

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 83.

Last time, the bandit chieftains of Peach Blossom Mountain, Double Dragon Mountain, and White Tiger Mountain had joined forces to attack Qingzhou Prefecture, where one of the chieftains, Kong Ming, was being held prisoner by Prefect Murong and the general Huyan Zhuo. The bandits sent Kong Ming's little brother Kong Liang to Liangshan for help, since he was friends with Song Jiang.

Song Jiang immediately agreed to help. He introduced Kong Liang to the leader Chao Gai and the other chieftains, and told them why he had come, and Chao Gai was totally on board.

"The heroes of the other two mountains are acting with such honor, and you are friends with the Kong brothers, so how can we not go?" he said to Song Jiang. "Brother, you have led several campaigns in a row. This time, you stay and guard the base, and I will go in your stead."

"No, brother," Song Jiang said. "You are our leader; you must not leave the base lightly. This is my affair, and since Kong Liang has come so far to request assistance, we cannot refuse, or his friends will not feel good. I would like to take a few brothers with me and make a trip."

Before he finished speaking, everyone in the hall declared, "We are willing to follow you anywhere and do whatever we can to help you!"

Song Jiang was delighted. That day, he treated Kong Liang to a welcome banquet. At the same time, he mobilized five battalions totaling 2,000 men and led by 20 chieftains. After the banquet, they set out for Qingzhou Prefecture. Their journey was uneventful, and they did not cause any trouble for the civilians in the towns and villages they passed along the way.

When they arrived outside the prefectural seat of Qingzhou, they were greeted by the bandits who had already been attacking the city. Those chieftains came to see Song Jiang and company. Wu Song the Pilgrim, who was good friends with Song Jiang, introduced the other chieftains. Song Jiang greeted them and then sat down on the floor with their de facto leader, Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk.

“I have long heard of your great name,” Lu Zhishen told Song Jiang. “I just haven’t had the good fortune to meet you. I am so happy to make your acquaintance today.”

“I am untalented and unworthy!” Song Jiang said. “The heroes of the jianghu scene all praise your virtue, reverend. It is the greatest pleasure of my life to meet you.”

Yang Zhi the Bluefaced Beast now bowed to Song Jiang and said, “I once passed through Liangshan. The heroes there asked me to stay, but I declined in my foolishness. Today, you have called on us within sight of our mountain base. This is most splendid.”

“Everyone on the jianghu scene has heard of your great name,” Song Jiang said, returning the compliment. “I only regret we did not meet sooner.”

The mutual love fest soon turned into a banquet. The next day, Song Jiang asked about the situation. Yang Zhi told him, “After Kong Liang went to see you, we fought several battles against the enemy, but they were all stalemates. Right now Qingzhou is relying solely on Huyan Zhuo. If we can capture him, then we can push through that city like hot water through snow.”

Liangshan’s military strategist, Wu Yong, laughed and said, “We cannot take that man by force, only by cunning.” He then offered up a plan, which delighted Song Jiang.

The next morning, the bandit forces marched to the foot of the city and surrounded it, waving banners, beating drums, and chanting war cries. Inside the city, Prefect Murong asked Huyan Zhuo what they should do.

“Don’t worry, benefactor,” Huyan Zhuo said. “By coming here, these bandits have already given up their geographical advantage. They are just used to creating havoc in their marsh. But now they have left their lair, so I can capture them one by one, and there’s nothing they can do about it. Please watch from the city wall while I take them on.”

He then donned his armor and rode out with 1,000 men. They lined up near the foot of the city. From within Song Jiang's lines, a chieftain had already galloped out, swinging his wolf-toothed mace, and cursing toward the top of city walls.

"You corrupt, wicked crook! You executed my whole family. I'm going to avenge them today!"

Hearing this, Prefect Murong looked down and recognized Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt. Remember that Qin Ming used to serve under Prefect Murong, but then thanks to a little deception by Song Jiang and company, the prefect was tricked into thinking Qin Ming had turned brigand, so he executed Qin Ming's whole family, which drove Qin Ming into banditry for real, and of course, now that he saw Qin Ming among the bandits, that only confirmed to Prefect Murong that he was right.

"You knave!" the prefect shot back at Qin Ming. "You were a government official, and the state did not mistreat you. Why did you rebel?! When I catch you, I will cut you to pieces! General Huyan, take him first!"

