

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 73.

Last time, we went back in time and took a little detour from the battlefield outside the Zhu Family Manor to the seaside prefecture of Dengzhou (1,1), where two hunters, the Xie brothers, had been falsely imprisoned. A jailer named Yue (4) He (2), who was the younger brother of the wife of the brother-in-law of the Xie brothers' father's younger sister's daughter, had gotten word out to said female relative, an Amazon-like warrior named Gu Dasao. She immediately hatched a plan to spring her cousins out of jail. But to do this, she needed some muscle, so she recruited slash conscripted her husband's older brother, Major Sun Li, who was also the son of the Xie brothers' mother's older brother.

As we rejoin the narrative, Major Sun Li, perhaps still trying to figure out this mess of a family tree, had agreed to help, since Gu Dasao was threatening to fight him to the death if he didn't. Now, they put their plan into motion.

First, they sent Zou (1) Yuan (1), a local outlaw who had also been recruited for this operation, back to his bandit lair to pack up his stuff and round up his men. Meanwhile, Sun Xin (1), Gu Dasao's husband and Sun Li's younger brother, went into town and looped in Yue He the jailer on their plan, and Yue He in turn told the brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao to be ready for their jailbreak.

The next day, Zou Yuan returned with his loot and men, including his nephew-in-name-but-brother-in-age-and-crime Zou Run (4). Sun Xin rounded up seven or eight trusted men from his tavern staff, and Sun Li had the dozen or so militiamen that he had brought. In all, they had about 40 people. Sun Xin slaughtered two pigs and a sheep, and everyone ate a hearty meal. And then, they set out.

Later that day at the prison, Yue He was standing watch by the inside of the front door when suddenly, the doorbell rang.

"Who is it?" Yue He asked aloud.

“A woman, delivering food for the prisoners,” a female voice answered on the other side of the door.

Yue He immediately opened the door, Gu Dasao slipped in, and he pointed her in the direction of the Xie brothers' cell. The corrupt warden happened to be sitting in a pavilion in the prison courtyard. When he saw Gu Dasao, he immediately shouted, “Hey, who is that woman?! How dare she come in here to deliver food to prisoners? No outsiders are allowed!”

Yue He replied, “She is Xie Zhen and Xie Bao's older sister; she came to bring them some food.”

“Don't let her into the dungeon!” the warden barked. “You take her food to them.”

So Yue He took the food and went in the dungeon to see the Xie brothers. They asked how the plan was going, and he told them, “Your cousin is already in here. She's just waiting for backup.”

As he spoke, he unlocked their restraints. Just then, another jailer rushed over to the warden in the courtyard and said, “Major Sun Li is knocking on the front door, demanding to come in.”

“He's a garrison officer. What the hell is he doing in my prison?” the warden said angrily. “Don't open the door!”

While he was distracted, Gu Dasao quietly stepped out of the pavilion. Meanwhile, someone else shouted from outside: “Major Sun is getting tired of waiting!”

The warden was really pissed now, and he stepped out of the pavilion, ready to go give Sun Li a piece of his mind. But just then, Gu Dasao shouted, “Where are my cousins?!” as she pulled out two shimmering knives. The warden saw that trouble was afoot, and his first instinct was to run. But he ran smack dab into the Xie brothers, who were coming out of the dungeon while holding the cangues that they had been wearing. Before the warden could react, Xie Bao had introduced his face to a piece of the cangue, and the blow was so hard that it smashed in the warden's head.

Gu Dasao, meanwhile, had already cut down four or five jailers, and now she, Yue He, and the Xie brothers all stormed out of the prison. Outside, they were met by Sun Li and Sun Xin, and the whole

group immediately ran toward the front of the prefectural office compound. Meanwhile, the uncle-and-nephew tandem of Zou Yuan (1) and Zou Run (4) emerged from the prefecture office, holding the head of the crooked magisterial clerk who had conspired to frame the Xie brothers.

Shouting as they ran through the streets, the group sprinted out of town. Bringing up the rear was Sun Li, with his bow drawn and an arrow nocked. Everyone on the street ran inside their homes and shut their doors. The soldiers and cops in town all recognized Sun Li and knew what he could do, so nobody dared to get in his way.

The rescue party left the town and ran back to Gu Dasao's tavern. There, they helped Sun Li's wife into a carriage, while Gu Dasao hopped on a horse and escorted her sister-in-law.

Meanwhile, Xie Zhen and Xie Bao said to everyone else, "We can't leave before we pay back that bastard Old Squire Mao (2)."

