

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 62.

Last time, Song Jiang decided to go alone back to his village to bring his father and brother to Liangshan before the authorities could arrest them. But no sooner had he set foot in the village did he find himself fleeing from the local cops. They chased him into a village that supposedly had only one road in and out. But just as things were looking dire, Song Jiang somehow eluded the search party in an old temple, and then got a surprise invitation from a couple girls dressed in green who kept calling him Starlord. They took him along some backroads to a giant palace that he had no idea even existed. And there, he was introduced to a figure that the girls kept referring to as their queen.

After much ceremony, Song Jiang finally mustered the courage to look up and gaze at this queen. When he lifted his head, he saw that the hall he was standing in was glittering with gold and jade and was lit by dragon lanterns and phoenix candles. Boys and girls dressed in green stood on both sides, holding jade wands and pennants and waving large fans. In the center, on a bejewelled, carved couch sat their queen. She was dressed in filmy golden silks and held a scepter of white jade. Her eyes were lovely, and her countenance divine, beautiful, yet dignified and serious.

“Starlord, I have invited you here,” the Queen said. As she spoke, she gestured for her acolytes to offer wine. Two young maidens came forth with a beautiful bottle and poured wine into a jade cup. One of them brought the cup to Song Jiang and offered it to him. He did not dare to refuse, so he stood up, accepted the cup, kneeled in the direction of the queen, and drank it. That wine, according to the novel, drifted to his brain like ambrosia and seeped into his heart like fresh morning dew.

Next, another girl came over with a tray of fairy dates and beckoned Song Jiang to have one. Trembling out of fear that he’d commit some kind of faux pas, Song Jiang daintily picked up a date with his fingertips and ate it. Now, dates have pits in them, and Song Jiang figured it would be the height of bad manners if he just spat out the pit, so he just held the pit in his hand, because apparently the queen didn’t have any acolytes whose job it was to bring over a trash can. The other girl now offered him

another cup of wine, which he again drank. The queen then ordered the girl to pour a third cup, which Song Jiang also drank, followed by a couple more dates. After three cups of wine and three dates, Song Jiang was starting to feel a little buzzy. He was afraid that he would make a fool of himself, so he bowed and said, "Your servant has a low tolerance. I hope you highness can spare me from any more wine."

"Since the Starlord isn't a drinker, we may stop," the queen said to her servants. "Bring him the three scrolls of divine texts."

One of the servants went behind a screen and returned with a jade platter, on which sat three scrolls wrapped in yellow cloth. They were about four-and-a-half inches long, two-and-a-half inches wide, and two-and-a-half inches thick. As the servant presented him with the scrolls, Song Jiang did not dare to open them. Instead, he bowed, received them, and stashed them in his sleeve.

"Starlord Song," the queen now said, "I hereby bestow upon you these three scrolls of divine text, so that you may commit yourself to carrying out heaven's decree, serve the emperor with complete loyalty, assist the state, protect the people, expel evil, and pursue justice. I also have four lines of divine guidance that you should keep with you. Never forget them, and never reveal them to another."

Song Jiang bowed again, and the queen spoke these four lines:

Great joy follows when you find lodging,

No danger threatens when you meet the heights.

In lands to both North and South,

Will you achieve most wondrous acclaim.

Song Jiang bowed again upon receiving those lines, and the queen told him, "Because your heart was not yet pure nor your duties done, the Jade Emperor of heaven banished you to earth temporarily. You will re-ascend to heaven before long, but do not let up in the slightest. If you commit new sins and

are condemned to hell, even I would not be able to save you. You should frequently study those three scrolls and familiarize yourself with them. You may only show them to the Knowledge Star, no one else. Once you have completed your service, burn them and do not allow them to remain in the earthly realm. Remember my instructions. Today, I am divine and you are mortal, so I cannot keep you here long. You must go back now, quickly.”

She then told her servants to take Song Jiang back, before turning to him once more and saying, “We shall meet again in the divine towers of gold and jade.”

Song Jiang thanked her and followed the girls in green dresses again. They descended the steps leading away from the hall, exited the palace gates, and returned to the stone bridge they had crossed on the way here. As they walked across the bridge, the maids said to him, “Starlord, you had suffered quite a fright. If her highness had not saved you, you would’ve been captured already. But when it becomes light out, you will escape this calamity. Oh look, there are two dragons wrestling in the water.”

