

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 56.

Last time, Song Jiang arrived at his exile destination, the scenic and prosperous prefecture of Jiangzhou (1,1). There, he became fast friends with the superintendent of the local jail, Dai Zong, and Dai Zong's "oh my god I can't take you anywhere" friend Li Kui. While they were drinking at a tavern by the river, Song Jiang made the mistake of saying he wanted some fresh fish soup. The next thing you know, Li Kui was body-slaming fishermen along the bank because they won't give him any fish before their boss showed up. When their boss did show up, even he got pummeled by Li Kui. But he didn't quit. Instead, he lured Li Kui onto a boat and promptly flipped the boat, sending his not-exactly-buoyant foe into the river.

As Song Jiang and Dai Zong, along with a few hundred others, looked on from the bank of the river, they could see the water parting and Li Kui being lifted up and quickly pushed back down under again. The two men fought in the jade waves, one with skin so dark that it looked black, the other as pale as glistening frost. Pretty soon, Li Kui was being pulled up and dunked back down repeatedly. After a few dozen times of that, his eyes were turning pale.

Seeing this, Song Jiang asked Dai Zong to beg somebody to intervene and save their friend. Dai Zong asked people in the crowd who the pale fisherman was. Someone told him, "That hero is the boss of the local fishermen. His name is Zhang Shun (4)."

That name rang a bell for Song Jiang. "Is he the one with the nickname White Streak in the Waves?" he asked.

"Exactly! That's the one!"

Song Jiang said to Dai Zong, "I have a letter for him from his brother Zhang Heng (2). It's back in my quarters at the penal colony."

Dai Zong immediately shouted from the bank, "Brother Zhang, please stop! We have a letter from your brother Zhang Heng. And that swarthy fella is our friend. Please spare him and come have a word with us on land."

Now, Zhang Shun knew who Dai Zong was, so he let go of Li Kui, swam to shore, and climbed up on the bank. "Superintendent, please pardon my manners," he said to Dai Zong as he bowed.

"Sir, for my sake, please go rescue my friend, and then I'll introduce you to someone," Dai Zong told him.

So Zhang Shun dove back in and swam back to the center of the river, where Li Kui was barely staying afloat and swallowing big gulps of water as he bopped up and down. Zhang Shun grabbed him and swam back toward land so easily that he looked like he was walking on land, and the water didn't even go above his belly. Soon, he was dragging Li Kui onto shore to the cheers of the spectators and the amazement of Song Jiang.

Once Li Kui was done throwing up all the water he had gulped down, Dai Zong invited Zhang Shun to accompany them back to the tavern at the Pipa (2,2) Pavilion near the bank of the river. So Zhang Shun and Li Kui both got dressed and the four men started walking.

Once they were back at their table in the pavilion, Dai Zong asked Zhang Shun, "Brother, do you know who I am?"

"I've long known of you, superintendent. But I haven't had the opportunity to make your acquaintance."

Dai Zong then pointed at Li Kui and asked, "And do you recognize him? Sorry for the run-in today."

"Of course. How could I not know Brother Li? But we hadn't faced off before today."

"Well, I think you drowned me enough," Li Kui said.

"And you gave me a good beating, too," Zhang Shun shot back.

“And now you two are brothers,” Dai Zong chimed in. “Like the old saying goes, ‘You don’t know a man until you have fought him.’ ”

“You just better not run into me on land,” Li Kui said.

“I’ll just wait for you in the water,” Zhang Shun quickly answered. And all four men cracked up, having a good laugh before they bowed to each other.

Dai Zong now pointed at Song Jiang and asked Zhang Shun, “Brother, do you recognize this gentleman?”

“I don’t, and I don’t think I’ve seen him around here before.”

“He’s none other than Dark Song Jiang!” Li Kui cut in as he leaped to his feet.

“Wait, the Mr. Song who’s a magisterial clerk in Yuncheng County? The Timely Rain?” Zhang Shun asked.

“That’s him,” Dai Zong confirmed.

Zhang Shun immediately fell to knees, kowtowed, and said, “I’ve long heard of your great name. I never expected to meet you today. I’ve long heard people on the jianghu scene say how upstanding, generous, and honorable you are, always helping those in need or in danger.”

Song Jiang was like, “Who? Me? Nah, I’m not that great.”