"Quite right," said Sun Li, who all the sudden went from reluctant accomplice to bloodthirsty ringleader.

So while Sun Xin and Yue He escorted the families and went on ahead, Sun Li, Xie Zhen, Xie Bao, Zou Yuan, and Zou Run took a bunch of men and made for Old Squire Mao's estate. Turns out, the old squire was celebrating his birthday, and was drinking with his son. They were completely caught off guard when the outlaws crashed in. Within a matter of minutes, everyone in the house lay dead, while the raiding party helped themselves to bundles of gold and silver, as well as some good horses. Xie Zhen and Xie Bao even picked out a few nice outfits for themselves. I guess if you're going to get framed for theft, you might as well get your money's worth.

After looting the place, they set fire to it and then left to join the rest of their party. They met up about 10 miles down the road and traveled together. And along the way, they seized a few more horses from some other random households, just because, I guess.

So, where was this crew going? If you hadn't guessed by now, they were on their way to Liangshan, where one of them knew a guy. Three guys, actually. When they were planning their rescue, the bandit Zou Yuan had told them that Liangshan was the perfect refuge and he knew three chieftains there -- Yang Lin the Multicolored Leopard, Deng Fei the Fiery-Eyed Lion, and Shi Yong the Stone General. So now, they were on their way to join the gang.

As this little group of rabble-rousers rode off into the sunset, let's flash forward back to the present and back to the battlefield outside the Zhu Family Manor, unpaused, and watch everyone resume killing each other. In the midst of the carnage, the Zhu Family Manor suddenly burst into flames.

As you may have guessed, this was the handiwork of none other than Sun Li and company. When they had stopped into one of Liangshan's tavern outposts, they learned about the bandits' feud with the Zhus. And they learned that two of the Liangshan chieftains they knew, Yang Lin and Deng Fei, were among the ones captured by the enemy.

Sun Li immediately noted that he was a sworn brother of the Zhu family's arms instructor, and offered to use that to the bandits' advantage. Back in episode 71, when Liangshan's military strategist Wu Yong paid a visit to a moping Song Jiang, this was the news he went to deliver. A couple days after that, Sun Li and company were introducing themselves to the Zhus. Unbeknownst to the Zhus, they were welcoming a Trojan horse, or a large wooden badger, into their manor. In fact, among Sun Li's entourage were four Liangshan bandits: Pei (2) Xuan (1) the former magisterial clerk, Xiao (1) Rang (4) the scribe with the really good handwriting, Jin (1) Dajian (4,1) the guy who specializes in making seals and engravings, and Hou (2) Jian (4) the tailor, so you know, the clean-cut, respectable looking ones who could pass for law-abiding citizens.

A couple days after that, the trap was sprung. While the Zhu brothers and their arms instructor were busy fighting the bandits outside the manor, members of Sun Li's entourage were causing chaos inside. Yue (4) He (2) the Iron Whistle started singing, and that was the signal. The uncle-and-nephew team of

Zou Yuan (1) and Zou Run (4) let out a few whistles and started swinging their big axes, cutting down guards by the dozens outside the area where the prisoners were being held. They then busted open the prisoner carts, freeing the seven Liangshan chieftains who had been captured. You can imagine how pissed off and bloodthirsty those guys were. They all found some weapons and started making a mess of things around the manor.

Meanwhile, Gu Dasao the Female Tiger unsheathed her twin knives, stomped into the Zhu family's private quarters, and started slaughtering all the women. I just love that even when they are killing and pillaging, they are being sexist about it. Let's send the woman to go kill the womenfolk.

Seeing his home engulfed by this mayhem, the patriarch of the Zhu family, Zhu Chaofeng (2,4), knew that all was lost. His only thought now was to avoid a painful death. He was just about to throw himself into a well, and presumably die by drowning, but he was denied that privilege. Shi Xiu the Daredevil, who had allowed himself to get captured a day earlier as part of the deception, cut him off, and then cut off his head. That'll teach you to defend your home against chicken thieves and bandits!

The dozen or so heroes now started slaughtering the Zhu family's militia, while by the back gates, the hunter brothers Xie Zhen (1) and Xie Bao (3) were busy starting a fire. Soon, giant black plumes of smoke were streaming toward the heavens.

Outside the manor, the Liangshan bandits saw the fire and surged forward with ever more vigor. The middle Zhu brother, Zhu Hu (3), turned around and rushed back toward the manor, but he found his path blocked by Sun Li, who had parked himself on the drawbridge.

"Stop, you knave!" Sun Li shouted.

