

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 65.

Last time, the Liangshan bandits had sent Dai (4) Zong (1) the Magic Traveler to go look for Gongsun Sheng, the Daoist priest who had taken a leave of absence to go home to check on his mother and his Daoist master but was now overdue. On the way, Dai Zong ran into a hero named Yang (2) Lin (2) the Multicolor Leopard, who had run into Gongsun Sheng a while back and now volunteered to serve as Dai Zong's guide. Then, they ran into two bandit chieftains in the local mountains. These were actually acquainted with Yang Lin. One was named Deng (4) Fei (1), the Fiery-Eyed Lion. The other was named Meng (4) Kang (1) the Jade Flagpole.

But Dai Zong was not done meeting new friends on this trip. As he chatted with the two bandit chieftains, they told him about a third chieftain, who was actually the reason they were bandits. This guy's name was Pei (2) Xuan (1), and he was a magistrate's scribe at the local prefectural courthouse. He excelled at writing petitions, was extremely honest and intelligent, and would not commit the slightest misdeed. People in the area all called him the Iron-faced Scribe. He also was adept at handling weapons and was both smart and brave.

But then, the imperial court assigned a corrupt official to be the prefect. And a corrupt prefect can't have a guy known for being a stickler for justice hanging around, so the prefect found some flimsy excuse and exiled Pei (2) Xuan (1) to Shaman (1,2) Island, the place where they sent disgraced officials.

"When they were passing through here, we killed the guards and rescued him," Deng Fei the Fiery-Eyed Lion said. "Then we gathered about 300 men and set up shop here. That Pei Xuan is really handy with his twin swords. Because he's the oldest among the three of us, he is our leader. Please come to our humble fort and talk for a bit."

Deng Fei then told his lackeys to bring over some horses for Dai Zong and Yang Lin. When they got back to the stronghold, Pei Xuan the head chieftain had already been informed, so he was waiting for

them outside. He was indeed a handsome man, with a fair complexion, a stout build, and a calm, steady demeanor that impressed Dai Zong.

The five heroes now went into the hall of honor and exchanged greetings. They then sat down to a feast to celebrate their chance encounter. In the middle of this banquet, Dai Zong started giving a recruitment pitch. He told the three chieftains how Chao Gai and Song Jiang were welcoming men of valor to Liangshan, how they were all one big happy family who shared wealth freely, and how Liangshan had great natural barriers and tons of soldiers so you would never have to worry about the authorities.

The recruitment talk worked, and Pei Xuan said to Dai Zong, “We have about 300 men in our fort, along with a dozen or so carts of treasures and countless grains and horse feed. Brother, if you do not think us unworthy, then please lead us to your great stronghold so we may join you and make some small contribution. What do you think?”

Dai Zong was delighted. “Brother Chao Gai and Brother Song Jiang are all sincerity,” he said. “If we can add your abilities, it would be like adding flowers to embroidery. If you really want to do this, then please start packing. Yang Lin and I have to go to Jizhou (4,1) Prefecture to check on Priest Gongsun. When we come back, we can disguise ourselves as government troops and set out for Liangshan.”

Everyone was ecstatic. After they drank some more, they all went to a pavilion on the backside of the mountain and took in the views. Dai Zong was quite impressed and said, “What beautiful mountain and water views! How did you guys find this place?”

Deng Fei the Fiery-Eyed Lion said, “A few useless chumps used to be holed up here, but then we came and took it from them.”

At that, everyone started laughing, and they resumed drinking in the pavilion until they were all trashed. Then Pei Xuan did a little demonstration with his twin swords for entertainment, which drew rave reviews from Dai Zong before they all turned in for the night.

The next morning, Dai Zong insisted that he and Yang Lin had to get back on the road. The three chieftains tried to keep them but could not, so they saw the two men off the mountain and then went back to their stronghold to start packing.

We will follow Dai Zong and Yang Lin as they continue their journey to find Gongsun Sheng. After traveling for a few more days, they arrived outside Jizhou (4,1) Prefecture and found lodging at an inn. Yang Lin then said to Dai Zong, "Mr. Gongsun is a man of religion, so I think he must be residing in some woods or village in the mountains, not in town."

