

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 57.

Last time, Song Jiang went out drinking by himself, and after a few too many cups, he started lamenting his current state of woe, what with the daily sightseeing tours and steady stream of feasts at five-star pavilions in the land of fish and rice. Truly this was the most horrible and unjust punishment a man could get for murdering his mistress to cover up his criminal connections and then fleeing from the law. Fueled by a mix of sadness and alcohol, Song Jiang wrote a few lines of poetry on the walls of the pavilion where he was drinking, spouting off that one day he shall have his revenge, and the mouth of the river shall run red, and that he would outshine even the most famous rebels of history. You know, typical drunken boasts. He then signed his name under the poem and went back to the penal colony and thought nothing further of it.

While Song Jiang spent the next day nursing a hangover, a local a-hole named Huang Wenbing (2,3) saw the poem he left at the pavilion. This Huang Wenbing thought the poem had seditious undertones, or overtones, so he copied it down.

The next morning after breakfast, Huang Wenbing and his servants went to pay a visit to Prefect Cai. After some pleasantries, Huang Wenbing presented the prefect with some gifts, and they sat down.

“I came across the river yesterday to call on you,” Huang Wenbing said, “but you were hosting an official function, so I dared not intrude and instead came back today to pay my respects.”

“You’re a good friend, so there would be no problem if you had come in,” Prefect Cai said. “Please excuse me for not greeting you.”

After tea was served, Huang Wenbing said, “My lord, may I be so bold as to ask if you’ve heard from your father, the premier, recently?”

“He just sent me a letter a couple days ago.”

“May I be so bold as to ask what’s new in the capital?”

“My father’s letter said that the royal astrologer recently reported that the pattern of the stars indicate someone might stir up trouble in the South, and that they must be eliminated. Also, my father said children on the streets were chanting this rhyme: ‘The destroyer of our country is home and tree; water and work are armed soldiery; stretched in a line are thirty-six; Shandong will put us in a terrible fix.’ So my father has instructed me to keep a close watch on my territory.”

Huang Wenbing thought for a moment, and then chuckled and said, “My lord, that is no accident.” He now pulled out the copy of Song Jiang’s poem and handed it to the prefect, saying, “This is the reason.”

Taking a look at the poem, Prefect Cai said, “This is a seditious poem! Where did you get it?”

“Last night, I did not dare to intrude on your function, so I went back to the riverbank. I had nothing to do, so I went to Sundown Pavilion to pass the time. I was reading the poems that other visitors had left on the walls and noticed this new addition.”

“What kind of person would write this?” the prefect wondered.

“My lord, his name is right there. It says Song Jiang of Yuncheng.”

“But what sort of man is this Song Jiang?” the prefect asked.

“He made it clear in the lines ‘Misfortune saddled me with a criminal’s tattoo, an unwilling exile in faraway Jiangzhou.’ He’s obviously just an exile, an inmate at the penal colony,” Huang Wenbing explained.

“Well, what can a mere inmate do?” Prefect Cai said.

“My lord, you must not underestimate him. The children’s rhyme from your honorable father’s letter is about him.”

“How so?”

“Consider the first line of the rhyme: ‘The destroyer of our country is home and tree.’ If you put the character for home over the character for tree, then you get the character Song. The next line says

'Water and work are armed soldiery.' The characters for water and work combine to make the character Jiang. This guy's name is Song Jiang, and he's written a seditious poem. This must be the work of heaven and the good fortune of the people for us to discover him."

Hearing this, the prefect asked, "What about the other two lines, 'Stretched in a line are thirty-six; Shandong will put us in a terrible fix'?"

"Thirty-six either refers to the year of our emperor's reign, or it's some other kind of number. As for the last line, Yuncheng County is in Shandong Province. So every line of the rhyme corresponds to this man."

"But is he here?" the prefect wondered.

Huang Wenbing said, "Yesterday I asked the waiter at the pavilion, and he said this poem was written just the day before. So it's not hard to find him. Just search the registry of the penal colony and see if he's there."

"That is a great idea!" the prefect said and immediately ordered his attendants to go fetch the registry of the inmates at the penal colony. He inspected it personally, and sure enough, he saw a Song Jiang from Yuncheng County who arrived during the fifth month.