So Huyan Zhuo raised his twin steel rods and made for Qin Ming. They were evenly matched for 50 bouts. Seeing that the fight had lingered on for a while, Prefect Murong was afraid Huyan Zhuo might slip up, so he ordered his men to ring the gong to signal retreat. Huyan Zhuo and his men went back into the city. Qin Ming also returned to his own lines, and the bandits backed up about five miles and pitched camp.

Upon returning to the city, Huyan Zhuo asked the prefect why he had ordered retreat.

"I saw you had fought for a while and was afraid you might be getting tired," the prefect said. "I ordered retreat so you can rest. That Qin Ming used to be a general here. He and Hua Rong rebelled together. You must not underestimate that knave."

"Don't worry, benefactor. I swear I will capture that dishonorable rebel! When we were fighting, he was already starting to lose his rhythm. Watch me kill him tomorrow!"

“General, since you are such a hero, how about tomorrow when you go out to fight, you carve out a path for three messengers to get through? One will go to the capital to request aid, and the other two will go to nearby prefectures to ask them to come help defeat the bandits.”

Huyan Zhuo agreed, so the prefect prepared the letters and selected three officers to deliver them.

That night, Huyan Zhuo was resting when suddenly, a soldier came to tell him, “There are three riders secretly scouting out the city from the hill outside the north gate. The one in the middle wore a red cloak and rode a white horse. As for the other two, we recognized that the one on the right was Hua Rong, the former military commandant of Fort Clear Winds. The one on the left was dressed like a Daoist.”

“The one in red must be Song Jiang, and the Daoist must be his military strategist Wu Yong,” Huyan Zhuo said. “Don’t startle them. Call up 100 men and follow me to go capture those three.”

So Huyan Zhuo quickly got dressed and quietly rode out of the north gate with 100-some men. They crossed the drawbridge and made for the hill. Sure enough, he saw Song Jiang, Wu Yong, and Hua Rong sitting in their saddles, intently studying the city.

Huyan Zhuo galloped up the hill, and now the three men turned and slowly rode away. Huyan Zhuo spurred on his horse. As he approached a few dead trees, he saw that the three men had reined in their horses and were just standing there. Huyan Zhuo sped toward them, but as he passed the dead trees, he heard a loud sound, and the ground beneath him gave way. He and his horse both fell into a hidden pit. Before he could struggle, about 60 bandits rushed out with hooks and latched onto Huyan Zhuo. They pulled him out and tied him up, while also seizing his horse. As for the 100-some men who were following Huyan Zhuo, Hua Rong took out a few of them with his arrows, and everyone else scampered away.

Once Song Jiang returned to camp, a bunch of armed men dragged Huyan Zhuo into his tent. Song Jiang quickly got up and shouted for his men to untie the prisoner. He then personally helped Huyan Zhuo sit down and then kneeled in front of him. Oh boy, here we go again.

“Why are you acting like this?” Huyan Zhuo asked.

“Your humble servant would never dare to rebel against the imperial court,” Song Jiang said. “It’s just that corrupt officials pushed us too far and we committed a great offense by mistake, so we are temporarily taking refuge in the swamp, pining for the court to grant us amnesty. We did not expect that we would cause trouble for you. I really admire your prowess. I have offended you; please forgive me!”

“I am your prisoner,” Huyan Zhuo said. “I deserve to die. Sir, why do you apologize to me instead?”

“How would I ever dare to harm your life, general? May heaven be my witness! I just wanted to express my hopes to you.”

“Soooo ... are you asking me to go to the capital and relay your desire for amnesty, and ask the emperor to send a decree to pardon you?”

“General, how can you go back?” Song Jiang said. “That knave Gao Qiu is a narrow-hearted scoundrel. He forgets great kindness and dwells on small transgression. You have lost many troops and provisions. How can he not punish you? Right now, your former officers Han (2) Tao (1), Peng (2) Qi (3), and Ling (2) Zhen (4) have all joined us. If you do not think us too unworthy, I am willing to yield my seat to you. When the court needs us and grants us amnesty, then it would still not be too late for us to serve the country loyally.”

Huyan Zhuo sat in silence and thought for a good while. On the one hand, these guys were outlaws who slaughtered thousands of my troops and have killed countless civilians. On the other hand, men of honor something something. Well, I think the choice is clear here.

