

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 79.

Last time, with some help from the priest Gongsun Sheng, Song Jiang broke the black magic of Gao Lian, the prefect of Gaotang. He then lured Gao Lian into a trap, decimated his army, and occupied the city.

Realizing the day was lost, Gao Lian took what few remaining soldiers he had and fled down a backroad. After just a few miles, his path was cut off by a squad led by the Liangshan chieftain Sun Li (4).

“I’ve been waiting for you for a long time!” Sun Li shouted. “Dismount and surrender now!”

Gao Lian quickly turned and fled, but his retreat was cut off by another squad, led by the chieftain Zhu Tong the Lord of the Beautiful Beard. Sandwiched by enemies, Gao Lian ditched his horse and scrambled up a hill. The Liangshan forces followed. Gao Lian quickly pulled out his sword, mumbled an incantation, and shouted, “Up!” A black cloud appeared and carried him up the mountain. Hey, cloud Uber is back.

But just as Gao Lian was starting to breathe easy, Gongsun Sheng appeared around a hill, pulled out his sword, mumbled his own incantation, and shouted, “Speed!” As his sword pointed skyward, the dark cloud dissipated, and Gao Lian came tumbling down to the ground. Before he could even move, another chieftain, Lei Heng the Winged Tiger, charged in and cut him in half. Lei Heng then cut off Gao Lian’s head and headed back to camp.

Word of Lei Heng’s deed quickly reached Song Jiang, and he ordered his troops to enter the city. He made sure that his men did not harm the civilians, and he sent out proclamations assuring the city’s residents that no harm would come to them.

Next, he rushed to the prison to rescue Chai Jin the Little Whirlwind, whose imprisonment by Gao Lian was the impetus for this war. By now, all the jailers had already fled, leaving behind about 50 prisoners. The Liangshan heroes freed them all, but Chai Jin was not among them.

That had Song Jiang worried. They kept searching, and came across a cell where the family members of Chai Jin's deceased uncle were being held. They also found the cell where Chai Jin's own family was held. But none of them knew where Chai Jin was.

Wu Yong now tracked down some jailers and asked them. One of them said, "A while back, Prefect Gao instructed me to put Chai Jin in a cell by himself and to keep a close eye on him. The prefect also told me, 'If something goes wrong, kill him.' Then, three days ago the prefect wanted to execute Chai Jin, but I could not bring myself to do it because he's a good man. So I just told the prefect that Chai Jin was really sick and that he would die from illness soon anyway, so there's no need to kill him. The prefect kept pressing, so later I said that Chai Jin was dead. Because of all the fighting lately, the prefect didn't have time to look into it. I was afraid he would send someone to check, so yesterday I brought Chai Jin to a dry well in the back, opened his cangue, and hid him in the well. I don't know if he's still alive."

Song Jiang told the jailer to take him to the well at once. When they got there, they looked down the well and saw that it was pitch black, with no way to tell how deep it was. They called out toward the bottom, but there was no answer. They lowered a rope to check the depth, and it turned out to be almost 70 foot deep.

"Looks like Lord Chai is gone!" Song Jiang said as he sobbed.

"Commander, don't get upset," Wu Yong consoled him. He then turned and asked, "Who dares to go down there to have a look?"

Before he finished asking, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind stepped forward and shouted, "I'll go!"

"Good!" Song Jiang said. "You were the one who got him into trouble. You should be the one to do this."

Li Kui smiled and said, "I'm not afraid to go down there, but you all better not cut the rope."

"Listen to you," Wu Yong said. "You're quite the sly scoundrel."

They now got a big basket, tied it to a rope, and told Li Kui to climb in. Li Kui took off his shirt, grabbed his axes, and sat down in the basket. They then lowered him into the well, with two bells attached to the end of the rope.

When the basket gently touched down on the bottom of the well, Li Kui stepped out. It was so dark that he couldn't see a thing, so he felt around the bottom. The first thing he felt, though, was a pile of bones.

"Ah, what kind of crap is down here?!" he muttered. He then felt around another side. It was all wet and there didn't seem to be anywhere to step. Li Kui now put his axes in the basket and reached both hands into this watery pit and felt around. Suddenly, he felt a body, crouched in the pit.

"Lord Chai!" Li Kui exclaimed.

But there was no movement. Li Kui put his hand near the figure's face and felt only a faint breath.

