

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 86.

Last time, the Liangshan bandits turned their wrath on another new group of manorial lords, although unlike the last group, these guys pretty much asked for it. Instead of waiting for our heroes to steal their chickens and burn down their taverns, the Zeng (1) family decided to hijack a horse meant for the bandit leader Chao Gai, and threw in some choice words for the bandits as well.

Thoroughly antagonized, Chao Gai decided to personally go put the smack down on these upstarts. His campaign got off to an annoyingly inconclusive start, but then, he caught a break. A couple monks from a nearby monastery that had been harassed by the Zeng family came to the bandits' camp and volunteered to lead them on a night raid via a secret route.

Chao Gai jumped at the opportunity. He split his army in half. Lin Chong the Panther Head would lead 2,500 men and wait outside the village as backup. Chao Gai himself, along with 10 chieftains and another 2,500 men, would go on the raid.

That night, under the shroud of darkness, the raiding party set out, led by the two monks. They first headed toward the monks' monastery, where they would lie in wait until the right time to strike. When they arrived at the ancient monastery, Chao Gai dismounted and entered. Inside, he did not see a single soul.

"How come there aren't any monks in such a large monastery?" he asked the two monks who led him here.

"Thanks to the misdeeds of the Zeng family, most of the monks have left," they told him. "Only the abbot and a few attendants remain, and they live over by the pagoda. Sir, let's wait here for now. When it gets late into the night, we will lead you to the enemy's camp."

"Where is their camp?" Chao Gai asked.

"They have four camps, but the Zeng brothers' troops are all in the northern camp. You just need to hit that one. If that falls, the other three are of no concern."

“When should we go?”

“It’s just 9 o’clock right now. Let’s wait until midnight. Their guard will be down by then.”

And so, they waited.

As the hours passed, Chao Gai and company could hear the drums from the Zeng Village that signaled the time. At first, the drums were orderly and right on time. But as the night dragged on, the drums stopped.

“The enemy’s troops must be asleep now; we can go,” the monks said.

So they left the monastery, with the monks leading the way, and Chao Gai and his men following behind. After less than two miles, though, they turned around a dark corner and suddenly lost sight of the two monks.

The front column of the bandit army halted. They were in the dark, in unfamiliar territory, and surrounded by treacherous looking paths, with no houses in sight. The soldiers were getting a little panicky, so they hurriedly reported to Chao Gai. One of his top chieftains, the general Huyan Zhuo, immediately ordered the troops to retrace their steps and head back.

But they had not gone 100 steps when suddenly, drums and gongs rang out from all around, accompanied by earth-shaking cries of war and a sea of torches. Chao Gai and his men picked a direction and tried to storm out of this trap. But they had not gone far before an enemy squadron darted out and showered them with arrows.

In the midst of this mayhem, Chao Gai suddenly felt something thud right into his face, followed by sharp pain and the sensation of the shaft of an arrow protruding from his face. A second later, he had tumbled off his horse. Two chieftains now charged forward to put up a dogged fight to keep the enemy at bay, while a couple other chieftains helped Chao Gai back on his horse and rushed out to the entrance of the village, where they rendezvoused with the reinforcements led by Lin Chong the Panther Head.

This combined force now scrummed with the pursuing enemy until dawn, at which point both sides fell back to their own camps.

Upon returning to camp, Lin Chong did a head count. Fortunately, all the chieftains who went in with Chao Gai made it out alive. Unfortunately, half of the 2,500 troops who went in did not come out. And most unfortunately, Chao Gai had an arrow lodged in his face. As soon as they removed the arrow, he started bleeding until he fainted.

After they bandaged up his wound, the chieftains examined the arrow. Carved into the shaft was the name of the Zeng family's arms instructor, Shi (3) Wengong (2,1). More critically, though, the tip of the arrow had been dipped in poison, and that poison was doing its work most efficiently. By now, Chao Gai could not even speak. Lin Chong ordered the men to help their leader into a cart and dispatched five chieftains to escort him back to Liangshan for treatment.