Dai Zong agreed that yes Gongsun Sheng would be a walking, talking cliché of a Daoist priest, so they started their search in the villages outside the city. But no one knew of any priest named Gongsun. The next day, they got up at the crack of dawn and went to even more distant villages in the vicinity, but again, no one knew Gongsun Sheng. On the third day, Dai Zong suggested they try their luck inside the town, so they went into town and asked a bunch of elderly townspeople, figuring that one of them might know Gongsun Sheng. But the old men all told Dai Zong and Yang Lin that they had never heard of the guy, and maybe they should try the mountains and villages outside the county.

In the midst of their fruitless search in town, Dai Zong and Yang Lin were walking down a big street when they saw a flock of people playing drums and music and congregating around a man who was walking this way. Dai Zong and Yang Lin stood to one side and watched this procession go by. In the front were two low-level jailers, one carrying colorfully wrapped gifts and the other holding bolts of satin and brocade. Behind them was a black silk canopy, providing shade over an executioner. That guy was a fine figure of a man. He wore a gown of embroidered blue indigo. His long eyebrows extended into his sideburns. His eyes were like those of a phoenix, turning up at the corners. His complexion was pale brown, and he had a wispy mustache.

This guy was named Yang (2) Xiong (2). He was not from here originally. He came here with a cousin who had been appointed prefect of Jizhou (4,1) and so he ended up staying here. Later on, a new prefect took office, but that guy also knew him, so he appointed Yang Xiong the warden of the city's two prisons, as well as the official executioner. Yang Xiong was a very skilled fighter, and because of his pale brown complexion, people gave him the nickname "Sick Guan (1) Suo (4)."

Ok, so let's take a minute and explain that nickname. Guan Suo was supposedly the third son of Guan Yu, a legendary general from the Three Kingdoms period, which spanned much of the third century, so about a thousand years before the time of the novel. Those of you who listened to my Three Kingdoms Podcast are no doubt quite familiar with Guan Yu. As for Guan Suo, I said that he was **supposedly** the son of Guan Yu because his name was actually never mentioned in the official historical records from that era. Instead, Guan Suo is a character in the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, the famous historical novel about that period that was written in the 14th century. Interestingly, even in that work, Guan Suo was just a very minor character who played a small role in a couple instances and then exited stage left. So his credentials don't seem like the stuff that heroic nicknames are based on.

So I did some digging, and apparently even though Guan Suo is now barely a blip, back in the Song Dynasty, he was a rather popular fictional or semi-historical character in various folktales. So I guess that makes it a bit more understandable that a novel set in the Song Dynasty would have invoked his name.

Anyway, back to our story. As it turns out, this procession was greeting Yang Xiong after he had just finished executing a criminal. As he walked, a jailer was carrying his executioner's knife while many acquaintances were busy bedecking him with red ribbons and congratulating him on a job well done as they escorted him home. But just then, trouble appeared.

Another group of men suddenly came out and blocked the street, and then seven or eight militiamen appeared from a side street. Their leader was a man named Zhang Bao (2), and people called

the Bucking Goat. He was a soldier in the garrison guarding the town walls, and his cronies were all riffraffs who made a habit of harassing people for money. Even though this Zhang Bao's (2) superiors had reprimanded him multiple times, it did little to curb his antics. Also, this guy had beef with Yang Xiong, mainly because he couldn't stand the fact that people were so in awe of Yang Xiong even though he was an outsider. On this particular day, Zhang Bao (2) and his entourage had been drinking, and when they saw Yang Xiong coming with so many gifts in tow, they decided to stir up some trouble.

Shoving the crowd aside, Zhang Bao pushed his way over to Yang Xiong and said, "Warden, my respects."

"Oh, brother, it's you. Come have a bowl of wine," Yang Xiong said, trying to be polite.

"I don't want wine. I want you to lend me 100 strings of coins."

"Brother, even though I know you, we are not close enough acquaintances for money to change hands, so why are you asking me?"

"You've embezzled all this stuff from the people, so why don't you lend me some?" Zhang Bao pressed.

"But these are gifts from others. How did I embezzle them?" Yang Xiong replied, getting a little annoyed. "Don't you try those antics with me. You are in the military, while I'm part of the civil administration. I don't answer to you."