"Oh thank heaven and earth! He's still alive!" Li Kui said. He then climbed back into the basket and rang the bell. The guys at the top pulled him back up, and he told them he found Chai Jin.

"Then go back down and put Lord Chai in the basket," Song Jiang said. "We'll pull him up first and then send the basket back down for you."

"Brother, no tricks! I got messed with two times on my way to find Gongsun Sheng. Don't make it three."

"Why would I trick you? Just hurry back down."

So Li Kui sat back in the basket and they lowered him down again. Momentarily, the bell rang again, so they pulled the basket back up. Sure enough, Chai Jin was lying inside it. Everyone was elated, but then Song Jiang saw that Chai Jin's face was all scratched up, and his legs had been beaten so hard that his flesh was tattered, and his eyes were barely open. Song Jiang was overcome by sadness and told his men to find a doctor.

Just then, Li Kui started yelling from the bottom of the well. Oh yeah, we did say we were going to send the basket back down for him, didn't we? So Song Jiang had the basket lowered again, and a minute later, they pulled Li Kui out of the well. As he emerged, he shouted, "You all are wicked! Why didn't you send the basket back down for me?!"

"We were preoccupied with tending to Lord Chai and forgot. Sorry," Song Jiang said.

They now helped Chai Jin into a carriage. They also put his family into carriages, along with all their property that had been confiscated. Song Jiang told Li Kui and Lei Heng to escort this convoy back to Liangshan.

Next, it was time to dole out more justice. Gao Lian may be dead, but he still had about 40 people in his household, and I guess they were all guilty by association, because the bandits took them all to the center of the city and lopped their heads off. Song Jiang then rewarded the jailer who tipped him off about Chai Jin. They then emptied all the money, fabric, and grain from the city's storehouses, along with Gao Lian's personal property. All this was carted back to Liangshan because, hey, why leave anything for the civilians. We are really not the "rob from the rich and give to the poor" type of bandits. The whole army then set out back toward Liangshan. They did not cause trouble for any of the towns and cities they passed on their way, for which I guess they want a pat on the back?

After a few days' travel, they arrived back at Liangshan. Chai Jin, who was still recuperating, got up to thank all the chieftains. Chao Gai then instructed his men to build a house next to Song Jiang's residence at the top of the mountain for Chai Jin and his family. And then, it was party time.

Meanwhile, the two neighboring prefectures that had received the urgent request for help from Gaotang Prefecture soon got another message, this one letting them know that the city had already fallen, and that Gao Lian was dead. So those two prefects sent a report to the imperial court. At the same time, some officials from Gaotang Prefecture who had survived the siege fled to the capital and

told Marshal Gao Qiu what had transpired. Needless to say, Gao Qiu was quite perturbed at the fate of his cousin.

The next morning, the imperial court was in session at 5 a.m., and all the officials were in attendance. When a courtier announced that it was time for officials to report news if they had any, Gao Qiu stepped forward and said, "In Jizhou Prefecture, the Liangshan bandit leaders Chao Gai and Song Jiang have been committing numerous evil deeds, robbing and pillaging, emptying storehouses, and assembling a gang of criminals. They killed government troops from Jizhou Prefecture and caused a ruckus in Jiangzhou Prefecture, and now they have slaughtered officials and civilians in Gaotang Prefecture and emptied its storehouses. They are a lingering concern. If we do not eliminate them soon and instead allow them to build up their strength, then they will be difficult to bring to heel. I hope your majesty will act decisively."

The Huizong (1,1) Emperor was quite shocked by this report, and he immediately decreed that Gao Qiu should dispatch troops to apprehend the bandits, cleanse the marsh, and exterminate all who associate with them.

Gao Qiu now said, "We don't need a huge army to take care of these two-bit bandits. I know someone who can do the job."

"I trust your judgment," the emperor said. "Order him to set off right away. When he succeeds, I will promote him."

Gao Qiu said, "He is a descendant of Huyan (1,2) Zan (4), the famous general from the time of our dynasty's founding. His name is Huyan (1,2) Zhuo (2). He wields two short steel staffs and has unrivaled courage. Right now he is the garrison commander at Runing (3,2) County. He has crack troops and many stout officers under his command. I would like to recommend him to lead the campaign against the Liangshan bandits. Please give him command of the troops, and he will raze the bandits' stronghold and return in victory."

