

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 71.

Last time, Song Jiang and company got a bloody nose when they tried to brute-force their way into the Zhu Family Manor. After having two chieftains captured by the enemy and spending the night stumbling around the labyrinth that was Zhu Family Village, they decided to ask for help. They went to see Li Ying the Striking Haw, the patriarch of the village to the east. Li Ying had been an ally of the Zhus, but that alliance went up in flames when the youngest Zhu brother, Zhu Biao, shot him with an arrow during an earlier squabble. Still, Li Ying didn't feel like meeting with rebels and outlaws, so he declined a face-to-face with Song Jiang. But his steward, Du Xing, gave Song Jiang and company some really helpful intel about the roads around here. Or at least, it would have been really useful had they gotten that intel before their foolhardy attack the night before.

Anyway, Song Jiang and company now returned to camp and told everyone how Li Ying refused to see them. Li Kui the Black Whirlwind scoffed, "Brother, you went there with good intentions and gifts, but that bastard won't even see you. Let me take 300 men and go smash open his damn house and drag his ass out to pay his respects to you."

"Brother, you don't understand," Song Jiang said. "He's a wealthy, law-abiding citizen. Why would he risk meeting with us?"

"That bastard must be a little kid; he's shy!" Li Kui chuckled, and everyone had a good laugh before returning their attention to the present dilemma.

"Two of our brothers have been captured, and we don't even know if they are dead or alive," Song Jiang said. "Everyone, you must put forth every effort and help me attack the Zhu Family Manor again."

"Brother, who would dare to disobey your command?" everyone said in unison. "Who are you sending first?"

"Hell, you guys are all afraid of those little punks, so let me go first!" Li Kui scoffed.

"No, you're not suited to be the vanguard," Song Jiang said, and Li Kui hung his head and pouted.

Instead, Song Jiang decided he would personally lead the vanguard with four other chieftains. The rest of the forces were divided into two more battalions to provide backup. Song Jiang then set out with 150 cavalry and 1,000 infantry, and marched on the Zhu Family Manor.

They soon arrived in front of Lone Dragon Ridge, and Song Jiang got his first good look at the manor. It was a truly impressive structure. Situated atop the ridge, it was defended by a wide moat and large willow trees. Its walls were lined with weapons and stout soldiers. By the front gate were two white banners with large characters that said, "Fill in the marsh and capture Chao Gai. Stomp flat Liangshan and take Song Jiang."

When Song Jiang saw those banners, he flew into a rage and swore to himself, "If I do not sack this place, I will never return to Liangshan!"

When the other chieftains heard that, they all got pissed, too. By now, the second battalion had arrived to attack the front, so Song Jiang led his vanguard and swung around to the back of Lone Dragon Ridge to see if there were any vulnerabilities there. But they were greeted with a stout defense there as well. Just as they were checking out the rear of the ridge, they saw an army charging toward them from the west. Song Jiang left half of his troops to keep watch on the back gates of the manor, while he led two chieftains and the other half of the men to go meet this incoming army.

From around a hill about 30 riders appeared, surrounding a stunning female warrior. This was Hu Sanniang, the daughter of Old Squire Hu (4) and the fiancée of the Zhus' youngest son. She rode a black-maned steed and wielded a pair of curved sabers. About 500 men followed her as they rushed to help the Zhus.

"I've heard that the Hu family has a formidable female warrior; this must be her," Song Jiang said. "Who dares to go fight her?"

Before he finished his question, one of the two chieftains with him, Wang Ying the Stumpy Tiger, had already galloped forth. So, if you remember, this Wang Ying was a real horn dog, so when he heard

that it was a woman coming this way, he eagerly volunteered to “meet” her. With battle cries roaring from both sides, Wang Ying and Hu Sanniang faced off, him wielding a spear and her with her twin sabers.

After a dozen bouts or so, however, Song Jiang could see that Wang Ying was starting to falter. Now, when he first saw Hu Sanniang, Wang Ying was so taken with her that he couldn’t wait to capture her for himself. But that was proving much easier said than done. In fact, he was the one who seemed on the verge of being captured. And yet, despite all that, he kept flirting with her even while they were hacking at each other, flashing her a smile here and a wink there.

Hu Sanniang was like, “Seriously? Can a woman please just go about her job without being harassed in the workplace?!” But in this case, she had an easy solution to that problem. She started hacking at Wang Ying even harder, and he was no match for her. So he turned and rode away, but she caught up to him and easily lifted him off his saddle with one hand and threw him toward her soldiers. They immediately pounced on him the second he hit the ground, and dragged him away.