“I stayed with Li (3) Jun (4) the River Dragon for a few days,” he told Zhang Shun. “Later, I got to meet Mu (4) Hong (2) and your brother Zhang (1) Heng (2). Your brother wrote you a letter and asked me to deliver it. It’s in my quarters at the penal colony; I didn’t bring it with me. Today I came here with Superintendent Dai and Brother Li for a few cups of wine and to enjoy the scenery. I was hoping for some fresh fish soup to sober up. Brother Li insisted on going to get fish, and we couldn’t stop him. Then we heard all the ruckus on the river bank, and our waiter said a big, swarthy man was fighting with people, so we hurried over to break it up. Who knew we would end up making your acquaintance? I’ve

met three heroes in one day; this must be a blessing from heaven! Please sit down and have a few cups.”

They then asked the waiter to reset the table and bring more food and wine. Zhang Shun now said to Song Jiang, “Brother, since you want fresh fish, I’ll go get you a few.”

“That’d be perfect!” Song Jiang said.

“I’ll go with you,” Li Kui chimed in.

“Here you go again!” Dai Zong scolded him. “Didn’t you drink enough water the first time?”

Zhang Shun started laughing and took Li Kui by the hand and said, “Come. I’ll go with you. Let’s see how the men will treat you now.”

So the two of them headed back to the riverbank. Zhang Shun let out a loud whistle, and on cue, all the fishing boats on the river rowed to shore.

“Who’s got golden carps?” Zhang Shun asked, and was immediately answered with a chorus of “I’ve got one!” and “Me too!” In the blink of an eye, the fishermen had offered up more than a dozen golden carps. Zhang Shun picked out the four largest, strung them up on a strip of willow leaf by their mouths, and told Li Kui to take them back to the pavilion first, while Zhang Shun stayed behind to open up shop so everybody else could buy fish. He instructed his assistants to take over the operation while he himself returned to the pavilion to keep Song Jiang company.

“This is too much,” Song Jiang said when he saw the four carps. “Just one would’ve been plenty.”

“It’s a trifle; no need to worry about it,” Zhang Shun said. “If you can’t eat them all, then take them back with you.”

The men then sat down according to age, and Li Kui was older than Zhang Shun, so he took the third seat while Zhang Shun sat in the fourth spot. They then asked the waiter to bring out a couple jugs of fine wine, along with some seafood, fruits, and appetizers and such. As for the fish, Zhang Shun

instructed the waiter to use one to make the spicy pepper soup that Song Jiang was craving, steaming it in wine. Another fish was to be sliced and fried in batter.

The four men now drank freely and poured their hearts out to each other. Just as the conversation was getting good, a young girl of about 16 came over, dressed in silks. She made four deep bows and started singing.

Now, Li Kui was just about to brag about himself, but all of a sudden, his three companions were attentively listening to this singing girl. Pissed off at having his conversation interrupted, Li Kui jumped up and thrust two fingers hard against the girl's forehead. With a loud yell, she fell backward. Everyone rushed over to her aid and found that her peach-like complexion had turned to the color of earth, her lips were unable to speak, and she lay motionless on the floor. And the next thing you know, the tavern keeper was telling the four friends that no you can't leave, and I'm calling the authorities.

Meanwhile, the staff rushed over to help the girl. They splashed her face with some water, and she slowly came to. Upon inspection, she just had some scraped skin on the corner of her forehead. But hey, at least she's conscious.

When the girl's parents came over and learned that it was Li Kui, aka the Black Whirlwind, who had roughed up their daughter, they were scared into silence. The mother bandaged up her daughter's wound and picked up her hairpins and ornaments.

"What's your name? Where are you from?" Song Jiang asked.

The old woman replied, "Sir, our last name is Song. We are from the capital. She's only daughter, and her name is Jade Lotus. Her father taught her a few songs, and we pull together a living by having her sing at this pavilion. But she was too impatient and didn't look to see that you were talking to each other before she started singing. Even though that gentleman accidentally hurt her a little bit, it's nothing worth going to court for or causing you trouble over."

Seeing that they were reasonable people -- by which I mean the kind of people who are willing to let assault be bygones -- Song Jiang told them, "Come back to the penal colony with me. I'll give you 20 taels of silver for your daughter's recovery. Then you should find her a good husband so that she won't have to sing here anymore."

The girl's parents hurriedly bowed and said, "That's more than we would dare hope for!"

"I'm a man of my words, and I won't lie," Song Jiang reassured them. "Just have your husband follow me, and I'll give him the money." And the couple thanked him once again.