Later that night, the soldiers standing guard atop the city walls saw about a dozen riders approach. When they stopped on the other side of the moat, one of them shouted, "Hurry up and open the gates. I just escaped!"

The guards recognized Huyan Zhuo's voice and quickly reported this to the prefect. Prefect Murong was brooding about having lost Huyan Zhuo, so he was quite excited when he heard that his top weapon was back. He rode to the city wall, hurried to the top, and looked down. He saw Huyan Zhuo and about 10 other riders that he didn't recognize.

"General, how did you get away?" the prefect asked.

"Those knaves lured me into a pit and captured me," Huyan Zhuo replied. "They took me to their camp. Then, some of their chieftains who used to be my men helped me steal back my horse and break out of camp."

The prefect was happy to hear that, so he got off the wall and ordered his men to open the gates and lower the drawbridge. Huyan Zhuo and his entourage started crossing the bridge and entering the city. As they came in, Prefect Murong rode up to the gates to greet them.

Just then, one of the riders raised a wolf-toothed mace and brought it down on the prefect's head with all his might. The prefect fell dead to the ground. The next thing you know, two other riders had started a fire, while others sprinted up to the wall and chased off the guards.

So yep, Huyan Zhuo had turned brigand, capitulating to Song Jiang's entreaties because Song Jiang, quote, just had too much honor. Then they cooked up this scheme to trick their way into the city. Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt finally got his revenge by taking out Prefect Murong, and Song Jiang's army now flooded into the city.

Song Jiang hurriedly sent out orders for his men to abstain from harming civilians. Instead, they focused on emptying the granary. They also went to the prison and busted out the captured chieftain Kong Ming and his relatives. Then, while some of the bandits put out the fire, others busied themselves

with executing Prefect Murong's entire family, old and young, because umm ... honor demanded it or something. They also confiscated the entire household's property.

Once morning came, the bandits took a count of the civilian houses that were damaged by their fire and compensated those folks with some grain. So that seemed like an honorable thing to do. And then they helped themselves to all the gold, fabric, and grain from the storehouses, which seems like a less honorable thing to do. They loaded up about 600 carts of booty and seized about 200 fine horses. And then they threw a big party in the prefectural office.

Next, they asked the chieftains from Peach Blossom Mountain, Double Dragon Mountain, and White Tiger Mountain to join the gang on Liangshan. They all agreed, and went back to their home bases to pack up their valuables, get the rest of their men, and burn their old strongholds to the ground. Within a few days, they had all reassembled, and the entire party set out for Liangshan.

Song Jiang sent four generals to lead the way -- Hua Rong the master archer, Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt, Huyan Zhuo the newest addition, and Zhu Tong the Lord of the Beautiful Beard. Along the way, they did not cause any trouble for the towns and villages they passed, and the civilians all came out to greet the bandit forces, lining the sides of the street and welcoming them with incense.

After a few days, they arrived back at Liangshan and were ferried back to Golden Sand Beach, where Chao Gai and the remaining chieftains awaited them. They went up to the Hall of Honor and did what they did best -- throw a giant kegger to welcome the newest recruits. They added 12 new chieftains in all, including some really kick-ass guys like Huyan Zhuo, Lu Zhishen, Yang Zhi, and Wu Song.

This was also a reunion of sorts. Lin Chong the Panther Head, remember, was good friends with Lu Zhishen, and the two caught up. Lu Zhishen asked Lin Chong about his wife, and Lin Chong told him that she had hung herself instead of giving in to Gao Qiu's son's entreaties, and his father-in-law also died.

Before Lu Zhishen could express his condolences, Yang Zhi the Bluefaced Beast started talking about how he had passed through here once and met the then-leader Wang Lun, and everybody laughed and said, "This must be predestined. It's no coincidence."

And then Chao Gai went up to Yang Zhi and was like, hey man! Great to see ya! Remember that time my brothers and I drugged you and made off with the birthday gifts you were escorting and pretty much ... umm ... ruined your life? Yeah, wasn't that hilarious?! What a small world, amiright?