"This must be the one the rhyme is referring to," Huang Wenbing said. "This is no small matter. If we delay, word will get out. We must arrest him at once and interrogate him."

"Quite right," the prefect agreed. So he immediately called court into session and summoned the superintendent, who, of course, was Dai Zong, Song Jiang's new best friend.

"Take some of my officers," the prefect told Dai Zong, "and go to the penal colony and bring me the inmate from Yuncheng County named Song Jiang. He wrote a seditious poem on Sundown Pavilion. Make it quick."

Dai Zong was stunned by that order and could only lament in silence. Once he left the courtroom, he rounded up the various jailers and told them to go home and get their weapons and such ready and then to meet him at his residence at the city monastery.

As soon as everyone else was out of sight, Dai Zong used a little of his Daoist magic and speed-walked his way to the penal colony. Remember, he was known as the Magic Traveler because when he strapped pictures of gods to his legs, he could walk really fast. So he rushed over to the penal colony before anybody knew he had gone. He hurried into Song Jiang's room and found his friend there.

Song Jiang greeted him and said, "I went into the city the day before yesterday to look for you, but you weren't there. I was bored, so I wandered to Sundown Pavilion by myself and drank a jug of wine. I've been in a stupor the last couple days. That was some wine."

"Brother, did you write anything while you were at the pavilion?" Dai Zong asked.

"Who can remember what crazy thing they say while drunk?"

"Well, just now, the prefect told me, 'Take a bunch of men and go arrest the inmate who wrote the seditious poem on Sundown Pavilion, a Song Jiang from Yuncheng County.' I was alarmed. I first sent all the soldiers to the city monastery while I rushed over here to warn you. What should we do?!"

When Song Jiang heard this, he went ah crap!

"I'm done for!" he cried.

But a lightbulb went on in Dai Zong's head at that moment.

"Brother, I've got a way to get you out of this," he said. "See what you think of this. I dare not linger, so I must go get my men and come arrest you. But you can let your hair hang loose and tangled. Scatter urine and feces on the ground, wallow in it, and pretend to be insane. When we get here, you just start spouting nonsense and pretend you've lost your mind. Then I'll go report back to the prefect and cover for you."

This was not an appetizing idea, but it wasn't like Song Jiang had a whole lot of options at the moment, so he agreed and thanked Dai Zong for the suggestion. Dai Zong then rushed to the monastery, gathered his men, and returned to the penal colony.

"Where is that new inmate Song Jiang?!" he shouted as he stomped in.

The jailer led them to the documents office. There they found Song Jiang with his hair hanging down, rolling around in the latrine pit. When he saw Dai Zong and company, he started shouting, "Who are you bastards?!"

Playing along, Dai Zong barked, "Seize him!"

Song Jiang glowered and started taking swings at the men while mumbling, "I am the son-in-law of the Jade Emperor of Heaven. He told me to lead 100,000 heavenly troops to slaughter the people of Jiangzhou. The King of Hell is my vanguard, and the Demon General is commanding my rear. I have a golden seal that weighs 800 catties. I'm going to kill all you bastards!"

Seeing and hearing all this, the soldiers said, "Turns out he's just some guy who's lost his marbles. What's the point of arresting him?"

Now, quite frankly, I think those guys were probably not all that eager to touch Song Jiang after he's been rolling around in urine and feces, so they might've just taken the easy way out here. And Dai Zong was certainly not going to argue with them.

"You guys are right," he said. "Let's go back and report. If the prefect really wants to arrest him, we can come back."

So they went back to the office and told Prefect Cai, "Turns out that Song Jiang is crazy. He's covered in feces and doesn't even care, and he's spouting nonsense. He reeks from head to toe. So we did not dare to bring him here."

Before the prefect could even ask a question, Huang Wenbing stepped out from behind a screen and said to him, "Don't believe them. Judging by the poem he wrote, he's not insane. It must be a deception. No matter what, just bring him here. Even if he can't walk, they must carry him here."

"You're quite right," Prefect Cai said. He then told Dai Zong, "No matter what you have to do, bring him here."

