterhouse, and a gambling den. He, too, was chivalrous, but also could be rather narrow-hearted. Nonetheless, just like Zhu Tong, he was also a skilled fighter.

As constables, Zhu Tong and Lei Heng's primary responsibility was to catch thieves and robbers. That day, the magistrate summoned them and said, "Since I have taken office, I have heard that within the jurisdiction of our prefecture, there is a group of bandits at Liangshan, robbing, pillaging, and resisting the authorities. I am also concerned about banditry and thievery becoming rampant at various villages. So I am ordering the two of you to lead our militia on patrol. One of you will go west, while the other goes east. If you come across any crooks, arrest them on the spot, but do not disturb the civilians. I know that on a hilltop past the village of East Bank, there is a large tree with red leaves that cannot be

found anywhere else. When you come to that spot on your patrol, pick a few leaves and bring them back as proof that you went that far. If you don't have the leaves, then I would know that you're lying, and you WILL be punished."

The two constables accepted their orders, rounded up their men and set out on their separate patrols. We'll follow Lei Heng, the Winged Tiger. He took his 20 foot soldiers and went east out of the county seat. They made their rounds through the various villages in the area, went to the tree on the hilltop near East Bank Village and collected the red leaves. Then, they headed toward the village. But less than a mile from the hill, they saw something peculiar.

They were walking past a temple when they noticed that its doors were open.

"There is no custodian in this temple, but the doors are not shut," Lei Heng said. "Could there be some shady character inside? Let's go take a look."

So his men lit their way with torches and quietly stepped into the temple. On the altar, they saw a big fella. He was half naked and sound asleep, using a pile of torn, shoddy clothes as his pillow.

"Well, well, looks like the magistrate really has keen foresight," Lei Heng said. "Turns out there really is a crook at East Bank Village."

He then let out a shout, and before the man on the altar could react, all 20 militiamen piled on and tied him up. They then dragged him out of the temple. It was now about 5 a.m., and Lei Heng had an idea.

"Let's take this guy with us and go pay a call to Ward Chief Chao's manor. We can get some food there before we take this crook back to the county seat for questioning."

And so the whole group headed into East Bank Village.

So this ward chief that Lei Heng mentioned was named Chao (2) Gai (4). He came from a well-to-do family in the county. He was the chivalrous, generous sort and loved meeting heroes of the land. Whenever someone came to stay with him, he would take them in no matter their background. And

when the visitors were ready to go, he would give them money for the trip. He also loved to play with weapons and was quite strong. He was single and spent all his time working out.

So there were two villages in these parts, and they sat on opposite sides of a large stream. Chao Gai's village was called East Bank, and the other one was called--surprise, surprise--West Bank. Apparently, the stream was haunted and ghosts often lured people into the stream to their watery graves. No one knew what to do about it until one day a monk was passing through and heard the tales from the villagers. He pointed out a location on the bank of the stream, and instructed the villagers to use black stones to build a pagoda there. He said that would suppress the demons on the bank.

Well, that location happened to be on the west bank, so when the West Bank villagers built the pagoda, it chased all the ghosts over to the east bank. So now Chao Gai's village was suffering supernatural incidents. When Chao Gai found out about this, he was enraged and did the only reasonable thing. No, he did not build his own ghost-repelling pagoda if that's what you're thinking. Instead, he stomped over to the west bank, lifted up the stone pagoda, and carried it across the stream and set it down on the east bank so that his village would be protected. For that, people gave him the nickname the Pagoda-Lifting Heavenly King. It's a mouthful, I know, and we can certainly debate the ethical issues raised by sharking another village's pagoda to repel ghosts from your own village, and presumably chasing them back to the village from whom you just sharked the pagoda. But whatever the case, Chao Gai was known throughout the jianghu scene.

So early that morning, Lei Heng and his men, along with their prisoner, went to call on Chao Gai at his estate. Chao Gai's workhands reported this to their master, and Chao Gai, who was still in bed at the time, quickly got up and welcomed his self-invited guests. The militiamen first hung up their prisoner in a room, dangling him from the rafters so he couldn't struggle. Then, Lei Heng and his men went to sit down in a thatched hall, where Chao Gai greeted them.

“Constable, what business brings you here?” Chao Gai asked.

“The magistrate ordered me and Zhu Tong to lead our men and patrol the villages in the area. We were getting tired and needed a quick rest, so we came to your honorable manor. I’m sorry that we disturbed your sleep.”

“Not a problem at all!” Chao Gai said. He then told his workhands to go prepare wine and food, and bring out soup for the visitors. He then asked Lei Heng if he caught any thieves in the village.

“Actually, we just found a man sleeping in the temple up the road,” Lei Heng said. “That guy did not look like a good man. I figured he must be passed out drunk, so we tied him up and are bringing him back to the magistrate. But it’s a bit too early, and I also wanted to let you know, so that you’d be prepared in case the magistrate asks you about this. Right now, that guy is strung up in one of your rooms.”