Realizing that they had been tricked, Zhu Hu (3) turned and rode toward the enemy lines, hoping to break through. But he was met by the halberd twins, the chieftains Lü (3) Fang (1) and Guo (1) Sheng (4). Before he could react, Zhu Hu and his horse were impaled by a pair of halberds, sending him to the

ground. A swarm of bandit lackeys engulfed him, reducing him to a paste of minced human flesh. As the Zhu family militia at the front of the manor disintegrated, Sun Li and his younger brother Sun Xin (1) welcomed Song Jiang and company into the manor.

Meanwhile, on the east side of the manor, the eldest Zhu brother, Zhu Long, was tangling with Lin Chong the Panther Head. But he was no match for Lin Chong, so he turned and galloped toward the back entrance of the manor. As he approached the drawbridge, however, he saw the brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao tossing the severed heads of his family's workmen into the roaring fire below. Uhh, I guess I can't go that way.

Zhu Long hurriedly turned and rode toward the north, but this was not his lucky day, because that route brought him face to face with Li Kui the Black Whirlwind. Li Kui charged forward and with one swing of his twin battle axes, he chopped off the legs of Zhu Long's horse, sending Zhu Long to the ground. Before Zhu Long could recover, Li Kui's axe came down on his head, and that was the end of Zhu Long.

Elsewhere on the battlefield, the youngest Zhu brother, Zhu Biao, had gotten word from his men that things were not going well. He did not dare to go back into his estate. Instead, he galloped off to the west, toward the manor of the Hu (4) family, who, if you remember, were to be his future in-laws as he had been slated to marry their daughter before she was captured by the bandits.

When he arrived at his future in-laws' house, Zhu Biao dismounted and went to meet his future brother-in-law Hu (4) Cheng (2). But to his shock, Hu Cheng immediately ordered his men to apprehend Zhu Biao. Remember, Song Jiang had told Hu Cheng that if he wanted to see his sister again, he had to capture and turn over any refugees from the Zhu family who went to him for shelter. So Hu Cheng tied up Zhu Biao, and then set off with an entourage to bring his prisoner to Song Jiang.

They had not gone far, however, when they saw someone stomping down the road toward them. It was none other than the Black Whirlwind. Li Kui was having the time of his life, what with the blood and

mayhem, and when he was having this much fun, he wasn't in the mood to ask questions or make fine distinctions between enemies and nominal allies. When he saw Hu Cheng's entourage, he rushed forward and with one swing, hacked off Zhu Biao's head. Hu Cheng's men all scattered, and Li Kui now swung his axes in the direction of Hu Cheng. Scared out of his mind, Hu Cheng rode away, leaving his home behind. The novel tells us that he ran all the way to Yan'an (2,1) Prefecture, where he eventually became a military officer.

But for the present, let's talk about the home he left behind. Li Kui's blood was up, and he crashed into the Hu family manor and started killing everyone there, all prior peace agreements be damned. Before you knew it, the entire household, old and young, including the patriarch Old Squire Hu (4), were dead. Li Kui then told his lackeys to gather up all the horses and treasure from the manor, which totaled about 50 loads. While his men transported the loot, Li Kui was busy setting the manor on fire. All this done, he dusted his hands, admired his handiwork, and then strolled back to report his fine deeds.

By now, Song Jiang had set up new headquarters in the estate formerly known as the Zhu Family Manor. He sat down in the main parlor, and one by one the chieftains came to report their accomplishments on this glorious day. They had taken about 500 prisoners and captured more than 500 fine horses and countless cattle. Song Jiang was delighted by all this good news, and the only downer was that the Zhu family's arms instructor, Luan (2) Tingyu (2,4), had been among the slain.

While Song Jiang was lamenting the loss of a potential recruit, someone came in and reported, "Black Whirlwind burned down the Hu (4) Family Manor and is coming to offer you some heads."

"What? That Hu Cheng had already surrendered to us the day before," Song Jiang said. "Who told Li Kui to kill them and burn their estate?"

Just then, Li Kui, covered in blood and with his axes tucked into his waistband, stomped in, made a deep bow to Song Jiang, and declared, "I was the one who killed Zhu Long. I also killed Zhu Biao. That knave Hu Cheng got away, but I slaughtered his entire household. I have come to report my service."

"Someone saw you kill Zhu Long, but how did you end up killing the rest?" Song Jiang asked sternly.

"I was on a roll and started heading toward the Hu Family Manor. I ran into that trollop Hu Sanniang's brother. He had tied up Zhu Biao and was coming out of his house. I killed Zhu Biao with one swing of my axe. It's a pity that Hu Cheng got away, but I did kill everyone on his estate."