Song Jiang leaned over the railing and looked down and indeed saw two dragons tussling in the water. But just then, the two girls gave him a push in the back and he fell forward. With a loud cry, he suddenly found himself sitting on the floor of the shrine in the dusty old temple where he had taken refuge when the authorities were looking for him.

So umm ... what the heck was that? Did Song Jiang just inhale some wacky incense while he was hiding? As he got to his feet, he judged by the position of the moon that it was after midnight. Suddenly, he felt something in his hand. He opened his fist and saw three date pits in his palm. Hmm, ok. Then, he reached into his sleeve and lo and behold, he pulled out three scrolls of divine text. Meanwhile, he could still taste the lingering fragrance of wine in his mouth. This is getting curiozier and curiozier.

“What a strange dream!” he thought to himself. “It was like a dream and yet not a dream. **IF** it was a dream, then how do I explain the scrolls, the taste of wine, and the pits? Besides, I remember every

word that was spoken. But if it wasn't a dream, then how did I fall into the shrine? Ah, the answer is obvious: The spirit here must be very potent and was manifesting itself. But which spirit was it?"

As he pondered, he lifted the curtain of the shrine and looked in. In a chair with nine carved dragons sat a beautiful female statue that looked just like the queen he had met.

"She called me Starlord," Song Jiang thought. "I must've been an uncommon man in my previous life. These three divine scrolls will no doubt be of use, and I still remember her four lines of divine guidance. The maids in the green dress said I would escape this calamity when it gets light out. It's starting to get light out now, so let me go outside and see."

Feeling around in the dark, he retrieved his short wooden staff, tidied up his clothes, and left the shrine. As he made his way out to the front of the temple, he looked up and saw an old plaque with golden characters that said, "Temple of the Mystic Queen."

So, the Mystic Queen is a mythological figure from the Daoist canon. Her name has also been translated as the Dark Lady or the Mysterious Lady. She is the goddess of war, sex, and longevity.

Song Jiang now raised his hands to his head in a gesture of gratitude and said, "Turns out it was the Mystic Queen who bestowed these three divine scrolls upon me and saved my life. If I have my day, I promise to come back and restore this temple and shrine to repay your heavenly mercy in protecting me."

After bowing, he quietly sneaked toward the entrance to the village. He had not gone far when he suddenly heard loud cries coming from ahead.

"Crap!" he thought. "I can't go out there yet or they'll catch me. Let me hide behind that tree on the side of the road."

He had barely taken shelter behind the tree when he saw several local militiamen running by, gasping for air and dragging their weapons behind them, all shouting, "Oh gods, save us!"

“Well, that’s strange,” Song Jiang thought to himself as he looked on. “They were waiting by the entrance to the village for me to come out so they can catch me. What are they running in here for?”

Just then, another man ran past. This was Zhao (4) Neng (2), one of the two constables who were leading the soldiers that had chased him into this village. As he ran by, Zhao Neng was crying, “We’re all done for!”

“Hmm. Why is that knave panicking?” Song Jiang thought.

A second later, he had his answer. Right behind Zhao Neng came a big man. He was stripped to the waist, exposing demon-like muscles, and he wielded two big war axes.

“Bastards! Don’t run!” this guy shouted.

Wait, was that? Why, I do believe that was Li (3) Kui (2), the Black Whirlwind.

“Am I dreaming?” Song Jiang thought. But he did not dare to reveal himself yet and just kept looking on in silence.

He watched the constable Zhao (4) Neng (2) run past the temple. Suddenly, Zhao Neng tripped on the roots of a tree and fell flat on his face. Before he could even recover, Li Kui had caught up to him, stepped on his back with one foot, and raised his axe. Just then, two other men were rushing onto the scene, both with broad-brimmed felt hats hanging on their backs and long-handle broadswords in their hands. Both were chieftains from Liangshan. One was Ou (1) Peng (2), the Golden Wings Brushing Against the Clouds. The other was Tao (2) Zongwang (1,4), the Nine-tailed Turtle. If you forgot, Song Jiang and company encountered them and their bandit buddies on the way to Liangshan two episodes ago, and they all joined the gang. And now, they were here, obviously to rescue Song Jiang.