Chao Gai made a mental note of this and thanked Lei Heng for the heads up. Momentarily, the food was ready, and Chao Gai invited Lei Heng and his men to the rear parlor. There, Chao Gai sat down in the host position while Lei Heng took the seat of the guest, and Chao Gai’s men laid out the food and wine. Chao Gai also instructed his men to bring wine and a big platter of meat for Lei Heng’s men.

While Chao Gai was drinking with Lei Heng, he kept wondering who it was that got snatched by Lei Heng, so after five or six cups of wine, he told a steward to keep Lei Heng company while he got up to use the bathroom.

Chao Gai then fetched a lantern and made his way to the manor entrance. All the militamen had gone off to drink, so Chao Gai asked his workhands where the apprehended thief was being kept, and they pointed him to one of the rooms. He went in and saw a man strung up high off the ground. His body was a mass of swarthy flesh. His dangling legs were dark and hairy, and his feet were bare. Chao Gai shined his lantern on the man’s face and saw that it was ruddy and broad. On the side of his temple was a scarlet birthmark, from which sprouted reddish brown hair.

“Who are you?” Chao Gai asked the man. “I haven’t seen you in my village.”

“I am a visitor from far away. I came here to look for someone, but ended up being mistaken for a thief. I can explain.”

“Who are you looking for in my village?”

“A true hero.”

“Who?”

“Ward Chief Chao Gai.”

“What business do you have with him?”

“He is known far and wide as a man of valor and honor. I wanted to discuss an opportunity for riches with him.”

Well now, that sounds rather intriguing. Chao Gai now revealed his identity.

“Hold on a second,” he told the man. “I am Chao Gai. If you want me to rescue you, then you must call me uncle. In a bit, when I escort Constable Lei and his men out, call me uncle, and I will pretend you are my nephew. Just say that you left here when you were 4 or 5 and that’s why you didn’t recognize me when you came back to look for me.”

“If you can save me, I will be eternally grateful,” the man said. “Please help me!”

So Chao Gai now went back to the rear parlor and apologized to Lei Heng for having to step away. Lei Heng said no problem, and they resumed drinking. After a few more cups, the first light of morning was starting to leak through the window.

“It’s starting to get bright out. I must go and check in at the county seat,” Lei Heng said.

“Since you have official duties, I dare not keep you,” Chao Gai said. “If you are ever here again on business, you must pay me a visit.”

“Of course, of course. That goes without saying. No need to see me out.”



“No, no. At least let me accompany you to the manor gates.”

So the two of them walked out together. And the militiamen had eaten and drunken their fill by now as well and were also ready to go. So they went and retrieved their prisoner and brought him outside.

“Wow, what a big fella!” Chao Gai said when he saw the man.

“Yeah, that’s the one I caught at the temple,” Lei Heng said.

Suddenly, the prisoner shouted, “Uncle! Save me!”

Chao Gai took a closer look and pretended to be surprised. “Why, isn’t this Little Wang the Third?!”

“Yes, it’s me, uncle! Save me!”

So now everybody was surprised. Lei Heng asked Chao Gai, “Who is he? How does he know you?”

“He is my nephew, Wang the Third. What the hell was that little punk doing in the temple? He is my sister’s son and lived here when he was little. He moved away to the Southern Capital with my sister and her husband when he was 4 or 5. It’s been more than a dozen years since then. He’s only been back once, when he was 14 or 15, to help a merchant from the capital do some business. I haven’t seen him since then. I’ve often heard from others that he’s no good, but how did he end up here? I won’t have recognized him if not for that scarlet birthmark on his face.”

Chao Gai now turned to the man and shouted, “You! Why did you not come to see me and instead took to thieving in the village?!”

“Uncle, I was not thieving!”

“Bullcrap! If you weren’t thieving, then why did you get arrested?!”

As he scolded his, umm, nephew, Chao Gai took one of the militiamen’s staff and threatened to beat him upside the head, but Lei Heng and others restrained him and told him to give his nephew a chance to explain.

“Uncle, don’t be angry! Let me explain,” the man said. “It’s been 10 years since I was last here. Last night, I drank a little too much, so I did not dare to come see you. I figured I would go sleep it off at the

temple and then come find you. But these guys didn't even ask questions before they arrested me. I never stole anything."

But Chao Gai once again raised his staff and threatened to beat him, scolding him, "You fool! Instead of coming to see me directly, you decided to go fill yourself up with piss water on the road. What? Do I not have any wine for you? God you're a disgrace!"