Ah crap. Now Dai Zong had no choice but to go back to the penal colony. While out of earshot of everyone else, he whispered to Song Jiang, "Brother, it's not going well. You have to come with us."

Then, his men brought over a big basket, put Song Jiang in it, and carried him to the prefectural office.

"Bring the knave!" Prefect Cai ordered.

The guards dragged Song Jiang into the hall, but he refused to kneel and instead glowered at the prefect and said, "Who the hell are you? How dare you question me?! I am the son-in-law of the Jade Emperor of heaven. He has ordered me to lead 100,000 heavenly soldiers to kill the people of Jiangzhou. The King of Hell is my vanguard, and the Demon General commands my rear. I have a golden seal that weighs 800 catties. You better get out of my way, or I'll kill you all too!"

Seeing this, the prefect was like, man what the hell are we doing here?! But Huang Wenbing said, "Let's ask the warden and jailer from the penal colony when this guy lost his mind. If he was crazy when he arrived, then it's for real. But if he only went crazy in the last few days, then it must be fake."

So the prefect summoned the warden and jailer and questioned them. And of course, they did not dare to lie to the boss, so they said, "This man did not appear to be crazy when he arrived. It only happened in the last few days."

Prefect Cai flew into a rage when he heard that and told the guards to tie Song Jiang up and give him 50 strokes. Unlike the previous caning he received, these strokes were for real, and soon Song Jiang's skin was tattered and he was covered in blood. All Dai Zong could do was lament in silence. At first, Song

Jiang still kept up his act, but as one stroke after another landed, he finally broke and confessed, saying, "I wrote a seditious poem by mistake after getting drunk. I did not mean anything by it."

Having obtained a confession, Prefect Cai had Song Jiang placed in a cangue that weighed 25 catties and thrown into prison. By now, Song Jiang had received so many strokes on his legs that he could not walk, so the guards put the cangue on right then and there and dragged him into his cell on death row. Dai Zong used his connections to make sure the jailers took good care of Song Jiang and that food was provided for him.

After court was adjourned, Prefect Cai invited Huang Wenbing to his private quarters and thanked him profusely. "If not for your keen insights, I might've been fooled by that knave," he said.

"My lord," Huang Wenbing replied, "we must not let this matter drag out. You should immediately send a messenger with a letter to the capital to inform your honorable father that you have done the country a great service. Inform his lordship that if he wants the rebel alive, you will send him to the capital in a prisoner cart. Otherwise, instead of risking letting him escape on the way, you will execute him right here to eliminate this threat. That should please your father."

"You are quite right," Prefect Cai said. "I was planning to send a messenger home anyway. I'll mention your great service in the letter and ask my father to inform his majesty in person so that you will be promoted and get to enjoy riches and prosperity."

"I have always been your humble servant and will repay you like a horse," Huang Wenbing said as he bowed in gratitude.

So Prefect Cai wrote a letter to his father and stamped it with his seal. Huang Wenbing then asked him whom he was going to task with delivering the letter.

"There is a superintendent here named Dai Zong," Prefect Cai said. "He has magic that allows him to travel 250 miles a day. I will send him to the capital. He'll be there and back within 10 days."

“If he can be that fast, then it’s perfect!” Huang Wenbing said.

The prefect then treated Huang Wenbing to wine. The next day, Huang Wenbing took his leave and went back across the river to his home. Meanwhile, Prefect Cai prepared two hampers filled with valuables and sealed with paper slips. The next morning, he summoned Dai Zong to his private quarters and said, “I have some gifts and a family letter that need to be delivered to the premier’s residence in the capital for my father’s birthday on the 15th day of the 6th month. The date draws near, and only you can make it in time. Please don’t mind the extra effort and make this trip for me. Once you come back with the reply, I’ll reward you handsomely. I’ve figured out your itinerary and how long it would take you to make the trip with your magic. I’ll be waiting for you to report back. Do not delay.”

Dai Zong, of course, did not dare to say no to the prefect. So he accepted the letter and the hampers, took his leave, and returned home. He then went to the prison to tell Song Jiang about his pending trip.