Seeing these two chieftains coming closer, Li Kui figured it won’t do anyone any good if they had to squabble over who killed which enemy, so he quickly brought his axe down on his foe’s back, cutting Zhao Neng in half and splitting his chest open. He then chased away the rest of the militiamen. But even now, Song Jiang still did not dare to show himself.

By now, three more chieftains had appeared: Liu Tang the Red-haired Devil, Shi (2) Yong (3) the Stone General, and Li (3) Li (4) the Life-taking Judge. The six heroes regrouped and said to each other, "We've chased away the soldiers, but there's no sign of Brother Song. What should we do?"

Just then, Shi Yong the Stone General shouted, "Hey, there's someone behind that pine tree!"

Only now did Song Jiang step out and say, "Brothers, thank you all for saving my life yet again! How can I ever repay this great debt?"

Oh, I don't know. Maybe you could've done the sensible thing and taken a few of us with you in the first place? Anyway, the chieftains were delighted to see him, and two of them ran off to inform their leader Chao Gai.

While they waited for the rest of the gang to show up, Song Jiang asked Liu Tang the Red-haired Devil how they knew to look for him here. Liu Tang said, "Brother, right after you left, Chieftain Chao and Professor Wu were so worried that they sent Dai (4) Zong (1) to follow you and find out your whereabouts. Even then, Chieftain Chao could not rest easy, so he personally came with us to back you up just in case. We ran into Dai Zong on the way and he said two scoundrels were after you. Chieftain Chao was furious. He sent Dai Zong back to Liangshan to mobilize our forces. They left Professor Wu, Priest Gongsun Sheng, and a few other chieftains to guard the stronghold. Everyone else came to look for you. We heard someone say, 'We chased Song Jiang into Circular Road Village.' So we killed every last one of the soldiers guarding the entrance, except for the few that fled into the village. Brother Li Kui chased after them, so we all came in, too. We didn't expect to find you here."

Just as they were talking, the rest of the cavalry arrived, led by Chao Gai, Hua Rong the archer, Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt, and so on and so forth. After everyone exchanged greetings, Chao Gai gave Song Jiang the "I told you so" speech, to which Song Jiang replied, "I could never rest easy worrying about my father. So I had no choice but to come."

“I’ve got good news then,” Chao Gai said. “I’ve already had some chieftains escort your father, brother, and the rest of your family to Liangshan.”

Song Jiang was ecstatic and bowed to Chao Gai, saying, “Brother, with such immense kindness from you, I would die without regret!”

Everyone then got back on their horses and left the village. As they departed, Song Jiang again raised his hands to his forehead and made a gesture of gratitude toward heaven, thanking the spirits for their divine assistance and promising to return someday to pay his respects again.

As soon as they got back to Liangshan, Song Jiang asked about his father, and Chao Gai told his men to go invite the old squire. Moments later, Song Jiang’s younger brother Song Qing arrived with a sedan chair, from which climbed the old squire. Everyone welcomed them into the Hall of Honor, and Song Jiang was ecstatic and all smiles.

Bowing to his father, he said, “Father, you have suffered quite a fright. It’s all because I was an unfilial son and caused trouble for you as well.”

The old squire answered, “Those two constables, the Zhao brothers, stationed men to watch over us every day. They were just waiting for the official order to arrive before they arrested us and sent us to jail. When you were knocking on our back door, there were eight or nine soldiers in our parlor. But then, they disappeared and ran outside. Around midnight, about 200 people opened the gates, helped me into the sedan chair, told your brother to pack up our belongings, and then burned the manor to the ground. They didn’t even give me a chance to ask what was going on and just brought me straight here.”

Yep, that’s the typical Liangshan welcome wagon. Song Jiang now told his younger brother Song Qing to bow and thank all the chieftains, and Chao Gai and company all bowed to the old squire. Meanwhile, lackeys started slaughtering oxens and horses to prepare a feast in celebration of Song

Jiang's family reunion. They drank to their hearts' content that night, and kept partying the next day. Then they decided to party a third day, because hey why not?

During the banquet on the third day, the Daoist priest Gongsun Sheng suddenly thought of something. His elderly mother was still in their home back in Jizhou (4,1) Prefecture, and this is NOT the same Jizhou as the one where most of our outlaws are from. This is a different prefecture to the north that just happens to have a similar sounding name.