Now that that's taken care of, Dai Zong got on Li Kui's case again. Like, c'mon man, how many times are you going to embarrass me in front of people today?

"You always bicker with others, and now you've cost your brother a bunch of silver again," Dai Zong said.

"I just grazed her with my fingers and she fell down," Li Kui said. "I've never seen such delicate girls. If it were me, you can punch me in the face 100 times, and I'd be fine."

Everybody cracked up, and Zhang Shun now asked the waiter for the check. But Song Jiang steadfastly refused to allow it.

"Brother, I invited you guys here. How can I let you pay?" he said.

But everybody else was equally insistent in their refusal to allow Song Jiang to pick up the tab.

"Brother, what a rare opportunity it was to get to meet you," Zhang Shun said. "When you were in Shandong Province, my brother and I were thinking of going to see you. Today, I got to meet you. This is just a minor token of my respect. Please don't stand on ceremony."

Dai Zong also chimed in and told Song Jiang, "Since Brother Zhang wants to show his respect, just let him."

"Alright then," Song Jiang relented. "Since you insist, I'll return the favor another day."

Being allowed to pay for the meal made Zhang Shun very happy. He then took the two remaining golden carps and followed Song Jiang back to the penal colony, along with Dai Zong, Li Kui, and the father of the singing girl. Song Jiang was good to his word as he gave the old man 20 taels of silver. The old man bowed to express his gratitude and took his leave. And that was the end of that. No sob tales of his daughter being bullied leading to further misadventures featuring bludgeoned butchers and overly severe administration of vigilante justice. Just a smooth financial transaction to make potential assault charges go away.

It was now getting late, so Zhang Shun gave Song Jiang the two remaining fish. Song Jiang gave him his brother's letter, and Zhang Shun took his leave. Song Jiang then gave Li Kui a huge, 50-tael ingot of silver and told him, "Brother, take this and spend it." After that, Dai Zong and Li Kui also took their leave and went back into the city.

After he parted ways with his new friends, Song Jiang made a gift of one of the golden carps to the warden and kept the other for himself. Seeing how fresh the fish was, Song Jiang couldn't stop eating, but soon, he discovered the flip side of ancient Chinese culinary delights. Around 2 a.m., his stomach started hurting, and by dawn, he had had more than 20 bouts of diarrhea. It got so bad that he passed out and became bedridden.

Because Song Jiang had been so nice to the people at the penal colony, everyone there came to check up on him, made him congee and soup, and looked after him while he recovered. The next day, Zhang Shun dropped by again. He was delivering two more golden carps after seeing how much Song Jiang loved fish, and also to thank him for delivering his brother's letter. But then he found Song Jiang lying in bed with the runs, and all the other inmates in his room looking after him. Zhang Shun wanted to go find a doctor, but Song Jiang told him, "I just ate a little too much fish and made my stomach upset. You just need to get me some diarrhea medicine, and I'll be fine."

Song Jiang then told Zhang Shun to give one of the two golden carps he had brought to the warden, and the other to the jailer, because, hey why keep diarrhea yourself. Zhang Shun did as he asked and fetched him the medicine before taking his leave. The inmates then prepared the meds for Song Jiang.

The next day, Dai Zong and Li Kui came by to visit Song Jiang with wine and meat in tow, but then they found him still recovering, which meant no wine or meat for him. So the two of them ate the meat and drank the wine outside his room and hung out with him until evening.

After about six or seven days, Song Jiang finally got back to normal, and now he was itching to get out. He was thinking about going to find Dai Zong. He waited a day, but Dai Zong did not come visit. So the next morning, Song Jiang took some money, locked up his room, and went into town. He asked around about where Dai Zong lived, and someone said, "He doesn't have any family, so he lives in the Guan Yin Monastery next to the city temple."

Song Jiang made his way to the monastery, but found Dai Zong's room locked. He then asked around about Li Kui, and everyone just said, "He's a headless ghost. He has no family and just stays at the jail. He's got no routine. He spends a couple days here and a couple days there. Who knows where he's staying right now."

Ok, so that's 0-for-2. Song Jiang next went looking for Zhang Shun, but he struck out on that account, too, as people told him that Zhang Shun lived in a village outside the city and only went to the riverbank to sell fish. The only time he would come into the city was to collect on a tab.