Lei Heng now tried to intervene. "Sir, please don't be mad. Your nephew hasn't stolen anything. It's just that we saw this big guy sound asleep in the temple, and he didn't look familiar, so we got suspicious and arrested him. If we had known that he was your nephew, we would not have done so."

Lei Heng immediately ordered his men to release their prisoner. He then apologized again to Chao Gai. "Sir, please forgive us. If we had known he was your nephew, it would not have come to this. My apologies for the offense. We will take our leave now."

"Constable, wait," Chao Gai said. "Let's go inside for a quick word."

So Lei Heng, Chao Gai, and Chao Gai's "nephew" all went back to the thatched parlor. There, Chao Gai took out 10 taels of silver and gave them to Lei Heng.

"Constable, please accept it even though it's a small sum," he said.

"No, I can't," Lei Heng half-declined.

"If you do not accept it, then it means you are displeased with me."

"Well, since you insist, sir, then I will accept it for now, and repay you in the future."

Requisite courtesies fulfilled, Lei Heng pocketed the silver, and Chao Gai told his nephew to thank the constable. Chao Gai then got out more silver and gave it to the militiamen and saw them out.

Once Lei Heng and his men left, Chao Gai and his visitor went to the rear building, where Chao Gai gave him some clothes to put on. He then asked the man what his name was.

“My name is Liu (2) Tang (2),” the visitor said. “Because of the scarlet birthmark on my temple, people call me the Red-Haired Devil. I have come here to offer you a bounty of riches. Last night, I passed out drunk in the temple and got arrested by those bastards and they took me here. Truly, it was destiny’s will that we should meet. Now that I have the fortune to meet you, please have a seat and accept my respects!”

As he spoke, Liu Tang prostrated on the ground and kowtowed four times. When he was done, Chao Gai said, “You told me you came to give me a bounty of riches. Where is it?”

“I have been drifting all over ever since my youth,” Liu Tang said. “I have traveled far and wide and met many heroes. And I have heard your great name, but had not had the opportunity to meet you. I have met many outlaws in the region who had found refuge with you. That is why I dare to mention this. But I can only tell you without any outsiders present.”

“Everyone here is a confidant,” Chao Gai said, “so you may speak freely.”

So Liu Tang went on. “I have heard that Governor Liang of Daming Prefecture is collecting valuables worth 100,000 strings of cash to be delivered to the capital as a birthday present for his father-in-law, the premier Cai Jing. He did the same thing last year, but it was hijacked midway by god knows who, and they still haven’t found those robbers. This year’s loot is about to hit the road in order to make it to the capital before the 15th day of the sixth month. This is ill-gotten wealth, so what’s the problem in taking it? If we come up with a plan to hijack it midway, even heaven would not deem it a crime. I have heard that you are a real man, with uncommon fighting skills. And while I may be untalented, I can hold my own. Even a thousand or two troops would not scare me as long as I have a weapon in my hand, much less a few men. If you don’t think it unworthy, then I would like to present you with this bounty. What do you think?”

“Excellent!” Chao Gai said. “We must plan this carefully. You just got here, and you had a rough night. So go get some rest first, and we will discuss this tomorrow.”

So Chao Gai told one of his workmen to set Liu Tang up in guest quarters. Once the workhand left him alone, Liu Tang got to thinking, "What crappy luck I had last night. Thank goodness Chao Gai helped free me. But that bastard Lei Heng swindled 10 taels of silver from him, and left me hanging all night. Lei Heng must not have gone far yet. Let me go chase him down, kick his ass, and take back that silver and return it to Chao Gai, so that I can vent a little bit."

So Liu Tang went and took a long-handled broadsword from a weapons rack, left Chao Gai's manor, and rushed south. By now, it was light out, and within two miles, Liu Tang spotted Lei Heng and his entourage, walking casually. Liu Tang caught up to them and roared, "Hey you, constable! Stop!"

Lei Heng turned and was surprised by the sight of Liu Tang charging toward him with a long broadsword. So he quickly took a long broadsword from one of his men and shouted back, "What are YOU doing here?!"

"You know why! Leave those 10 taels of silver, and I'll spare you!"

"That was a gift from your uncle to me. What business is it of yours? You're damn lucky I didn't kill you, and it was all for your uncle's sake. How dare you come ask me for the silver?!"

"I wasn't a thief, ut you left me hanging all night and swindled 10 taels of silver from my uncle! If you're smart, then hand it over, and I'll show you mercy. Otherwise, I'll make you bleed right here and now!"

"You damn disgraceful crook! How dare you?!"

"You filthy extortionist! How dare you call me names?!"

"You are a crook through and through. You will surely bring trouble for Chao Gai. Don't you try pulling that crap on me!"

Well, things were definitely building up to a crescendo here. To see how these two men will resolve their differences, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode,

join us on a trip to a fishing village that abounds in natural beauty and crushing poverty, as well as a distinct lack of fish. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!