Seeing his comrade get taken prisoner, Ou Peng, the other chieftain with Song Jiang, rode out to try to save him, and Hu Sanniang took him on as well. That Ou Peng was originally a military man, so he was very handy with a spear. In fact, his skills greatly impressed Song Jiang. And yet, even he could not gain any advantage against Hu Sanniang. Another chieftain, Deng Fei the Fiery-Eyed Lion, now charged in to help, swinging his iron chain.

When the Zhu family saw this from their walls, they were afraid that Hu Sanniang would slip up, so they quickly opened up their back gate, and the eldest son, Zhu Long (2), charged out with 300 men and made straight for Song Jiang. The chieftain Ma Lin (2) saw them and rode forth to fight Zhu Long, while the chieftain Deng Fei stayed right next to Song Jiang, just in case anything happened. Song Jiang saw that Ma Lin wasn’t a match for Zhu Long and that Ou Peng couldn’t beat Hu Sanniang, and he was starting to panic.

Just then, though, another army charged onto the scene, led by the chieftain Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt. He had heard commotion from the back of the ridge, so he rushed over to provide backup, and Song Jiang was quite happy to see him.

“General Qin, go take Ma Lin’s place!” Song Jiang shouted.

Qin Ming was, of course, impatient by nature, and the Zhus had captured his disciple Huang Xin last night, so he was already in a bad mood. He made straight for Zhu Long, swinging his wolf-toothed mace, and Zhu Long hoisted his spear to meet him. The chieftain Ma Lin, meanwhile, led some men to go try to rescue Wang Ying the Stumpy Tiger. When Hu Sanniang saw that, she broke off the fight with Ou Peng and went to fight Ma Lin instead. Both of them wielded twin sabers, and their steel flashed and shimmered as they traded blows.

Meanwhile, Qin Ming and Zhu Long had fought for 10 bouts, and Zhu Long was no match for Qin Ming. Seeing this, the Zhu family’s arms instructor Luan (2) Tingyu (2,4) rode out to help. The chieftain Ou Peng went to meet him. Luan Tingyu didn’t engage and instead just rode off to the side. Ou Peng gave chase, but that was a mistake. Luan Tingyu, as it turns out, was handy with a throwing mallet. When Ou Peng got close, he suddenly saw a mallet flying toward him. He couldn’t dodge in time and was smacked in the face and tumbled off his horse.

The chieftain Deng Fei hollered for his men to go save Ou Peng while he engaged Luan Tingyu. The bandit lackeys helped Ou Peng back on his horse. Meanwhile, the eldest Zhu brother, Zhu Long, gave up the fight with Qin Ming and ran, and Luan Tingyu took his place. He and Qin Ming fought for 20 bouts and were evenly matched. After a few more exchanges, Luan Tingyu turned and retreated, and Qin Ming gave chase. Luan Tingyu galloped into some tall grass, and Qin Ming followed. Unfortunately for Qin Ming, this was a trap. Just as he rode into the grass, a wire was pulled up in front him, tripping up his horse. A swarm of men immediately converged on Qin Ming and subdued him.

Seeing this, the chieftain Deng Fei rushed over to help Qin Ming. But when he saw more trip wires, he quickly halted and tried to turn back, but it was too late. Cries rang out from all around him, and soon he found himself snagged by a barrage of hooks on ropes flung in his direction, and the Zhu family's men captured him as well.

Seeing two more chieftains get hauled away, Song Jiang went ah crap! The chieftain Ma Lin now broke off his fight with Hu Sanniang and rushed over to protect Song Jiang as they retreated south. Behind them, the combined forces of the Zhu and Hu families gave chase. Ahead of Song Jiang, the road came to a sudden dead end. He thought he was done for, but just then, about 500 men appeared from the south, led by the chieftain Mu Hong (2) the Unrestrained. From the southeast came another 300-some men, led by Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu, the guys who started this beef with the Zhu family. At the same time, from the northeast came another force, led by Hua Rong the archer. All these guys were top-notch warriors, so Song Jiang was quite happy to see them. They converged and made straight for the Zhu family forces, which were led by Zhu Long the eldest son and Luan Tingyu the arms instructor.

Seeing the tide of battle turning yet again, the Zhu family was worried that their guys would take a beating, so while the middle brother Zhu Hu (3) guarded the back door, the youngest brother Zhu Biao led 500-some men and charged out to join the fight. The two sides scrummed behind the ridge. Meanwhile, the Liangshan chieftains Li Jun the River Dragon, Zhang Heng the Boat Flame, and Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves tried to swim across the moat, but were repelled by a barrage of arrows. The rest of the Liangshan forces could only shout from the opposite bank.