Next, Lin Chong and the other 14 chieftains met to discuss their next step. Most of them said that Chao Gai's injury was exactly the ill fortune foretold by the banner that broke as they were setting off on this campaign, and they advocated for returning to Liangshan. Huyan Zhuo, however, said they must wait for orders from Liangshan before they can retreat. So, they waited, but all the chieftains were discouraged, and all the soldiers had no heart for battle. Everyone just yearned to go home.

Around 9 p.m. that night, there was just the faintest bit of light in the night sky. All 15 chieftains were sitting around in dismay, unsure of what to do next. As the saying goes, a headless snake cannot move, and a wingless bird cannot fly.

Just then, panicked scouts rushed in and reported that four or five enemy armies were charging this way, their troops too numerous to count amid the sea of torches. The chieftains rushed out and saw

that the hills on three sides were lit up as bright as day by enemy torches, and the cries of battle were swarming ever closer.

Led by Lin Chong, the chieftains and their troops beat a hasty retreat, with the Zeng family's forces in hot pursuit. The bandits fought as they ran, and kept it up for a good 20 miles before they got away. A quick headcount showed they had lost another 700 men.

After this rout, the bandits hurriedly retreated toward Liangshan. They were met on the way by Dai Zong the Magic Traveler, who had come bearing orders for them to return to the stronghold. So, they all limped back to Liangshan.

When they returned to base, they rushed to see Chao Gai. They found Song Jiang weeping by his bedside, personally changing his bandages and trying to feed him medicine. But by now, Chao Gai could no longer eat or drink anything, and his whole body was swollen. While Song Jiang tended to him, all the other chieftains waited outside.

Around midnight, Chao Gai's condition had deteriorated even further. He now turned his head slowly, looked at Song Jiang, and said, "Brother, take care of yourself. Whoever catches the man that shot me should be the leader of Liangshan!"

And with that, he breathed his last.

Song Jiang wailed as though he had just lost his parents. He cried so hard that he almost fainted. The other chieftains quickly steadied him, helped him out of the room and asked him to preside over things.

The next two most senior chieftains, the strategist Wu Yong and the Daoist priest Gongsun Sheng, consoled Song Jiang, saying, "Brother, please restrain yourself. Life and death are preordained, so do not be grief-stricken. You have important matters to tend to."

After more crying, Song Jiang ordered that Chao Gai's body be bathed with fragrant water and dressed for funeral services. They put Chao Gai in state in the Hall of Honor, and all the chieftains came to mourn him. Meanwhile, they built a coffin and chose an auspicious hour for services. In the main hall, they erected an altar with a tablet that read, "The Heavenly King Chao Gai, Divine Leader of Liangshan." In front of the tablet, they placed the arrow that had killed Chao Gai, lest anyone ever forget. All the bandits, from Song Jiang down to the lowliest lackey, donned white headbands as a symbol of mourning, and they hired monks from a nearby monastery to come to the base and perform funeral services.

Every day, Song Jiang led the chieftains in mourning, and it seemed that this was the only thing on his mind as he gave no thought to anything else. Recognizing the need to fill the power vacuum, Lin Chong, Wu Yong, and Gongsun Sheng led the other chieftains in deliberation, and they were all of one mind: Song Jiang should be the next leader of Liangshan.

The next morning, led by Lin Chong, the chieftains asked Song Jiang to join them in the Hall of Honor, which had been decorated with candles and lanterns. Once Song Jiang sat down, Wu Yong and Lin Chong told him, "Brother, please hear us: A country cannot go a day without an emperor, and a household cannot go a day without a master. Chieftain Chao has ascended to heaven, but someone must lead Liangshan. Within the four seas, everyone reveres your great name. Tomorrow is an auspicious day, so we want to ask you to become our leader, and we shall all obey your command."

Song Jiang, however, said, "Chieftain Chao's dying command was that whoever catches that Shi (3) Wengong (2,1) shall be the leader. You all know this, so how can you disregard it before his body is even cold? I have not yet avenged him, so how can I assume the leadership?"

But Wu Yong said, "Even though Chieftain Chao said that, we haven't caught his killer yet. How can our stronghold go a day without a leader? Brother, if you don't assume the leadership, who else would dare to? Then how can we command the troops? Don't worry about Chieftain Chao's last wish. You just take the command chair for now, and then we will figure it out later on."