Zhang Bao, however, gave no reply and instead directed his gang forward, and they helped themselves to the gifts.

"How dare you be so rude!" Yang Xiong shouted angrily. He was just about to teach these riffraffs a lesson, but Zhang Bao grabbed him by the chest, while two of his accomplices grabbed Yang Xiong's arms. Yang Xiong's jailers, meanwhile, made themselves scarce as they wanted no part of this brawl.

Triple-teamed, Yang Xiong was unable to fight, even though he was getting really pissed. Just as he was struggling to get free, a big man was walking past with a load of firewood on a shoulder pole. When

he saw what was happening, this guy put down his firewood, parted the crowd, and tried to make peace.

“Why are you guys beating up this warden?” he asked.

But Zhang Bao put on his mean face and cursed, “You miserable beggar! How dare you come meddle?”

That, however, was the wrong thing to say. The big guy got pissed and in the blink of an eye, he had knocked Zhang Bao to the ground. Zhang Bao’s thugs rushed over to help, but the big guy gave them all a taste of his fist, sending them flying this way and that. And that allowed Yang Xiong to break free. And NOW, there was going to be hell to pay.

Yang Xiong’s fists of fury started flying, and one thug after another hit the ground. Seeing things go sour, Zhang Bao scrambled to his feet and dashed off with a bundle of Yang Xiong’s gifts. But Yang Xiong wasn’t done and stomped after him. While they disappeared down a back alley, the big guy was still busy punching thugs and looking for more people to beat up.

As they looked on, Dai Zong and Yang Lin were secretly impressed. “What a hero!” they said to each. “He saw injustice and leapt into the fray. What a valiant man!”

So they went up to the guy and asked him to spare the riffraffs. They then pulled him into a back alley while Yang Lin carried his firewood for him. Dai Zong took this man by the hand and invited him to a tavern.

Once they sat down, the big guy greeted the two and said, “Brothers, thank you for helping me out of that trouble.”

Dai Zong replied, “We, too, are outsiders. We saw you act in the name of honor, but we were worried that you might accidentally beat one of them too hard and kill someone, so we intervened and asked you here to share three cups of wine so we may get acquainted.”

“Thank you, honorable sirs, for helping me out of that mess and for treating me to wine,” the man said. “I am truly not worthy.”

“As the saying goes, ‘Within the bounds of the four seas, all men are brothers,’ so what’s the big deal?” Yang Lin replied. “Please sit.”

After some haggling over who was deserving of which seat, they finally sat down and summoned the waiter. Yang Lin gave the waiter a tael of silver and told him to just keep the food and wine coming.

After a few cups, Dai Zong asked the big guy for his name.

“My name is Shi (2) Xiu (4),” he said. “I have been learning fighting skills ever since my youth. Whenever I see injustice, I am determined to intervene. So everyone calls me the Daredevil. I accompanied my uncle to this region to buy and sell sheep and horses, but he died on the way, and we lost all our capital, so I couldn’t go home. Instead, I ended up here, scratching out a living by selling firewood.”

Hearing this, Dai Zong said, “The two of us came here on some business and had the great fortune of meeting you. How can such a valiant be reduced to selling firewood for a living? How can you get by on that? Why don’t you become part of the jianghu scene and live the high life?”

“Alas, I just know some fighting skills, nothing else,” Shi Xiu said. “How can I make it big and live the high life?”

“In these times, it doesn’t pay to be too proper,” Dai Zong said. “The emperor is muddleheaded, and corrupt officials keep him in the dark. An acquaintance of mine got fed up and went off to join Song Jiang’s gang of outlaws on Liangshan. Now, he’s got plenty of gold, silver, and clothes. And whenever the court grants them amnesty, he’s going to be an official.”

Shi Xiu sighed and said, “I would like to go, but I have no way in.”

“Hero, if you are willing to go, then I can introduce you,” Dai Zong said.

“Sirs, dare I ask who you are?” Shi Xiu inquired.

“My name is Dai Zong, and this brother is named Yang Lin.”

“I’ve heard people on the jianghu scene talk of a Magic Traveler from Jiangzhou Prefecture. Is that you?”