"You rogue! Who told you to do that?!" Song Jiang scolded him. "You knew that the day before yesterday Hu Cheng had come here with oxen and wine to offer his surrender. Why did you disobey my orders and kill his family?"

"You may have forgotten, but I haven't!" Li Kui shot back. "I still remember how that damn woman was chasing you and trying to kill you. But then you went all soft on her family. You haven't even married her yet, and you are already worrying about your in-laws."

"Enough nonsense!" Song Jiang barked. "I don't want that woman. I have other plans for her. Now, you dark knave, how many prisoners did you take?"

"Whos' got the patience for that crap?! I killed every live one I came across!"

"You rogue! You disobeyed my orders," Song Jiang declared. "You should be executed for that, but we'll let it slide this time on account of your killing Zhu Long and Zhu Biao. Next time, I will NOT spare you."

To that, Li Kui just laughed and said, "Even though I won't get any rewards, at least I got to have some fun killing people!"



Soon, the military strategist Wu Yong arrived with some reinforcements to congratulate Song Jiang on his victory. They then sat down to discuss the next matter at hand -- cleansing the surrounding village to teach them a lesson about ... umm ... honor or something.

But now, Shi Xiu the Daredevil spoke up. "There's an old villager named Zhong (1) Li (2) who is kind and virtuous. He gave me directions that saved us. We must not wrong the kind-hearted people like him."

Hearing this, Song Jiang told Shi Xiu to go find the old man. Shi Xiu soon returned with him, and Song Jiang gave him a bundle of gold and brocade, telling him that he could remain in the village permanently, nevermind all the dead bodies.

"If not for your kindness, we would have cleansed this village, leaving not a single household," Song Jiang told him. "But because of your act of goodness, we will spare the people of the village."

Umm ... thank ... you? I guess? The old man was smart enough to fall to his knees and kowtow to Song Jiang in gratitude. Song Jiang then said, "We have intruded on you civilians for days. Today, we have sacked the Zhu Family Manor and rid your village of a scourge. We will award 15 pounds of rice to each household to show our sincerity."

So again, umm, thanks a lot? I mean, this whole feud started because three guys stole and ate a chicken in the village in the name of Liangshan, and then that just escalated, and you guys decided you had to come flatten the estate of the villagers' lord to protect your honor, no doubt destroying significant parts of the village in the process, killing many of the villagers who had to take part in the fighting, and leaving the village's economic system in shambles. And if not for the fact that an old man was fooled into giving one of your guys directions, you would have slaughtered the rest of the villagers as well. And now, just a second after threatening to do that, here you are, telling the villagers how sincere you are and proving it by giving them ... what? A sack of rice that's smaller than what I can get for \$40 down at the local Asian grocery store? Thanks guys. That ... really means a lot.

While the villagers were counting their blessings, the bandits were busy counting their loot. The day's action had netted them almost 7 million pounds of grain, plus countless cattle and cartloads of gold and silver. They also added 8 new chieftains in Sun Li and his entourage, not to mention rescued the 7 chieftains who had been captured. The novel said that as the Liangshan forces departed, the villagers, old and young, lined the road, burning incense and candles, and kowtowing to them. Again, for, umm, reasons.

Meanwhile, to the east of what remained of the Zhu Family Manor was the estate of Li (3) Ying (4) the Striking Hawk. Remember that way back at the beginning of this mess, he had tried to resolve the situation amicably, only to get rebuffed by the Zhu family. And then Song Jiang called on him hoping for his help in the war, but Li Ying, being a law-abiding citizen, declined to meet with a bandit leader. Since then, Li Ying had been staying home, recovering from the arrow wound he suffered at the hands of the Zhu brothers. Nonetheless, he sent out scouts to keep him apprised of the war.

On this day, one of the scouts reported that the Zhu Family Manor had fallen. Li Ying was equal parts shocked and elated, but just then, a workhand rushed in and said that the local prefect was outside with about 50 men, asking questions about what happened with the Zhu family.

Li Ying hurriedly told his steward Du (4) Xing (1) the Demon Face to open the gates, lower the drawbridge, and welcome the prefect in. Meanwhile, Li Ying quickly made himself a sling for his arm. Gotta sell the whole "I've been laid up in bed with an injury" angle, you know. This done, he went to greet the prefect. The prefect dismounted and sat down in the center of the parlor, flanked by his gaggle of clerks, officers, and jailers. Li Ying bowed to him and remained standing.