“Your words make sense,” Song Jiang said. “In that case, I will temporarily assume this responsibility. But once we have avenged Chieftain Chao, whoever catches Shi Wengong, no matter who it is, will become our leader.”

Standing off the side and growing impatient with all this hemming and hawing, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind shouted, “Brother, it would be just fine if you became the emperor, much less the leader of Liangshan!”

“This dark knave is spewing nonsense again!” Song Jiang scoffed. “Any more out of you and I’ll cut off your tongue!”

Chastened, Li Kui just mumbled, “It’s not like I was nominating you to be some two-bit village head. I was asking you to be emperor, and yet you want to cut off my tongue.”

Wu Yong now chimed in and made peace, telling Song Jiang, “That knave has no respect for anything. Brother, don’t sink to his level. Just worry about presiding over our stronghold.”

So Song Jiang burned some incense and assumed the first chair, flanked by Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng. The rest of the chieftains took their position on two sides, led by Lin Chong on the left and Huyan Zhuo on the right. They all bowed and offered their respects to the new leader and then sat down then.

Song Jiang now declared, “Today, I assume the leadership. Brothers, I am wholly reliant on your assistance. Let us be of one body and mind and work together to carry out justice on heaven’s behalf. Right now, we have many troops, so we cannot operate like we did in the past.”

He then went on to announce a whole series of operational changes and assignments. I won’t describe them verbatim here, because most of it is just another iteration of the duty roster. But one particular item of note is that the Hall of Honor was now renamed to the Hall of Loyalty and Honor. In Sidney Shapiro’s translation of the novel, the hall was originally dubbed Fraternity Hall, and its new name was Loyalty Hall. You may remember how Song Jiang had mentioned a couple times in past recruitment pitches that they were waiting for the imperial court to grant them amnesty. Well, here’s

another indication that his government-friendly rhetoric was more than just talk, because the character “loyalty” in the new name was very specifically referring to loyalty to the state.

Beyond that symbolic name change, the bandits also divided their forces into six camps, including two naval camps, each with its own pecking order of chieftains. Everybody was assigned to one of the camps and had specific duties. The operation even included its own financial management arm, its own forge, and its own brewer. Our heroes really made sure to cover all their bases when they went recruiting.

One day, after the changes had been implemented, Song Jiang sat down with the chieftains and discussed going to attack the Zeng (1) Village to avenge Chao Gai. But Wu Yong advised against it.

“Even ordinary civilians abstain from drastic actions when they are in mourning,” he told Song Jiang. “Brother, if you want to go on campaign, then wait until the 100 days of mourning are up.”

Song Jiang took his advice and just stayed in the stronghold, spending each day doing good deeds and accruing good karma while conducting services for Chao Gai.

One day, a monk from Daming Prefecture was passing through, and the bandits invited him up to the stronghold to perform services. As they were dining and chatting after the service, Song Jiang asked the monk about famous figures in Daming, which was a prosperous big city that was commonly referred to as the Northern Capital.

“Chieftain, have you not heard of the Jade Qilin (2,2) of Hebei Province?” the monk asked.

Now, a Qilin is a mythical creature that looks like a dragon with hooves. In Chinese mythology, it’s believed that when you see a Qilin, it’s a sign that a great sage or ruler is about to either arrive or die. It’s said to be a fearsome looking creature with great powers, but it does not attack people, so it’s considered a benevolent creature.

So anyway, as soon as the monk mentioned this “Jade Qilin of Hebei,” both Song Jiang and Wu Yong slapped their heads and went, of course!

“We aren’t even old yet, and we’re already forgetting things,” Song Jiang said. “There is a wealthy man in Daming. His name is Lu (2) Junyi (4,1), and his nickname is the Jade Qilin. His family has lived in that city for generations. He possesses great fighting skills that are unrivaled in the land. If we can add him to our ranks, we would have no need to fear the authorities coming to attack us.”

Wu Yong chuckled and said, “Brother, why do you put ourselves down? If you really want that guy here, it won’t be hard.”

“But he’s an A-list personality in Daming; how can we get him to turn brigand?” Song Jiang said.