After many days of partying, Lu Zhishen went to see Song Jiang and said, "I have an acquaintance, and brother Li Zhong also knows him. His name is Shi (3) Jin (4) the Nine Tattooed Dragons. Right now he's occupying Shaohua (4,2) Mountain in Huazhou (2,1) Prefecture. He has three other heroes with him -- Zhu (1) Wu (3) the Divine Strategist, Chen (2) Da (2) the Stream-Leaping Tiger, and Yang (2) Chun (1) the White Flower Serpent. I think about him a lot. He helped me once, and I have never forgotten it. I would like to go visit him and convince the four of them to come join us as well. What do you think?"

"I have also heard of Shi Jin," Song Jiang said. "If you can go invite him here, that would be great! But you must not go alone. Let's have brother Wu Song go with you. He's a pilgrim, also a man of religion, so it makes sense for you two to travel together."

Wu Song agreed, and so he and Lu Zhishen set out that day. After a few days, they arrived at Shaohua (4,2) Mountain. They were accosted by a bandit lackey, and they asked the lackey whether Shi Jin was on the mountain.

"Oh, since you're looking for Chieftain Shi (3), please wait here," the lackey said. "Let me go report this to our chieftains, and they'll come to welcome you."

"Just tell them that Lu Zhishen is here to see them," Wu Song said.

The lackey went off, and a short while later, three chieftains -- Zhu Wu, Chen Da, and Yang Chun -- came down to welcome Lu Zhishen and Wu Song.



“Where is Shi Jin? Why don’t I see him?” Lu Zhishen asked.

“Reverend, are you the Major Lu from Yanan (2,1) Prefecture?” Zhu Wu the Divine Strategist asked.

“Indeed I am. And this is Wu Song, the constable who beat a tiger to death on Jingyang (3,2) Ridge.”

The three chieftains from Shaohua (4,2) Mountain quickly greeted them and said, “We have long heard of your names! We heard that you two were occupying Double Dragon Mountain. What brings you here?”

“We’re not there anymore,” Lu Zhishen said. “We have joined the gang on Liangshan. I have come to see Shi Jin.”

“Well since you are here, please come to our stronghold, and I’ll tell you all the details,” Zhu Wu said.

“If you’ve got something to say, then say it,” Lu Zhishen scoffed. “None of this courtesy crap. Who’s got that much patience?!”

Wu Song smiled and told the chieftains, “The reverend is an impatient man. Just tell him what’s on your mind.”

So Zhu Wu explained, “Ever since Brother Shi joined us on Shaohua Mountain, business has been booming. But recently, Brother Shi went down the mountain and ran into an artist named Wang (2) Yi (4). That artist is from Daming (4,2) Prefecture. He had made a promise to heaven that he would paint murals at a temple on Huashan (2,1) Mountain, so he went there with his daughter to fulfill the promise. But one day, the local prefect He (4) went to the temple to offer incense. That Prefect He (4) is a member of Premier Cai’s clique and is a corrupt official who preys on the common people. When he went to the temple, he saw the artist’s daughter and took a liking to her. So he sent multiple matchmakers, trying to convince Wang Yi to let him take his daughter as a concubine. But Wang Yi refused. So Prefect He (4) took his daughter by force and exiled Wang Yi to a distant location. That day, Wang Yi was being escorted through here when he ran into Mr. Shi. Mr. Shi killed the two guards

escorting him, rescued him, and brought him to our base. Then, Mr. Shi went to assassinate Prefect He (4), but he was exposed and got captured. Right now he's in jail. And the authorities are preparing to mobilize their forces to wipe out our base. We are struggling to come up with an idea."

Lu Zhishen was enraged. "How dare that damn prefect?! He's not so tough! I'll go kill him for you!"

"Please, come to our base to discuss this first," Zhu Wu said.

So the five chieftains went up to the stronghold. The artist Wang Yi came out to meet Lu Zhishen and Wu Song and confirmed to them that Prefect He (4) was indeed a corrupt official who harmed civilians and took girls from good households by force.

During the welcome banquet, Lu Zhishen said to Wu Song, "That damn prefect has gone too far. Tomorrow let's go to the prefectural seat and kill him!"

"Brother, don't be reckless," Wu Song said. "Let's rush back to Liangshan and ask Brother Song Jiang to lead a big army to attack Huazhou Prefecture. Only then can we save Shi Jin."

"My brother will be dead by then!" Lu Zhishen scoffed.