As the scrum dragged on, it was starting to get dark. Seeing this, Song Jiang told the chieftain Ma Lin to escort the injured chieftain Ou Peng out of the village first, and then he told the bandit lackeys to ring the gong to signal retreat, and all the Liangshan forces now fell back, fighting as they went.

Song Jiang personally rode through the melee to make sure everyone was going the right way. But suddenly, he saw Hu Sanniang galloping toward him. He had no chieftain around to protect him, so he turned and rode off toward the east. Hu Sanniang gave chase and she was closing rapidly. Just as she was about to strike, however, someone roared from a hill up ahead.

“You trollop! Leave my brother alone!”

This was none other than Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, accompanied by about 80 lackeys as he stomped toward Hu Sanniang. Seeing this throng of enemies coming toward her, Hu Sanniang dashed off toward some woods. But just then, from those woods emerged about a dozen riders, led by Lin Chong the Panther Head.

“Stop, you trollop!” Lin Chong shouted. Hu Sanniang spurred on her horse and hoisted her sabers as she made for Lin Chong. Lin Chong raised his spear to take her on. Before they had reached 10 bouts, Lin Chong gave Hu Sanniang an opening, enticing her into taking a big hack at him. He parried her blow with his spear and in the same moment, he reached over and lifted her off her saddle, a move that drew a shout of approval from Song Jiang.

Lin Chong told his men to tie up Hu Sanniang, and then he rode over to check on Song Jiang. Song Jiang now told Li Kui to go meet the rest of the Liangshan forces as they were retreating and tell them to regroup outside the entrance to the village and that they must not linger on the battlefield now that darkness was descending. While Li Kui stomped off, Lin Chong escorted Song Jiang out of the village, with their prisoner Hu Sanniang in tow.

While the Liangshan forces rushed out of the village, the Zhu family forces returned to their manor, leaving behind countless dead in the village. In this one fight, they had captured two more chieftains, Qin Ming and Deng Fei. And their allies the Hus had captured another, Wang Ying, which they promptly handed over to the Zhu family. The Zhus put all these chieftains into prisoner carts. Once they capture Song Jiang, they would take them all to the capital for rewards.

Outside the village, Song Jiang and the Liangshan forces set up camp for the night. He then dispatched four chieftains, along with 20 veteran lackeys, to take the prisoner Hu Sanniang up to Liangshan. "Put her in the care of my father, and then report back," he told them. "Once I get back to the stronghold, I will deal with her."

Now, all the chieftains just figured that honorable Brother Song wanted that woman for himself, so they made sure to treat her gently on the way. They also put the injured chieftain Ou Peng on a cart and took him back to Liangshan to recover. Once they left, Song Jiang sat up in his tent all night, worried and annoyed.

The next day, word came that a reinforcement of 500 men had arrived, led by Wu Yong the military strategist, the three Ruan brothers, and the halberd twins, Lü (3) Fang (1) and Guo (1) Sheng (4). Song Jiang quickly welcomed them and invited Wu Yong to his tent. Wu Yong had also brought some wine and food for Song Jiang and the troops, which were promptly distributed.

"Brother Chao Gai heard that you suffered some setbacks, so he sent me and the other five chieftains to come help you," Wu Song said to Song Jiang. "How goes the fight in recent days?"

"It's a long story," Song Jiang sighed. He then recounted everything that's happened, including all the chieftains that had been captured or wounded.

"I don't know what to do in the current situation," he lamented. "If I cannot sack the Zhu Family Manor and rescue our brothers, I would rather die here than to go back and face Brother Chao."

Wu Yong chuckled and proceeded to cheer up Song Jiang. Then, as they sat talking, a soldier reported that Hu (4) Cheng (2), the son of the Old Squire Hu (4) from the manor to the west, was there to see Song Jiang with wine and oxen in tow. Song Jiang invited him in. Hu Cheng bowed and said, "My sister Hu Sanniang was rash, and she's young and didn't know any better. She offended you and was

captured by you. I hope you can forgive her. She is engaged to one of the Zhu family's sons, and got tangled in this mess in a moment of misplaced valor. If you can release her, we will give you whatever you need."

Song Jiang asked Hu Cheng to sit down, and then told him, "Those knaves from the Zhu family are quite rude. They decided to pick on us for no reason. That's why we had to mobilize our forces to seek revenge. We have no quarrel with your family. It's just that your sister captured our chieftain Wang Ying, so we had to respond in kind and captured your sister. If you release Wang Ying to me, then I'll give your sister back to you."

"But the Zhus have already taken him from our custody," Hu Cheng said.

"So where is Wang Ying now?" Wu Yong asked.

"He's locked up at the Zhu Family Manor. I would not dare to go ask for his release."