“Brother, rest easy,” Dai Zong said. “The prefect is sending me to the capital on an errand. I’ll be back within 10 days. I’ll use this opportunity to find some connections at the premier’s residence to try to save you. As for your daily meals, I’ll give Li Kui instructions, and he’ll deliver it every day without fail. Please be patient for a few days.”

“Brother,” Song Jiang said, “I hope you can save my life.”

Dai Zong then called Li Kui over and told him in front of Song Jiang, “Brother Song wrote a seditious poem by mistake and ended up in jail. His fate is uncertain. And now I’ve been sent to the capital on an errand, but I’ll be back soon. While I’m gone, it falls on you to tend to Brother Song’s daily meals.”

“What’s the big deal about writing a seditious poem?!” Li Kui scoffed. “Tens of thousands of traitors get made high officials. Brother, go without worry. No one would dare to mistreat Brother Song in jail. If they do, I’ll chop off their heads with my big axe!”



Before leaving, Dai Zong again reminded Li Kui, "Be careful, and don't drink too much, or you will forget about Brother Song's meals. Don't go get drunk and make your brother starve."

"Brother, don't worry," Liu Kui said. "If you're that concerned about it, then I'll stop drinking starting today and until you get back. I'll just stay in jail every day and tend to Brother Song. Is that good enough?"

"If you can be so determined, that would be best!" a delighted Dai Zong said.

And sure enough, once Dai Zong left, Li Kui really did go dry, staying by Song Jiang's side in prison all the time and not touching a single drop of wine.

Now, as for Dai Zong, he went home and got dressed for the road. He put on leggings, hemp sandals, and an apricot-yellow robe tied at the waist with a sash. He tucked his official ID badge into the sash, changed his headscarf, and slipped the letter into his documents pouch, along with some money, and carried the two hampers on a shoulder pole.

Once he left the city, he attached two charms to each leg, recited an incantation, and poof, off he went, zooming down the road as if he were gliding on clouds. After traveling for a day, he found an inn to spend the night. He removed the charms, burned some sacrificial money as a token to the gods, and retired for the night. The next day, he got up early, ate some food, and hit the road again. He strapped on the charms again, carried the shoulder pole, and started flying down the road. He was traveling so fast that wind and rain whistled past, and his feet barely touched the ground. He stopped only once or twice for food, which consisted of vegetarian dishes, weak wine, and light snacks -- and this diet was apparently important to the effectiveness of his magic. As the sun descended at the end of the second day, Dai Zong found another inn to spend the night.

The next day, he got up at 5 a.m. so he could travel while it was cool. After about 100 miles or so, it was getting to be noon, and he had not come across a single clean tavern. It was the early part of the

sixth month, so around July on our calendar, and it was really hot. After walking all morning, Dai Zong was soaked through with sweat, and he was afraid of overheating. As he was battling hunger and thirst, a tavern came into view, situated next to a grove beside a lake.

Dai Zong went up to the tavern, took a look inside, and saw 20 clean red-lacquered tables with matching benches, sitting in a row beside the windows. He sat down at a secluded table, put down his luggage, untied his sash, took off his sweat-soaked robe, and hung it on the window sill to dry.

A waiter now came and asked, "Sir, how many horns of wine? Do you want any meat? Pork? Mutton? Beef?"

"I don't want much wine; bring me some rice," Dai Zong said.

"We have wine and food, along with steamed buns, noodles, and soups," the waiter said.

"I don't eat meat. What kind of vegetarian dishes do you have to go with the rice?"

"How about some numbing spicy tofu?"

"Perfect!"

So the waiter went to the kitchen and soon returned with a bowl of tofu, along with two plates of vegetables, and poured three big bowls of wine. Dai Zong was hungry and thirsty, so he devoured it all in the blink of an eye.

As he waited for the rice to come out, Dai Zong suddenly started feeling dizzy, and within seconds, the room started to spin and he lay slumped on the table. Wow, I guess that really was some numbing tofu. And yes, this was one of THOSE taverns.

"He's down," the waiter called out, and on cue, a man emerged from the back.

"Take his hampers inside," the man said, "and search him to see if he's carrying anything."