Gongsun Sheng had been away for a long time and had no news of his mother. So in the midst of the feasting, he got up and said to all the chieftains, "I am grateful that you have kept my company for so long and treated me like family. But ever since I came here with Chieftain Chao, I've been partying every day and have not gone home once to see my old mother. My master might also be worried about me. So I would like to take a trip home. I would take my leave of you for about three to five months and then come back. Please grant me this wish so that my mother would not be worried."

To this Chao Gai said, "I've heard you mention before that your mother was living in the north with no one to attend to her. Since you put it that way, it's impossible to say no. I just can't stand being apart from you, that's all. But even though you're leaving, you can wait until tomorrow, and we'll see you off."

Gongsun Sheng thanked him, and everyone again drank themselves stupid before going to bed. The next morning, they got together for another feast, this one at the foot of the mountain passes to see Gongsun Sheng off. Gongsun Sheng once again put on his traveling priest outfit, strapped on his bundles and sword, wore a hat on his back, and carried a tortoise shell fan in his hand. When he came down the mountain, the other chieftains greeted him and, one by one, offered him a toast.

After all the drinking, Chao Gai said, "Sir, we can't keep you from going, but please stay true to your word. I really don't want you to go, but since it's about your mother, I dare not stop you. I hope to see you again in 100 days or so. Don't break your word."

To this, Gongsun Sheng reassured him, "You all have taken care of me for so long, how can I dare to break my word? Once I go home to see my master and take care of my mother, I will return."

Song Jiang now chimed in. "Sir, why don't you take a few people with you, and move your mother here, so you can tend to her all the time."

"My mother enjoys peace and tranquility and cannot withstand commotions, so I dare not bring her here," Gongsun Sheng replied. "We still have some fields at home, and my mother can look after them. I'll just go for a quick visit and then come back here to rejoin you."

Chao Gai now brought out a tray of gold and silver as a parting gift. Gongsun Sheng said he didn't want anything beyond what he needed for travel expenses, so Chao Gai had his men pack up half of the gold and silver for him. Gongsun Sheng then took his leave and sailed across the water.

With the going-away party breaking up, all the chieftains were just about to head back up the mountain when suddenly, somebody started wailing. They looked and saw that it was Li Kui, the Black Whirlwind, who was probably the last guy you would expect to lose it in front of everyone.

Song Jiang asked him what was wrong, and Li Kui said in between sobs, "Dammit! This guy is going to get his dad, and that guy is going to see his mom. Does everyone think I just popped out of a damn hole in the ground?"

"Ok, so what do you want to do?" Chao Gai asked.

"I just have an old mother at home. My older brother is a hired hand. How can he provide a good life for my mom? I want to go bring her here so she can get a taste of the good life, too."

"You're right," Chao Gai said. "I'll send some men with you and go bring her here. That'd be a very good thing."

"That won't do," Song Jiang objected. "Brother Li has a bad temper. Something will surely go wrong on his trip home. Even if you send someone with him, it still won't do. With his fiery temper, he's bound

to stir up trouble on the way. Besides, with all the people he killed back in Jiangzhou (1,1) Prefecture, who doesn't recognize the Black Whirlwind? By now, government decrees for his arrest would have been sent everywhere. He's also got a vicious appearance. If something does go wrong, given the great distance, how would we find out? Just sit tight for a while. Once things have died down a bit, then you can go get your mother."

But Li Kui lost his patience and shouted, "Brother, you're so unfair! You've already brought your dad here to live the high life. But you would have my mom suffer in her village. How can that not piss me off?!"

"Brother, be patient," Song Jiang said. "If you want to go get your mother, then you must promise me three things, and then I'd let you go."

"Which three things?!"

"If you want to go to Yishui (2,3) County in Yizhou (2,1) Prefecture to get your mother, then first, until you get back here, you cannot drink. Second, because of your temper, no one wants to go with you. So you just go alone and bring your mom back quietly. And third, don't bring those two axes of yours. Be careful on the way, and hurry back."

"No problem!" Li Kui said. "Don't worry, brother. I'll leave right now."

So Li Kui immediately got ready right there at the foot of the mountain. He hung a short-handle broadsword from his waist, took a long-handle broadsword in hand, and stashed a large ingot of silver and a few smaller pieces. He drank a few cups of wine, gave everyone a big bow to say goodbye, and took off.

After he left, Chao Gai, Song Jiang and the other chieftains returned to the Hall of Honor. But Song Jiang was feeling uneasy about this whole thing. He told everyone, "Brother Li Kui is going to run into

trouble for sure. Is there anyone among you from his home village? If so, can you go and keep tabs on him?"