"What do you know about the slaughter at the Zhu Family Manor?" the prefect asked.

"I took an arrow from Zhu Biao on my left arm a while back and have been holed up at home since then," Li Ying replied. "I haven't dared to go out, so I don't know what happened."

“Nonsense!” the prefect scoffed. “The Zhu family has submitted a petition, accusing you of being in cahoots with the Liangshan bandits. They say that you lured the Zhu family’s militia into a trap and helped sack their estate. Also, you accepted horses, sheep, wine, fabric, and gold and silver from the bandits a few days ago. How can you deny it?!”

“Your servant is a law-abiding man; how would I dare to accept anything from the bandits?” Li Ying protested.

“It’s hard to believe you,” the prefect said. “We’ll take you back to the prefectural office, and you can sort it out with your accusers.”

The prefect now barked for the jailers to arrest Li Ying and take him back to the prefectural seat, so the officers immediately tied him up. As the prefect was climbing onto his horse, he asked, “Which one is the steward Du Xing (1)?”

Du Xing raised his hand, and the prefect said, “Your name is among the accused as well. You have to come with us, too. Men, chain him up.”

So the prefect and his entourage departed with Li Ying and Du Xing. They had traveled for about 10 miles when suddenly, an army appeared from the woods, led by the chieftains Song Jiang, Lin Chong, Hua Rong, Yang Xiong, and Shi Xiu, blocking their path.

“All the Liangshan heroes are here!” Lin Chong shouted.

The prefect and his men, predictably, wanted no part of this, and they turned and ran, ditching their prisoners. Song Jiang ordered his men to give chase. After pursuing for a bit, they turned back and said, “If we had caught him, we would’ve killed that damn prefect, too. But he ran off to who knows where.”

They now untied Li Ying and Du Xing and helped them onto a couple horses. Song Jiang then said to Li Ying, “Sir, how about you come and take refuge on Liangshan for a spell?”

“That won’t do,” Li Ying said. “You guys were the ones who tried to kill the prefect; it had nothing to do with me.”

Song Jiang chuckled and said, “Do you think the authorities would split that hair with you? Once we leave, you will be saddled with our crime. If you don’t want to become a bandit, you can just rest at our base for a few days. Once we get word that things have died down, then you can go home.”

At this point, it wasn’t really up to Li Ying anymore, as Song Jiang and his entourage escorted him and Du Xing back to Liangshan. They were met at the foot of the mountain with great fanfare by the bandit leader Chao Gai. Everyone then went up to the Hall of Honor and sat down in a semicircle.

After greeting all the chieftains, Li Ying turned to Song Jiang and said, “General, I have escorted you back to your stronghold, and I have met all the chieftains. While I don’t mind staying here, I don’t know how my family is doing. Please let me go check on them.”

At that, the strategist Wu Yong smiled and said, “Sir, you’re mistaken. Your family is already here, and your manor has been burned to the ground. What would you go back to?”

Li Ying wasn’t sure whether to believe this, but just then, he saw a convoy coming up the mountainside. As they got closer, he recognized them. They were his family and his workmen. He rushed to meet them, and his wife told him, “Right after you were arrested, a couple inspectors and four constables came with 300 militiamen to confiscate all our property. They helped us into carts, took all the valuables and livestock, and then burned the manor.”

When he heard this, Li Ying could only lament ... and probably mutter a few choice words under his breath. Chao Gai and Song Jiang now came over and apologized, saying, “We have long heard of your great name, so we concocted this scheme. Please forgive us.”

So yep, once again, our heroes were up to their old recruitment slash abduction tricks. I mean, if you were a law-abiding citizen, your worst-case scenario really was to be admired and respected by our heroes. With things as they were, Li Ying settled his family into some quarters and discussed the situation with his wife, deciding that given the circumstances, they had no choice but to acquiesce to his

new ... umm ... brothers' entreaties. He then came back out to the main hall to shoot the breeze with the gang, and everybody was elated.

While they were talking, Song Jiang laughed and said, "Sir, do you want to meet the prefect and his officers?"

At that, a group appeared, and it was none other than the entourage that had arrested Li Ying. The "prefect" was Xiao (1) Rang (4) the Sacred-handed Scribe, and his various officers were all Llang chieftains as well. Li Ying was left speechless with mouth agape. I'm sure it was from being overcome by the sincerity of his new band of brothers, so amply illustrated in the lengths to which they had gone to invite him here.

So, fresh off their victory and bolstered by their new recruits, what honorable adventures will our heroes get into next? To find out, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we have a wedding! And you won't believe who's getting married. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!