Having come up empty on trying to locate any of his three new best friends, Song Jiang was feeling rather lonely and bored. He went outside the city to try to find Zhang Shun, but found no one he could ask. So he started slowly walking around and came upon a scenic stretch of the river. As he took in the views, he walked up to a pavilion and tavern. He gazed up and saw a flag pole with a banner that said,

“The Excellent Cellar by Sundown River.” On a sign beneath the eaves was written the name of the place -- Sundown Pavilion. And apparently this sign was written by a famous Song Dynasty scholar.

“Even when I was in Yuncheng County, I had heard about this Sundown Pavilion,” Song Jiang thought to himself. “Turns out it’s right here! Even though I’m here by myself, I shouldn’t miss this opportunity. Why don’t I go up and have a look?”

So he approached the front door. On the carved vermilion pillars on both sides of the door were two white plaques. On the plaques, someone had written a couplet, which said, “Wine without equal; Pavilion known by all.” Song Jiang then went upstairs, sat down in a room facing the river, and looked around as he leaned on the railing. It was indeed quite a sight.

Oh and by the way, this Sundown Pavilion is a real place, and it’s still around. In fact, it’s considered one of the 10 most famous pavilions south of the Yangzi River. Its name first appeared in records dating back to the Tang Dynasty, so it has a history of about 1,200 years, and it was famous long before the novel name-dropped it. The current incarnation of this pavilion was rebuilt in 1987. And it looks quite nice. I’ve included [a link to some pictures](#) of it with this episode on the podcast website, so go check it out if you are interested.

Anyway, as Song Jiang was taking in the sights and praising the beauty of the place, a waiter came upstairs and asked, “Sir, are you waiting for guests, or just here by yourself?”

“I’m waiting for two guests, but they’re not here yet,” Song Jiang said, telling a white lie. “You can go ahead and bring me a jug of good wine, and keep the fruits and meats coming. But no fish.”

The waiter took his order and soon returned with a tray and bottle of Moonlight on Lover’s Bridge wine -- which was apparently a premium label. He poured some wine and set out vegetables, seasonal fruits, fat mutton, tender chicken, wine-steeped goose, and lean meat, all served on red plates. Song Jiang saw this and was quite pleased, thinking to himself, “Look at this delicious food served on beautiful

wares. Jiangzhou really lives up to its reputation. Even though I'm here in exile, I can still take in all this scenery. Back home, even though there are a few famous peaks and ancient ruins, we don't have views like this."

So he sat down by the railing and started drinking steadily. Before he knew it, he was starting to feel the buzz when a thought suddenly popped into his mind.

"I was born in Shandong Province and spent most of my life in Yuncheng County. A magisterial clerk by trade, I have met so many heroes on the jianghu scene and earned something of a reputation. Yet, I'm already over 30 and I have not accomplished anything. Instead, I have a criminal's tattoo on my face and have been exiled here. When will I get to see my father and brother again?"

That thought, combined with the alcohol, brought tears to his eyes and stoked pangs of sadness in his heart. But it also got his creative juices flowing, because he composed a poem on the spot, which he titled, "Moon over the West River." And as any halfway decent drunk scholar was apt to do, he decided he would write this poem on the walls, so he asked the waiter for ink and brush.

As he gazed at the white walls that were covered with poems left by previous drunken scholars, Song Jiang thought to himself, "I should write my poem here. If I become a success someday, I can come back here, find my poem, and remember my current travails."

Umm, sure, travails. That's exactly what daily sightseeing river tours and banquets with fine dishes and fancy plates are called. Travails. In any case, Song Jiang was on a roll now, so he dipped his brush in the ink and wrote the following verse on the white walls of the pavilion:

Since childhood I studied classics and history,

And grew up shrewd and intelligent.

Today, a tiger enduring in the wilderness,

I crouch with tooth and claw, intent.

Misfortune saddled me with a criminal's tattoo,
An unwilling exile in faraway Jiangzhou.
But if I have my revenge someday,
Blood shall dye red the Sundown River's flow.

After he finished writing, he read it over to himself and started laughing out loud, quite impressed with his own creation. He then chugged a few more cups of wine and soon started dancing wildly as his inhibition blew away into the breeze. His creative juices were flowing again, so he picked up the brush and added another four lines under the poem he had written on the wall. These four lines said:

Heart in Shandong, body in Wu,
Drifting, I breathe sighs into the air.
If I should achieve my lofty aim,
Not even Huang (2) Chao (2) can with me compare.