The emperor consented and issued a decree to Runing (3,2) County right away, instructing Huyan Zhuo to come to the capital to receive his command. The envoy arrived at Runing County, and Huyan Zhuo and the local officials met him outside the county seat. After the envoy read the decree and was wined and dined, Huyan Zhuo packed up his things and headed to the capital with an entourage of about 40. He arrived the next morning and went to see Gao Qiu. Gao Qiu summoned him in and sized him up, and was delighted to see that Huyan Zhuo looked every bit the fearless general he was reputed to be.

Gao Qiu rewarded Huyan Zhuo, and the next morning, he introduced the general to the emperor. The emperor was equally impressed with Huyan Zhuo, so he bestowed upon him a fine horse that was known as the Snow-Treading Ebony Steed. This horse was black all over except for its hooves, which were snow white, and it had great stamina. Huyan Zhuo thanked the emperor and then followed Gao Qiu back to the chancellory, where they discussed the coming campaign.

“Benefactor,” Huyan Zhuo said, “Based on my intelligence, Liangshan has a large army and many skilled generals. We must not underestimate them. I would like to nominate two officers to serve as my vanguard. If they can accompany me on this campaign, then we will succeed for sure.”

So the first guy that Huyan Zhuo was recommending was named Han (2) Tao (1). He grew up in the capital and passed the imperial military exam, basically the martial version of the civil exam by which the government identified talent for its administrative ranks. This Han Tao wielded an 18-foot lance made from datewood, and everyone called him the Undefeated General. Huyan Zhuo wanted him to lead the vanguard.

The second guy that Huyan Zhuo recommended was named Peng (2) Qi (3). He was currently the district garrison commander in Yingzhou (3,1) Prefecture. He also grew up in the capital and came from a military family. He wielded a three-pronged, double-edged saber and was a skilled fighter. Everyone

called him the General of Heavenly Vision. Huyan Zhuo nominated him to be second-in-command of the vanguard.

Gao Qiu was delighted after hearing Huyan Zhuo's nominations. "With those two as your vanguard, you would have no need to worry about those wild bandits!"

So Gao Qiu sent messages to the two officers that very day, summoning them to the capital. Within 10 days, they both arrived and went to the chancellory to pay their respects to Gao Qiu and Huyan Zhuo. The next day, Gao Qiu brought them to the training grounds to show off their skills and inspect the army. After that, they returned to the chancellory to meet with the Council of Military Affairs and discuss the campaign.

"How many troops do the three of you have between you?" Gao Qiu asked.

"About 5,000 cavalry and 10,000 total if you count infantry," Huyan Zhuo replied.

"Go back to your outposts and mobilize 3,000 of your best cavalry and 5,000 infantry," Gao Qiu said. "Set a date to commence the campaign and go wipe out the Liangshan bandits."

"All of our troops are stout, seasoned veterans, so no need to worry about them," Huyan Zhuo said. "The only concern is that we might not have enough armor, and that might cause a delay. I hope you can show us a little leniency."

"In that case, you can take what you need from the armory in the capital," Gao Qiu told him. "Don't worry about how much; just take all the armor and weapons you need. But you must organize your army well and fight a good battle. On the day you depart, I will come inspect your troops."

So Huyan Zhuo went to the armory and took 3,000 suits of steel armor, 5,000 suits of horse-hide armor, 3,000 bronze helmets, 2,000 long spears, 1,000 knives, countless bows and arrows, and 500 canons. On the day of departure, Gao Qiu also gave him 3,000 war horses, as well as a healthy chunk of gold and silver for each of the three generals. In exchange, all three generals signed military pledges that

basically promised to either come back victorious or not at all. They then took their leave and headed to Runing (3,2) County, Huyan Zhuo's old base of operations.

Once there, Huyan Zhuo told the other two generals to go to their respective bases and round up their troops and rendezvous with him back here. Within two weeks, all the troops were assembled. Huyan Zhuo distributed all the armor, weapons, and horses that he had obtained in the capital. Gao Qiu sent two officers to come inspect the troops and reward them. All this done, Huyan Zhuo set out on his campaign, with the general Han Tao leading the front, Huyan Zhuo himself overseeing the main army, and Peng (2) Qi (3) commanding the rear.

Word of these troop movements soon reached Liangshan, and the chieftains took a break from their daily parties to discuss what to do.

The strategist Wu Yong said, "I have heard that Huyan Zhuo is a descendant of the famous general Huyan Zan (4). He is a skilled fighter with his steel rods, and no one can get near him. We must counter with our most capable generals. First we wear him down with force, and then we capture him through cunning."