"But even if you killed the prefect, how does that save Shi Jin?" Wu Song said, trying to reason with him while refusing to let him go.

Zhu Wu also chimed in and tried to convince Lu Zhishen against going, but Lu Zhishen lost his temper.

"You slow-ass mothers! Your hemming and hawing is going to doom my brother Shi Jin. No need to report back to Liangshan; just watch me!"

Everyone tried to talk him out of it, but to no avail. So at 3 a.m. the next morning, Lu Zhishen got up, took his spade and a broadsword, and stomped off toward the prefectural seat of Huazhou.

"He won't listen to reason; something will go wrong for sure," Wu Song lamented. So Zhu Wu dispatched a couple sharp lackeys to keep tabs on Lu Zhishen.

Once Lu Zhishen arrived in the prefectural seat, he asked for directions to the prefect's office. Someone told him, "Go across that pontoon bridge and head east, and it'll be right there."

As he approached the pontoon bridge, everyone else was stepping off to the side and telling him, "Monk, stand to one side. The prefect is coming."

"Hmm. I was just looking for that bastard," he thought to himself. "And now he's delivering himself right into my hands. Looks like he's destined to meet his end!"

Soon, the prefect's entourage came through in pairs. The prefect was riding in an enclosed sedan chair, protected by 10 officers, all wielding whips, spears, and iron chains.

Seeing this, Lu Zhishen thought to himself, "This is not a good place to make my move. If I try to hit him and miss, people will laugh at me."

As Lu Zhishen stood there thinking, the prefect saw him. After his entourage had crossed the bridge, the prefect leaned out of his sedan chair window and told his men, "Go invite that fat monk from the bridge to my residence for a meal."

One of the officers did as he instructed and told Lu Zhishen that the prefect had issued an invitation.

"That scoundrel is destined to die by my hand," Lu Zhishen thought to himself. "I was just about to attack him, but then was afraid I might not be able to get to him. So I let him pass. But now, he's inviting me."

So he followed the officer to the prefectural residence. He was invited into the main hall, where he was asked to stow his spade and broadsword before proceeding to a private hall for the meal. At first, Lu Zhishen didn't want to relinquish his weapons, but others said, "You're a monk, how can you not understand this? You can't bring weapons deep into the prefect's residence."

Lu Zhishen thought to himself, "I can crack that bastard's skull with my bare fists." So he laid down his spade and broadsword, and followed the officer to the back. There he saw the prefect sitting in the middle of the hall.

Just as Lu Zhishen entered the hall, the prefect waved his hand and shouted, "Arrest this bald crook!"

About 40 guards stormed out from behind the wall and bum-rushed Lu Zhishen. They piled on top of him until they subdued him and tied him up. They then dragged him in front of the prefect.

Prefect He (4) now barked, "You damn baldy. Where are you from?!"

"What did I do?!" Lu Zhishen protested.

"Tell me the truth: Who sent you to assassinate me?!" Prefect He asked.

"Why do you ask me something like that? I'm a man of religion."

"Bald donkey. I saw you just now. You were thinking about attacking me in the sedan chair with your spade, but then you changed your mind and did not dare to make a move. Confess right now!"

"I didn't even try to kill you. Why are you arresting me and accusing an innocent man?"

"Ha! You don't sound like a monk at all! You must be a bandit coming to avenge Shi Jin. You are not going to confess without torture. Men, beat this bald donkey, hard!"

"Wait! Wait! Don't you dare lay a finger on me!" Lu Zhishen shouted. "I'll tell you. I am Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk, a hero from Liangshan. It's no big deal if you kill me, but once my brother Song Jiang finds out, he's going to come here. And when he does, you might as well cut off your damn head and send it to him."

Prefect He (4) was pissed when he heard that, so he ordered his men to give Lu Zhishen a thorough beating, and then put him in a big cangue and locked him in the dungeon. He confiscated Lu Zhishen's weapons and sent word up to his superiors, asking for instructions.

Word of this soon got out and caused quite a stir within the city. When the bandit spies caught wind of it, they rushed the intel back to Shaohua (4,2) Mountain. Wu Song was stunned.

"The two of us came here on a mission, and now one of us is lost," he said. "How can I go back to face the other chieftains?"

To see what Wu Song will do, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, Song Jiang borrows something from a government official just passing through. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!