"If you can't deliver Wang Ying to me, how can I release your sister?" Song Jiang said sternly.

Wu Yong chimed in and said, "Brother, let's not be too harsh. Just listen to me." He then turned to Hu Cheng and said, "Sooner or later, there's going to be some commotion at the Zhu Family Manor. When that happens, your people must not come to their aid. And if anyone from the Zhu family runs to your place for refuge, you just apprehend them. If you do that, then we can return your sister. But she's not here right now. She's been sent back to our stronghold, where she is in the care of Old Squire Song. Go on back and don't worry. We know what we're doing."

"Of course I would not dare to go help the Zhus," Hu Cheng said. "And if anyone from there flees to our manor, we will bound them and bring them to you."

"If you can do that, that'd be better than giving me gold or fine silk," Song Jiang said. Hu Cheng then took his leave.

A couple days later, the sentries at the backdoor of the Zhu Family Manor saw a group coming toward them in the distance. As the group neared, the sentries could see that they were carrying banners that said, "Major Sun (1) Li (4) of Dengzhou (1,1) Prefecture." The sentries quickly reported this to their masters.

When the arms instructor Luan (2) Tingyu (2,4) heard this, he told the Zhu brothers, "That Major Sun is my sworn brother. We studied martial arts under the same master when we were kids. I don't know what he's doing here though."

So Luan Tingyu rode out with about 20 men, lowered the drawbridge, and greeted Sun Li, who dismounted and returned the greeting.

"Brother, you're stationed at Dengzhou (1,1), so what are you doing here?" Luan Tingyu asked.

"The high command has transferred me to Yunzhou (4,1) Prefecture in this area to guard against the Liangshan bandits," Sun Li replied. "We were passing through here, and I knew that you were at the Zhu Family Manor, so we came to see you. We were going to come to the front door, but we saw a lot of troops stationed outside the front entrance to the village. We didn't want any confrontations, so we swung around and got directions to come to the back door to see you."

Luan Tingyu told him, "We've been fighting the Liangshan bandits the past few days. We already captured a few of their chieftains. Once we capture their leader Song Jiang, we will take them all to the authorities. It's a gift from heaven to have you transferred here. It's like adding flowers to an embroidery, bringing rain to parched young grass."

Sun Li chuckled and said, "I may be untalented, but I can help you capture those rogues."

Luan Tingyu was delighted and invited Sun Li and his entourage into the manor. Once they changed into fresh clothes, Sun Li and company went to pay their respects to the Zhus.

"This is my sworn brother Sun Li," Luan Tingyu said to the Zhus as he made the introductions. "He was a major at Dengzhou Prefecture. He has been transferred here to defend Yunzhou (4,1)."

The patriarch of the family, Zhu Chaofeng (2,4), greeted Sun Li and said, "Then I am also under your jurisdiction."

"I am but a lowly officer; no need for such courtesy," Sun Li said. "I will no doubt rely on your guidance."

After some more pleasantries, Sun Li asked how the fight was going. Zhu Long, the eldest son, told him, "We've fought them to a standstill. You all must be tired from your long journey."

Sun Li now summoned his wife and his brother's wife, and told them to go pay their respects to the Zhu family's women. Meanwhile, he introduced his hosts to his entourage, which included three of his brothers, an officer that Yunzhou Prefecture had sent to fetch him, and two other officers who escorted him from Dengzhou Prefecture. The Zhus then busied themselves with throwing a welcome banquet for their new reinforcement.

Three days later, sentries reported that Song Jiang and his bandits were marching on the manor again.

"I'll go capture that crook myself!" said Zhu Biao, the youngest brother. He rounded up 100-some cavalry and rode out. He saw a force of about 500 coming toward the manor, led by a chieftain who was wearing a bow and a quiver of arrows and wielding a spear. This was Hua Rong, the chieftain known for his unrivaled archery skills.

Zhu Biao rode forth to take on Hua Rong, and the two of them traded blows in front of Lone Dragon Ridge. After about a dozen bouts, neither had the upper hand, but Hua Rong feigned a blow and turned and rode away. Zhu Biao was just about to give chase, but someone in his army alerted him that Hua Rong was quite the archer. Fearing that this was a trick, Zhu Biao decided to let Hua Rong go and took his men back inside the manor instead. And Hua Rong also left with his troops.

When Zhu Biao went back into the rear parlor, Major Sun Li, the leader of the new reinforcements, asked him if he had caught any bandits.

“There was a guy named Hua Rong in their ranks,” Zhu Biao said. “He was quite skilled with the spear. We fought for 50-some bouts, but then that rogue ran away. I was just about to chase him, but our men warned me that he was a great marksman, so both sides just fell back.”