Before he finished talking, Li Kui cut in and said, "I'll go catch that guy for you!"

"You can't go!" Song Jiang scoffed. "I have my own plans. Let's have Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt fight him first, followed by Lin Chong the Panther Head, and then the chieftains Hua Rong, Hu Sanniang, and Sun Li (4). Once each of them is done fighting, their squadron will rotate to the rear. I will personally lead another 10 brothers and follow with the main army. We'll also have our navy serve as backup, led by Li Jun the River Dragon, the brothers Zhang Heng (2) and Zhang Shun (4), and the three Ruan (3) brothers. Li Kui the Black Whirlwind and Yang Lin the Multicolored Leopard will lead two squads of infantry and lie in wait."



With the plans laid out, everyone snapped to, and Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt led his men down the mountain first and lined up on a flat plain. It was winter, but the weather was mild. After waiting for a day, they saw the government forces marching in the distance. This was the vanguard, led by Han (2) Tao (1) the Undefeated General. By the time they got close, it was getting late in the day, so they just pitched camp.

The next morning, the two sides lined up, and their commanding generals faced off. Han Tao reined in his horse and stood under his banner, cursing Qin Ming. "Divine troops have arrived. Instead of surrendering at once, you dare to resist. Do you want to die?! I will fill in your marsh, flatten your mountain, and capture all you rebels alive and take you to the capital, where you will be cut to pieces!"

Qin Ming, always a short fuse, got pissed and didn't even bother returning the insults. He just rode out swinging his wolf-toothed mace and made for Han Tao. Han Tao met him and they exchanged blows. After 20-some bouts, however, Han Tao was starting to falter. Uh, so much for that "Undefeated General" moniker. He was just about to turn and run when his main army arrived under the command of Huyan Zhuo.

Seeing that Han Tao was struggling against Qin Ming, Huyan Zhuo galloped out to the front lines wielding his twin steel rods. Qin Ming was just about to go fight him, but his time was up. The second wave of Liangshan forces, led by Lin Chong the Panther Head, had arrived.

"General Qin, take a break and watch me fight 300 rounds first!" Lin Chong shouted. He then brandished his spear and galloped toward Huyan Zhuo, while Qin Ming led his men to the back of a hill. Huyan Zhuo and Lin Chong turned out to be quite the matchup, as they fought for 50-some bouts without a winner.

And now, the third wave of Liangshan forces, led by Hua Rong the archer, came upon the scene, and Hua Rong shouted to Lin Chong that it was his turn. So Lin Chong broke off and rode away to the back of the hill, while Hua Rong wielded his spear and rode forward.

From the back of Huyan Zhuo's army came Peng (2) Qi (3) the General of Heavenly Vision. Gripping his three-pronged, double-edged saber, Peng Qi galloped to the front and cursed Hua Rong: "You traitor! You're nothing special! Let's see if you can beat me!"

Hua Rong didn't bother answering and just rode forth to fight him. After 20-some bouts, Huyan Zhuo could see that Peng Qi was also starting to falter. Hmm, maybe he oversold these guys to Gao Qiu. So Huyan Zhuo now rode out again to fight Hua Rong and bail out Peng Qi. He and Hua Rong had not exchanged but three blows when another wave of bandits appeared, led by the female warrior Hu Sanniang the Ten Feet of Steel.

"General Hua, take a break! Watch me capture that knave!" she shouted. So Hua Rong backed off, and Peng Qi decided that hey, I can totally beat a woman! So he started trading blows against Hu Sanniang. Just as they were getting into it, the fifth wave of Liangshan forces, led by the chieftain Sun Li (4), showed up. Sun Li decided to give Hu Sanniang her allotted time, so he just looked on.

After 20-some bouts, Hu Sanniang pulled back her twin sabers and rode away. Peng Qi was eager to earn some credit, so he gave chase. But little did he know, he was riding into a trap. Hu Sanniang hitched her sabers to her saddle and pulled out a red cord from under her cloak. This cord had 24 golden hooks attached to it. As Peng Qi got close, Hu Sanniang suddenly turned and swung the cord toward him. Peng Qi couldn't dodge it in time, and before he knew it, the hooks had latched on to him, and Hu Sanniang pulled him off his saddle. Sun Li gave a shout, and his men charged forward and tied up Peng Qi.