Two helpers now came out and searched Dai Zong. They found his documents pouch and the letter inside. They handed it to their boss, who recognized it as a family letter. The front of the envelope said, "Peaceful family letter, with the utmost respect to my father, from your son Cai (4) Dezhang (2,1)."

The tavern boss tore open the envelope and read the letter, and did a double take when he came across the line that said, "Right now I've arrested a Song Jiang from Shandong Province, who wrote a seditious poem. He is in jail; I await your instructions for how to deal with him."

The tavern boss went silent for a good while. Meanwhile, his helpers carried the unconscious Dai Zong into the back and prepared him for the butcher's table. That was when the boss noticed Dai Zong's sash on the bench, from which hung his red ID badge. The boss took a look and saw the name, "Dai Zong, Superintendent of Jiangzhou Prefecture."

"Stop!" the boss shouted to his helpers. "I've often heard our military strategist mention this Dai Zong. They're friends. Could this be him? But then why would he be delivering a letter to harm Song Jiang? Thank heaven this ended up in my lap."

So this tavern boss was none other than Zhu Gui (4), the Dryland Crocodile, the chieftain who runs recon for the bandits on Liangshan in the guise of a tavern keeper. Dai Zong had unknowingly stumbled into his place and fallen for his shenanigans.

"Get the antidote and bring him around so I can ask him about this," Zhu Gui told his men.

Once the antidote was administered, Dai Zong soon started to wake up. As he regained consciousness, he quickly scrambled to his feet. When he saw Zhu Gui holding the opened letter, Dai Zong shouted, "Who are you? You've got some gall to drug me and open a letter addressed to the premier. You've torn open the envelope. Do you know what punishment you would get for that?"

Zhu Gui chuckled. "What's the big deal with this damn letter? We're enemies of the emperor himself, so who gives a damn about opening some letter addressed to the premier?"

Dai Zong was taken aback and asked, "Hero, who are you? Please tell me your name."

"I don't mind telling you. I am Zhu Gui, the Dryland Crocodile, a chieftain among the heroes of Liangshan."

"If you are a chieftain from Liangshan, then you must know Professor Wu," Dai Zong said.

“Professor Wu is our military strategist and commands our forces. How do you know him?” Zhu Gui asked.

“He and I are friends.”

“Brother, are you the Superintendent Dai that the professor talks about? The one called the Magic Traveler?”

“Indeed I am.”

“In that case, when Song Jiang came through here a while back on his way to Jiangzhou, Professor Wu wrote you a letter to introduce him to you. So why are you now trying to kill him?”

Dai Zong was confounded by that accusation. “Song Jiang and I are close. He’s in trouble for writing a seditious poem, and I have no way to save him. I am on my way to the capital to find some way. Why would I try to kill him?”

“If you don’t believe me, then take a look at Prefect Cai’s letter,” Zhu Gui told him.

Dai Zong read the letter and was stunned. He then recounted how he became friends with Song Jiang and how the latter got himself in trouble.

“In that case,” Zhu Gui said, “please come to our stronghold and discuss with the other chieftains to devise a plan to save Song Jiang’s life.”

Zhu Gui quickly ordered his men to prepare some undrugged food for Dai Zong, while he shot a whistling arrow across the water. Soon, a bandit lackey rowed a boat over, and Zhu Gui and Dai Zong boarded it and traveled to Golden Sand Beach and went up to the fortress. Wu Yong rushed out to greet them and invited Dai Zong in.

Zhu Gui told everyone why they were there, and Chao Gai asked Dai Zong for details. Once Dai Zong recounted how Song Jiang got into trouble, Chao Gai was quite alarmed and immediately wanted to mobilize his forces and go attack Jiangzhou to save Song Jiang.

Wu Yong, however, said, “Brother, you must not act rashly. Jiangzhou is far from here. If we march there with an army, it might stir up more trouble and set off their alarm and end up costing Song Jiang his life. This matter cannot be dealt with by force, only by cunning. I may be untalented, but I can devise some trifle of a scheme and save Song Jiang’s life, with help from Superintendent Dai.”

To see what Wu Yong has in mind, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we see more questionable talent-acquisition practices. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!