So a couple explainers are in order here. Song Jiang said his heart was in Shandong while his body was in Wu. Shandong, of course, was the province in the northeast where he was from and where most of the novel had taken place until shifting south to Jiangzhou. As for Wu, that's the name of an old state that once occupied parts of the territories south of the Yangzi River. So that first line basically was saying heart in the North and body in the South.

Now, in the last line of that poem, Song Jiang compared himself to someone named Huang Chao. That man was the leader of a major rebellion in the late 9th century, which severely weakened the once-mighty Tang Dynasty and contributed to its eventual downfall. So Song Jiang was comparing himself to one of the most infamous rebels in Chinese history.

After he finished adding those four lines, he added five big characters that said, “By Song Jiang of Yuncheng.” Then, he tossed the brush onto the table and started singing to himself out loud while downing more wine. After a few more cups, he finally felt too drunk to continue, so he summoned the waiter, paid the bill, plus a nice tip, and left the pavilion. He stumbled back to the penal colony, went to his room, and collapsed onto his bed. There, he crashed until around 5 a.m. When he finally sobered up, he had no recollection at all of what he had done or written on the Sundown Pavilion. The only thing he knew was that he had a massive hangover, so he just slept in.

While Song Jiang was trying to sleep off his bender, the plot was thickening. Across the river from the prefectural seat of Jiangzhou sat another town. It was a desolate little place, and there lived a former deputy prefect named Huang (2) Wenbing (2,3). This guy might have been educated, but he was a narrow-hearted sycophant who was always jealous of men of talent. He would try to harm anyone who was better than him and pick on anyone who couldn’t match him. In fact, he had a reputation for doing harm unto people in the area. So, basically a total ass. But he was an ass with connections. He knew that Prefect Cai (4) of Jiangzhou was a son of the current premier, so he frequently went to suck up to the prefect, hoping to land another government position.

That day, this Huang Wenbing (2,3) was bored at home, so he went out with a couple servants, bought some gifts, and took a boat across the river to call on Prefect Cai again. But when he got to the prefect’s residence, he learned that the prefect was hosting an official banquet, so Huang Wenbing did not dare to intrude. He went back to the boat to go home. It just so happened that the ferryman had tied the boat next to Sundown Pavilion. It was a hot day, so Huang Wenbing decided to go up the pavilion to catch a breeze and find some entertainment before going home.

After taking a look around downstairs, he slowly made his way upstairs, where he saw walls covered with poems, some halfway decent and some downright bad. I mean, these were drunken poetry after

all. As he scanned the verses, Huang Wenbing just chuckled. But when he came across Song Jiang's poem, he stopped laughing.

"This is a seditious poem!" he said with alarm. "Who wrote this?!"

Oh, well the author conveniently left his name right under the poem in big characters: "Song Jiang of Yuncheng."

Huang Wenbing now re-read the poem, throwing in some commentary along the way.

" 'Since childhood I studied classics and history, And grew up shrewd and intelligent.' Well, this guy is pretty full of himself."

" 'Today, a tiger enduring in the wilderness, I crouch with tooth and claw, intent.' Yeah, he clearly doesn't know his place."

" 'Misfortune saddled me with a criminal's tattoo, an unwilling exile in faraway Jiangzhou.' Ah, so he's not some noble-minded person; just an exiled criminal."

" 'But if I have my revenge someday, blood shall dye red the Sundown River's flow.' Who is this knave trying to get revenge against? Talking about stirring up trouble here. You're just an exiled criminal; what can you possibly do?"

Next, he moved on the four-line addendum.

" 'Heart in Shandong, body in Wu, Drifting, I breathe sighs into the air.' Well, at least these two lines make sense."

" 'If I should achieve my lofty aim, Not even Huang (2) Chao (2) can with me compare.' What? How dare that knave? He's comparing himself to the rebel Huang Chao. What is this if not a seditious poem?"

He then looked at the byline again and said to himself, "I've heard of that name. That guy's probably some petty functionary."

Huang Wenbing now asked the waiter who wrote the poem. The waiter said, "Last night a man came here and drank a jug of wine by himself. He got drunk and started acting wildly and wrote this."

"What did he look like?"

"He had two criminal tattoos on his face, so he's probably an inmate at the penal colony. He was dark and pudgy."

"That sounds about right," Huang Wenbing said. He then borrowed brush and ink to copy down the poem and told the waiter to make sure not to paint over that poem.

So ... what's this Huang Wenbing going to do, aside from delivering a few zingers in his literary review of Song Jiang's work? To find out, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, regrets? Yeah, Song Jiang will have a few. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!