Huyan Zhuo was outraged by this and rode forth to try to rescue his man. Hu Sanniang rode out to fight him. Huyan Zhuo wished he could swallow her in one gulp. As they exchanged blows for 10 bouts without either gaining the upper hand, he was getting impatient and thought to himself, "This damn trollop's got some skills, to be able to hold her own against me for so long."

He now feigned an opening, luring Hu Sanniang into taking a stab at him with her sabers. While she thrust her sabers toward his chest, he brought both of his steel rods above his head and brought them down with all his might toward her head. Hu Sanniang spotted this out of the corner of her eye and quickly raised her right saber to block the blow. With a loud clang, the saber met the rods, and sparks flew.

That close call convinced Hu Sanniang to quit the fight, so she turned and rode back toward her own lines. Huyan Zhuo gave chase, but was met by the chieftain Sun Li. And behind him, Song Jiang had arrived with 10 more chieftains, and they were all lined up for battle while Hu Sanniang took her troops and rotated to the back of the hill.

Song Jiang was delighted to hear that they had captured the enemy general Peng Qi. He now watched as Sun Li took on Huyan Zhuo. Sun Li's main weapon was a spear, but he was also very handy with a ribbed steel rod, and he now latched his spear and used only his rod to fight Huyan Zhuo. So the two of them traded blows with their rods for 30-some bouts, with neither gaining the upper hand. Song Jiang couldn't help but cheer as he watched.

While this was going on, Huyan Zhuo's second-in-command Han Tao had gotten word that his comrade Peng Qi had been captured. So he rode to the back of his army and ordered them to all charge forward. Seeing this, Song Jiang pointed with his whip, and the 10 chieftains and the Liangshan troops also charged forward. At the same time, the various backup forces from Liangshan also attacked from the flanks.

Seeing this, Huyan Zhuo quickly turned his own troops around to take on the enemy. The Liangshan forces had the element of surprise, but Huyan Zhuo had his own advantage. His cavalry were all heavily armored, both horses and men. The only exposed parts on the horses were their hooves, while the men were covered in armor from head to toe, with only their eyes being visible. Song Jiang had his own armored cavalry, but they were nowhere near as well equipped. And as his men fired arrows at Huyan

Zhuo's cavalry, the shots just bounced harmlessly off the enemies' armor. Huyan Zhuo's troops, meanwhile, answered with their own barrage of arrows, preventing Song Jiang's troops from getting close. Seeing that a victory was not possible, Song Jiang ordered his troops to fall back, and Huyan Zhuo did likewise.

After he returned to camp, Song Jiang instructed his men to bring forth the prisoner Peng Qi. A few armed soldiers dragged him into the tent, but Song Jiang stood up, barked for his own men to back off, and then personally untied Peng Qi and offered him a seat. Once Peng Qi sat down, Song Jiang kneeled in front of him and bowed, prompting Peng Qi to return the gesture and say, "I am your prisoner. I expected to die. General, why do you treat me like a guest?"

"My brothers and I have nowhere to go, so we temporarily occupied this marsh as a refuge, and we have committed many offenses," Song Jiang said. "Today, the court has sent you to come apprehend us. We should surrender, but we fear that if we did we would not be able to save our own lives, so we had no choice but to fight you and add to our list of offenses. We accidentally insulted you, please forgive us!"

Peng Qi was not expecting this, and all he could say was, "I have long heard that you are honorable and compassionate and that you help those in need. Turns out you really are a man of honor! If you spare my life, I will dedicate it to serving you."

Song Jiang was delighted and told him, "My brothers and I are pining for the day when the sage emperor will show us leniency and pardon our crimes. Then we will put our lives on the line to repay the country, even if it means our death."

Song Jiang then sent Peng Qi up to Liangshan to meet Chao Gai and to stay there as the newest recruit, while he tended to his army and met with his chieftains about how to defeat Huyan Zhuo.

Meanwhile, on the other side, Huyan Zhuo was meeting with his second-in-command Han Tao. Han Tao said, "When those kanves saw our troops approach today, they charged forward in a quick covering action. Tomorrow, we should hit them with our whole cavalry. That will guarantee a big victory."

"My thought exactly," Huyan Zhuo agreed. "I've already made all the arrangements; I just wanted to discuss with you first."

To see how the next battle will go, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, the bandits decide they need to forcibly recruit another guy. So join us next time.

Thanks for listening!