Someone said that Zhu Gui (4), the Dryland Crocodile, was also from Yishui (2,3) County, so Song Jiang quickly sent someone to Zhu Gui's tavern to summon him to the stronghold. Song Jiang told him, "Brother Li Kui has gone home to fetch his mother. Because of his bad temper, I didn't want to send anyone else with him, but I'm afraid something will go wrong. I heard that you're from his home village. Please go there to keep an eye on him."

Zhu Gui said, "I did come from Yishui (2,3) County. I have a brother named Zhu Fu (4) who runs a tavern outside the west gate of the town. That Li Kui is from a small hamlet that's part of Hundred Yard Village. His older brother is named Li (3) Da (2) and works as a hired hand in someone's home. That Li Kui has always been a brute. He once beat a man to death and fled onto the jianghu scene, and he hasn't gone home since. I'm fine with going there to keep tabs on him. I just worry that my tavern would be neglected. I haven't gone home in a long time either, so it would be good to go home and see my brother."

Song Jiang told him, "Don't worry about the tavern. I'll have the chieftains Hou (2) Jian (4) and Shi (2) Yong (3) take care of it for a while."

So Zhu Gui set off right away, and then the rest of the chieftains got back to partying every day, while Song Jiang and Wu Yong spent time studying the divine scrolls that he had obtained.

Now, let's get on the road and follow Li Kui. True to his word, he abstained from alcohol on his trip and thus stayed out of trouble. One day, as he approached the west gate of the Yishui (2,3) County seat, he saw a bunch of people crowding around a posted notice, so he went and joined in. Someone read the notice out loud:

“The first name on the notice is the main culprit Song Jiang. The second name is his accomplice Dai Zong. The third name is another accomplice, Li Kui.”

As he listened to the man read on, Li Kui started getting animated when suddenly someone wrapped him up around the waist from behind and said, “Hey brother Zhang! What are you doing here?!”

Li Kui turned and looked, and saw that it was none other than the chieftain Zhu Gui.

“What are YOU doing here?” he asked Zhu Gui.

“Come with me and we’ll talk,” Zhu Gui said.

Zhu Gui took Li Kui to a tavern in a nearby village, and they went straight into a quiet room. Once they sat down, Zhu Gui pointed at Li Kui and said, “You’ve got some gall! That notice clearly said they were offering 10,000 strings of coins for the capture of Song Jiang, 5,000 strings for Dai Zong, and 3,000 strings for you. And yet you were just standing there next to it. What would we do if some smart guy recognized you and arrested you? Brother Song Jiang was afraid you would cause trouble, and didn’t send anyone else with you. But then he was worried about you, so he sent me to come keep tabs on you. I left a day after you did, but arrived a day earlier than you. What took you so long?”

“Brother Song told me not to drink on the way, so that slowed me down,” Li Kui answered. “Hey, how do you know this tavern was here? You’re from this area. Where’s your home?”

“This tavern belongs to my brother Zhu Fu (4). I am from *here*. I left to become a merchant, but my business went bust and I lost all my money, so I became a bandit at Liangshan. This is my first time back since then.”

Zhu Gui now introduced his brother Zhu Fu, who went by the nickname the Smiling Tiger, and Zhu Fu prepared wine for his guest.

“Brother Song told me to not drink,” Li Kui said. “But I’m already in my hometown, so there’s nothing wrong with having a couple bowls.”

Zhu Gui didn't dare stop him, so he let Li Kui wet his whistle. They sat and drank until around 2 a.m. that night. After he ate and drank his fill, Li Kui wanted to get back on the road and travel under the bright moonlight.

"Don't take the backroads," Zhu Gui cautioned. "Just turn at the big hackberry tree and take the main road east. That'll take you straight to your village. Get your mother, come straight back here, and we'll hurry back to Liangshan."

"It's shorter to take the backroads," Li Kui objected. "Whos' got the time to take the main road?"

"There are lots of tigers on the backroads, not to mention robbers and bandits," Zhu Gui said.

"Hell, like I'm afraid of THEM!" Li Kui scoffed as he grabbed his stuff and set out.

To see if Li Kui can avoid any incidents on this trip, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, no, Li Kui cannot avoid incidents on this trip. So join us next time.

Thanks for listening!