“I’ve actually been thinking about that for a while; it just slipped my mind in the moment,” Wu Yong said. “I’ll just use a simple scheme to get him to come here.”

“Sir, everyone calls you the Resourceful Star; you truly live up to your reputation!” Song Jiang praised Wu Yong. “May I ask how you plan to lure him here?”

“I’ll just use a few words to get Lu Junyi to come here. It’ll be as easy as taking something out of a sack. But I need a bold, simple-minded companion to go with me.”

Well, as soon as Li Kui heard that, he was like, hey, I’m bold and simple-minded! So he shouted, “Professor, I’ll go with you!”

“Brother, hold on,” Song Jiang shouted back. “If we’re killing, burning, looting, or besieging a city, then we can use you. But this is a delicate operation, not suited to your temperament. You can’t go.”

“You all just don’t want me to go because you think I’m ugly and don’t like me!” Li Kui protested.

“It’s not that!” Song Jiang said. “But Daming Prefecture is crawling with cops. If someone recognizes you, it could cost you your life.”

“I don’t care. I want to go!”



Wu Yong now said, "If you agree to three conditions, then I can take you. Otherwise, just sit down right here in the base."

"Even if it's 30 things, I would agree; much less three."

"Alright then. First, you drink like mad. From this day forth, you must go dry until we get back here. Second, you must disguise yourself as a Daoist acolyte in my service. Whatever I tell you to do, you must do it. The third thing is the most difficult. Starting tomorrow, you must not speak. You'll act as if you were a mute. If you can agree to those three things, then I'll take you with me."

Li Kui answered, "I can go dry and disguise myself as an acolyte. But it's gonna kill me to not be allowed to say anything."

"If you open your mouth, it'll cause trouble," Wu Yong said, remaining firm on his last condition.

"Alright, easy enough," Li Kui said. "I'll just keep a coin in my mouth."

Song Jiang chimed in and warned Li Kui, "Brother, if you insist on going, then don't blame me if something goes wrong."

"It's fine, it's fine! I'll bring my axes with me and take off at least a few thousand heads before I'm done."

At that, all the chieftains burst out laughing, even though Li Kui was like, guys, I'm totally not kidding here, or have you forgotten EVERY SINGLE THING I've done in this story? Anyway, no one could talk him out of it, so that very day, they threw him and Wu Yong a going-away party. They rested that night and set out first thing in the morning. Wu Yong packed some luggage, and Li Kui dressed up like an acolyte and carried the luggage on a shoulder pole. Song Jiang and company saw them off at Golden Sand Beach, with final reminders for Wu Yong to be careful and for Li Kui to ... umm ... not act like his usual self for a change.

The journey to Daming took four or five days, and every day brought myriad new reasons for Wu Yong to regret letting Li Kui tag along. In any case, they managed the trip without anyone literally losing their heads, and one day, as dusk approached, they arrived outside the city and found an inn. And of course, Li Kui couldn't let this night pass without incident either. When he went to make dinner, the clerk at the inn was a step slow starting the fire in the stove. Li Kui couldn't yell at the guy since he was supposed to be a mute, so he let his fist do the talking instead. Soon, the clerk was knocking on Wu Yong's door, with blood dripping out of his mouth. Wu Yong hurriedly apologized and handled the matter with a financial transaction. And then he let Li Kui hear about it for the rest of the night.

The next morning after breakfast, Wu Yong called Li Kui into his room and told him, "You insisted on coming, and yet all you've done is aggravate me the whole way! Today, we are going into the city. That's no place for games. Don't cost me my life!"

"I would never dare," Li Kui muttered.

"Let's agree on a signal," Wu Yong said. "When you see me shake my head, DO NOT move a muscle."

Li Kui promised to do as Wu Yong instructed, and they prepared to set out. Wu Yong wore a black crinkled silk headscarf that came down to his eyebrows, a black Daoist cassock trimmed in white, and a multicolored girdle. He had on square-toed cloth shoes and carried a pole with a bronze bell that shined like gold. Li Kui, meanwhile, wound his bristly brown hair into two coils on two sides of his head. He had on a short brown gown, a multicolored short-fringed sash, and a pair of walking boots. He carried a wooden pole with a piece of paper attached to the top. On the paper were characters that said, "Fortunes told. One tael of silver."