“Indeed,” Dai Zong replied. He then told Yang Lin to fetch a 10-tael piece of silver and give it to Shi Xiu. After more back-and-forth, Shi Xiu finally accepted the silver.

Shi Xiu was just about to talk more with Dai Zong and Yang Lin about going to join the gang when suddenly, they heard someone come into the tavern. It was the warden and executioner Yang Xiong, followed by 20-some officers. Seeing so many cops, Dai Zong and Yang Lin got worried and quickly snuck out amid the hubbub.

Shi Xiu got up and greeted Yang Xiong, who told him, “Brother, I’ve been looking everywhere for you. Turns out you’re here drinking. Those knaves got the jump on me and I couldn’t fight back. Thank you so much for saving me. I was too wrapped up in chasing down that knave and getting my stuff back that I forgot about you. And then these friends of mine heard that I was involved in a fight, so they came to help and we got all my stuff back. Then I went looking for you and someone said that two travelers had invited you to a tavern, so I came looking.”

Shi Xiu said, “Yes, they were just passing through and invited me here for a few cups and some idle chit-chat. I didn’t realize you were looking for me.”

As they introduced themselves to each other, Yang Xiong was delighted to have met Shi Xiu’s acquaintance, especially given that Shi Xiu looked every bit the man of valor. Yang Xiong now asked where Shi Xiu’s drinking buddies went, and Shi Xiu told him, “When they saw you and your entourage, they thought you were looking for trouble, so they went off.”

“Oh well,” Yang Xiong said. “Tell the waiter to bring two jugs of wine first, and let everyone have three big bowls. And then we can all reconvene tomorrow.”



Once everyone else drank their fill and left, Yang Xiong said to Shi Xiu, "Brother, please don't think me too forward. But you have no relatives here, so how about we become sworn brothers?"

Shi Xiu was delighted. Yang Xiong was 29 and Shi Xiu 28, so Shi Xiu kowtowed four times as they swore the oath of brotherhood. Yang Xiong was equally happy, and they asked for more wine and got ready for a bender to celebrate.

While they were drinking, they suddenly saw another group of men come into the tavern. This was a Mr. Pan (1), who was Yang Xiong's father-in-law, along with six or seven helpers.

"Father-in-law, what are you doing here?" Yang Xiong asked as he stood up.

"I heard you were fighting with someone, so I came to look for you."

"Thanks to this Brother Shi Xiu intervening to save me, we beat that Zhang Bao so badly that he's going to be afraid of my shadow. And I just became sworn brothers with Shi Xiu."

Mr. Pan was quite happy to hear that. They now gave the helpers a few bowls of wine each and sent them on their way. Then, Mr. Pan joined the two newly sworn brothers at their table for more wine. He, too, was quite impressed by Shi Xiu's physique, and he told Shi Xiu, "With a brother like you to help him, no one will dare to mess with my son-in-law! What line of work were you originally in?"

"My late father was a butcher," Shi Xiu said.

"And do you know that trade?" Mr. Pan asked.

Shi Xiu chuckled and replied, "I grew up in a butcher's house, so how can I not know the trade?"

"I used to be a butcher, too," Mr. Pan said. "But I've given it up because I'm too old. I just have this son-in-law now, and since he's working for the government, I've given up my old business."

The three men kept shooting the breeze as they drank. After they settled the bill, Shi Xiu picked up his load of firewood and the three men headed back to Yang Xiong's house. As soon as they entered the front door, Yang Xiong shouted, "Wife, come meet your brother-in-law!"

A fabric curtain went up and a voice from inside answered, "Husband, what brother are you talking about?"

"Come out and meet him first; ask questions later."

At that, a woman swayed out from the house. Her name was Pan (1) Qiaoyun (3,2), which meant Witty Cloud. She used to be married to a local magisterial clerk named Wang (2), but he died two years ago, and she has been remarried to Yang Xiong for less than a year. And right here, the novel spills quite a bit of ink describing her appearance, everything from her eyes to her lips, to her waist, to her chest, to her legs, and so on. Basically, she was quite the looker and not afraid to show off the goods either. Uh oh. You know what that means in this novel.