Hearing this, Sun Li said, “Tomorrow let me go capture a few of those knaves.”

They drank and made merry the rest of the night before turning in. The next morning, word came that the bandits were back again. This time, all three Zhu brothers donned their armor and rode out. They could hear the war drums and see the enemy’s banners in the distance. Soon, the bandits were lined up for battle. Atop the manor walls sat the Zhu family patriarch Zhu Chaofeng (2,4), flanked by his arms instructor Luan (2) Tingyu (2,4) and the newcomer Sun Li.

From the ranks of the bandits, Lin Chong the Panther Head started challenging for battle. Zhu Long, the eldest Zhu brother, got irritated and ordered his men to lower the drawbridge. He rode out with a couple hundred men and made for Lin Chong. As the battle drums rolled, he and Lin Chong traded blows for 30-some bouts without a winner.

The second brother Zhu Hu now rode out to help, but before he was even done issuing his challenge, a chieftain had already ridden out to take him on. This was Mu (4) Hong (2) the Unrestrained. They fought for 30-some bouts, also without a winner.

Zhu Biao, the youngest brother, now rode out with 200-some men to help. He was quickly met by Yang Xiong, one of the guys who was responsible for starting this whole brouhaha.

Watching all this action from the top of the wall, Major Sun Li couldn’t stand it anymore. He told his younger brother to bring him his armor and weapons, which included a spear and a short steel rod with

ridges. He then galloped out to the front lines. The three chieftains from Liangshan who were out fighting now pulled back and reined in their horses, standing at the front of the lines.

“Watch me go capture them,” Sun Li said as he trotted forward. He then shouted toward the bandits: “Who among you has some skills? Come out and face me!”

Immediately, the sound of horse bells could be heard as a rider galloped out. This was Shi Xiu the Daredevil, another of the trio of outlaws who started this feud. He raised his spear and took on Sun Li. They went back and forth for 50 bouts. Then, suddenly, Sun Li pretended to leave an opening, and Shi Xiu tried to stab him, but this was a trick. Sun Li dodged the blow and easily lifted Shi Xiu off his horse, carried him back to the Zhu family’s lines, and tossed him onto the ground, whereupon his men immediately tied up Shi Xiu.

With momentum on their side, the Zhu brothers directed their forces to attack, and Song Jiang’s army quickly fell back. The Zhus then returned to their manor and congratulated Sun Li on his victory.

“How many bandits have we captured?” he asked.

The family patriarch Zhu Chaofeng tallied up the total and told him they had captured seven bandit chieftains in all, starting with that chicken thief Shi Qian all the way up to the freshly captured Shi Xiu.

“Don’t hurt any of them,” Sun Li said. “Put them in seven prisoner carts. Give them some wine and food so they don’t starve. If they look skinny, it will make us look bad. Once we capture Song Jiang, we’ll take them all to the capital, and all the land will sing the praises of the three heroes of the Zhu Family Manor.”

“Major, thank you so much for your help,” Zhu Chaofeng said. “Those Liangshan bandits are destined to fall.”

And so they feasted again the rest of the day. The next morning, around 8 a.m., they were all just sitting around after breakfast when suddenly word came that the bandits were back, and this time, they were attacking on four sides.

“It won’t matter if it were 10 sides,” Sun Li scoffed. “No need to worry. Just get ready with your hooks and ropes. We must capture them alive; dead ones don’t count.”

They then went to the top of the walls to check out the situation. They saw Lin Chong the Panther Head leading the siege on the east side of the manor with about 500 men. Hua Rong the archer was leading the siege on the west side. From the south came Mu Hong, Yang Xiong, and Li Kui the Black Whirlwind. And outside the front gates to the north was Song Jiang leading the main force. The bandits had surrounded the manor.

Unfazed, the Zhus immediately deployed their counterattack. Luan (2) Tingyu (2,4) the arms instructor would go out the back door and attack the enemies to the northwest. Zhu Long the eldest brother would go take on the enemies on the east side. Zhu Hu the middle brother would go out the back door and attack the enemies to the southwest. And Zhu Biao the youngest brother would go out the front gates to capture Song Jiang.

Three rounds of battle drums now thundered from atop the walls, followed by a signal rocket. The front and back gates of the manor flung open and the Zhus’ armies flooded out to take on the bandits.

But just as the action was heating up outside the manor, things were literally getting hot inside the estate as well. In fact, when the Zhu brothers turned back to look at their home, they were astonished to see it engulfed in flames and the cries of men being slaughtered.

What is going on? To find out, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we take a little trip back in time. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!