The two of them now left the inn and headed toward the south gate of the city. In less than a mile, a truly awesome metropolis stood in front of them, with high walls, wide moats, strong defenses, and a bustling scene of commerce. Daming Prefecture was the top destination north of the Yellow River, and it

was overseen by Governor Liang, the son-in-law of the premier. So it was a hive of activity and had a strong military presence.

Wu Yong and Li Kui made their way to the gate, where about 50 soldiers stood guard around an officer who was seated by the gate, checking all who entered. Wu Yong stepped forth and greeted them, and the soldiers asked him where he was from.

“Your humble servant is named Zhang Yong (4), and this acolyte’s last name is Li (3),” he replied. “We are traveling fortune-tellers. We have come to this big city to ply our trade.”

As he spoke, Wu Yong took out his forged paperwork. The paperwork passed mustard, but something else caught the soldiers’ attention.

“That acolyte has the shifty eyes of a thief,” they said.

Li Kui was just about to deliver a stern response with his fist, but Wu Yong quickly shook his head, and so Li Kui could do nothing but look down. Wu Yong turned to the guards and said, “It’s a long story with him. This acolyte is deaf and mute, and offers nothing but a bit of brute strength. Yet, he’s my child, so I have no choice but to bring him with me. He doesn’t know any manners; please excuse him.”

That explanation satisfied the guards, and they let the duo into the city. They headed to the city center. As they walked, Wu Yong rang his bell and chanted verses that announced his trade.

“Fortune, destiny, fate. I predict life, I foretell death, I know who shall rise high and who shall fall low. To learn your future, offer one tael of silver.”

As they walked, they were drawing a crowd of about 50 little kids, who had a good ol’ time following them and laughing at them. Soon, this whole entourage arrived outside the home of Lu Junyi. Wu Yong now chanted his verses and walked back and forth, while the kids made a ton of ruckus as they gawked.

At that moment, Lu Junyi was sitting in his office, watching his gaggle of stewards receive and distribute merchandise. Just then, he heard some commotion outside on the street, so he asked one of

his men what was going on. The guy told him, "My lord, it's too funny. There's a fortune-teller from out of town. He's offering his services on the streets, but he's asking for a tael of silver for each fortune told. Who the heck would pay that much? He also has an acolyte, a sloppy looking guy who walks like some inhuman creature. And a bunch of kids are following them and laughing at them."

When he heard this, Lu Junyi said, "He would not ask for such a high price if he did not have real knowledge. Go invite him in."

Umm ... ok, that's one way to look at it. But whatever, you're the boss. His man rushed outside and called to Wu Yong, "Sir, our master invites you in."

"Who is inviting me?" Wu Yong asked.

"The magnate Lu Junyi."

Wu Yong and Li Kui followed the guy into the residence. They went into a parlor and waited, and Wu Yong told Li Kui to sit down. A moment later, Lu Junyi walked in. He was tall and carried himself with an impressive air, looking as though he were a god.

Wu Yong offered his greetings, and Lu Junyi returned them, asking Wu Yong for his name. Wu Yong replied, "My name is Zhang Yong (4), with the nickname the Mouth that Talks of Heaven. I am from Shandong Province, and I can calculate the will of heaven and foretell people's fates. But I must receive one tael of silver before I can tell your fortune."

Lu Junyi invited them to a back parlor for tea. He then gave Wu Yong a tael of silver and asked him to tell his fortune. Wu Yong asked for his birthdate, and Lu Junyi provided the information, adding, "A gentleman asks about calamity rather than good fortune. No need to tell me about my good fortune; just tell me about any hidden dangers."

Wu Yong took out his abacus, put it on the table, and did some quick calculations. Suddenly, he slapped the table and shouted, "So strange!"

This caught Lu Junyi off guard, and he hurriedly asked what the future held for him.

“Sir, I can answer honestly only if you would not get angry,” Wu Yong said.

“I’m asking you to point a lost traveler in the right direction, so please speak without concern,” Lu Junyi said.

To see what the future held for Lu Junyi, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, Lu Junyi goes looking for trouble, and finds it. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!