Shi Xiu quickly greeted Pan Qiaoyun and asked her to sit down so he can kowtow to her.

"I am too young to accept such courtesy," she said.

"He's my new sworn brother," Yang Xiong said. "That makes you his sister-in-law, so you can accept half a courtesy from him."

Shi Xiu now kneeled in a dramatic motion and kowtowed four times, then Pan Qiaoyun returned two curtsies. They then invited Shi Xiu inside and cleaned up a room for him. The next day, before Yang Xiong went off to work, he instructed his household to arrange for some clothes for Shi Xiu and to go fetch his luggage from the inn that he had been staying at.

Before we get too far into the Yang Xiong-Shi Xiu story arc, let's quickly tie up a loose end. After Dai Zong and Yang Lin scampered out of the tavern yesterday, they went back to their own inn. For the next two days, they continued their search for Gongsun Sheng, but with no luck. So they decided to go back to Liangshan for the time being. They packed up and headed back to Horse Watering Valley, where they had met the bandit chieftains Pei (2) Xuan (1), Deng (4) Fei (1), and Meng (4) Kang (1). Those three

chieftains were all packed and ready to go, so they disguised themselves as government troops and returned to Liangshan, where the new recruits were greeted with the usual days of feasting.

Alright, now then, let's jump back to Yang Xiong's home in Jizhou Prefecture. While Yang Xiong was busy with his duties as warden and executioner, his father-in-law, Mr. Pan, was proposing a business venture to Shi Xiu, the newest member of the household. He wanted to open a butcher shop, since Shi Xiu came from that line of work.

"Behind our back door is a deadend lane," Mr. Pan said. "There is an empty building back there, and there's also a well so it's convenient to get water. That can be the butcher shop, and you can live there and oversee everything."

Shi Xiu agreed, so Mr. Pan found him an assistant, and they set up all the equipment, like the counters, the water basin, the chopping block, and of course, lots and lots of knives. They also set up a pig pen and acquired a dozen or so fat hogs. They picked an auspicious day to open their business, and all the neighbors and relatives came to congratulate them and they partied for a couple days. Yang Xiong's family was quite happy with the new business, and so everything went smoothly as Mr. Pan and Shi Xiu tended to their new business.

In this way, two months flew by and it was now getting to be late autumn, and Shi Xiu changed to a bunch of new clothes. One day, he got up early and went out of the county to buy more pigs. Three days later, he came home to find the butcher shop closed. When he went inside, he saw that all the chopping blocks and knives had been stored away.

Now, Shi Xiu is a pretty sharp guy. When he saw this, he immediately figured he knew what was going on.

"Like the old saying goes, 'The good times don't last forever, and all flowers must fade,' " he thought to himself. "My brother is busy tending to his work. His wife must be speaking ill about me because she

saw all the new clothes I've put on. And someone must be grumbling and raising suspicions about me while I've been gone these last couple days, so they've decided to shut down the business. Fine, I won't wait around for them to ask me to leave. I'll take my leave of them first and go home. Like the old saying goes, 'Who can plan for the long term?' "

So he put the pigs in the pen and then went to his room to change and pack his stuff. He then wrote up a detailed accounting of the finances and went into the house to see Mr. Pan. Mr. Pan had just set up a vegetarian meal, so he invited Shi Xiu to sit down for a cup of wine.

"You must be tired after driving those pigs back here," Mr. Pan said. "Thank you for your efforts."

"Sir, that is something I should do," Shi Xiu said. "Here are the books. If there is anything amiss in there, may heaven and earth smite me."

Uhh, dude, lighten up.

"Why are you talking like that?" Mr. Pan said. "There's nothing amiss."

"I've been away from home for six or seven years now, and I would like to go home for a visit," Shi Xiu said. "So I'm giving you the books now. Tonight, I will say goodbye to my brother, and I'll be gone tomorrow morning."

When he heard this, Mr. Pan caught Shi Xiu's drift and he started laughing.

"You misunderstood!" he said to Shi Xiu. "Just hold on and I'll explain."

To see what explanation Mr. Pan will give, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, Shi Xiu discovers there's more going on in his new home than just a butcher shop. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!