

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 98.

Last time, Song Jiang insisted on yielding the leadership of Langshan to Lu Junyi, but nobody else was having it, including Lu Junyi himself. But Song Jiang would not relent. In the end, they decided to settle the matter in the only honorable way they could think of: Go smack down two nearby towns that were just minding their own business. Whoever sacked their target first would be the next leader. So, on the first day of the third month of the year, they set out, each with 28 chieftains and an army of 10,000.

We will first follow Song Jiang and his army to the prefectural town of Dongping (1,2). When they were about 10 miles away, Song Jiang pitched camp at a place ironically named Peace Mountain Town. Once they were settled, Song Jiang said to his chieftains, “The prefect of Dongping has a commander named Dong (3) Ping (2).” — Yeah, I know, talk about confusing. — Anyway, Song Jiang continued, “This Dong (3) Ping (2) is quite skilled at wielding a pair of spears, and everyone calls him the General of Double Spears. He has the valor to surpass 10,000 men. Even though we are on our way to attack their town, we should still proceed with some courtesy. Let’s send a couple men to deliver a letter challenging them to combat. If they are willing to surrender, then we won’t have to come to blows. If they refuse, then no one can blame us for the bloodshed.”

Umm, so, I would think that plenty of people would have perfectly legit reasons to blame our heroes for the carnage to come even if they sent the letter first, such as, oh I don’t know, the innocent civilians of the town? But anyway, the newest chieftain, the former horse thief Yu (4) Baosi (3,4), the God of the Dangerous Road, stepped forth and said, “I am acquainted with Dong Ping. I am willing to deliver the letter.”

Another chieftain also volunteered to go with him. This was Wang (2) Dingliu (4,4), the Living Goddess of Lightning, the guy who helped Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves when the latter was suckered by a shady boatman while en route to fetch the miracle healer to save Song Jiang’s life a

couple episodes back. Wang Dingliu and Yu Baosi both said, “We haven’t done anything for Liangshan yet, so we are willing to take on this mission.”

Song Jiang was delighted and wrote a letter immediately. The letter only mentioned that they wanted to “borrow’ grain from the town, and the two chieftains set off.

Inside the town of Dongping (1,2), the prefect, a certain Prefect Cheng (2), had gotten word that a bandit army from Liangshan was on its way to his town, so he asked his commander Dong (3) Ping (2) to join him and discuss how to prepare. As they were talking, an attendant said that Song Jiang had sent messengers to deliver a message. Prefect Cheng (2) summoned them in, and the two chieftains promptly presented the letter.

After reading the letter, Prefect Cheng turned to Dong Ping and said, “They are asking us for grain; how should we proceed?”

Dong Ping immediately flew into a rage and barked for his men to take the chieftains outside and execute them. But Prefect Cheng intervened and said, “We must not. Since ancient times, warring states do not execute each other’s envoys. It would not be proper. Let’s just give them each 20 strokes and send them back, and then see how the bandits react.”

Dong Ping relented, but he was still pissed. So he ordered his men to bound the two chieftains and cane them until their skin split, and then he kicked them out of the town. The two chieftains limped back to camp and told Song Jiang while weeping, “That knave Dong Ping was so rude! He thinks nothing of us!”

Seeing his messengers get less-than-royal treatment, Song Jiang was filled with anger and now wanted to flatten the town. He sent the two unlucky chieftains back to Liangshan to recuperate, and then turned his attention back to his target.

Another chieftain, Shi (3) Jin (4) the Nine Tattoo Dragons, now told Song Jiang, "I used to live in this town, and when I was there, I was seeing a courtesan in a pleasure house named Li (3). We were really tight. I can bring lots of gold and silver with me, slip into the city, and stay in her home. On an agreed-upon date, you can attack the city to lure Dong Ping out to fight, while I climb up to their drum tower and start a fire. By coordinating from inside and out, we would succeed."

"That's perfect!" Song Jiang said. So Shi Jin packed some gold and silver and stashed a dagger on him and left. As he departed, Song Jiang told him, "Proceed as you see fit; I will hold off on attacking for now."

So Shi Jin made his way into the town and went over to the pleasure house in the western part of town. When he knocked on his old flame's door, the madam's husband answered and was quite shocked to see him. He let Shi Jin into the house and called out the courtesan to see him.

Once they sat down upstairs, the courtesan asked Shi Jin, "Why haven't I seen you in so long? I heard you became a chieftain on Liangshan. The authorities have put out wanted posters for you. In recent days they are saying on the streets that Song Jiang is coming to besiege the city and demand grain. What are you doing here?"

Shi Jin answered, "I'll be honest with you. I am a chieftain on Liangshan now. I haven't rendered any service. Now that my brother Song Jiang is here to attack the city, I told him about our past connection. I have come here as a spy. I have brought a bundle of gold and silver for you. Don't let word of this get out. Once the deed is done, I will bring you and your family to Liangshan to live the high life."

The courtesan agreed and accepted the gold and silver. She then prepared some wine and food for Shi Jin and left him to eat.

A little while later, she returned, but Shi Jin noticed that her face was flushed. "Is something wrong? Why do you look so unsteady?" he asked.

“I slipped coming up the stairs,” she told him. “I almost fell, so I’m a bit flustered.”

She then sat down and the two caught up on old times. They had been talking for about an hour when suddenly they heard footsteps stomping up the stairs and men shouting outside the window. Before Shi Jin could react, dozens of cops stormed into the room, pounced on him, bound him, and dragged him out of the house.

So, I guess now we know why the courtesan was looking flushed. While Shi Jin was eating, she had gone downstairs to speak to the madam of the pleasure house.

“When he was a regular here, he was a good man, so it didn’t matter when he came here,” the courtesan said. “But now he’s a criminal. If this gets out, it’s no laughing matter.”

The madam’s husband said, “Song Jiang and that gang of Liangshan bandits are not to be messed with. Whenever they attack a city, it falls. If we turn him in, when they break into the town, they are gonna settle the score with us.”

But his wife cursed him, “You old fool! What the hell do you know?! As the old saying goes, ‘If a wasp flies under your clothes, you take off the shirt to chase it away.’ The universal rule is that informants are not prosecuted. You just hurry up and go report this to the prefectural office so they can come arrest him. It will spare us trouble later.”

“But he gave us so much gold and silver,” her husband said. “What would be the point of all that if we don’t do something for him?”

“Stop farting, you old fool! How many people have met their downfall in this pleasure house? What’s one more? If you won’t go report him, then I will, and I’ll tell them that you are in cahoots with him!”

“Alright, don’t lose your temper,” her husband relented. “Have our girl keep him occupied so that we don’t beat the grass and startle the snake and let him escape. I’ll go inform the authorities and have them come arrest him first, and then go report this to the prefectural office.”

Fast forward back to the present, and the cops were taking their prisoner to the prefectural office.

Prefect Cheng cursed Shi Jin as soon as he saw him.

“You’ve got some gall! How dare you come here alone to spy on us?! If the courtesan’s father had not turned you in, you would’ve doomed the innocent people of this town! Tell me your intentions now! What were Song Jiang’s instructions?”

Shi Jin refused to say a word, and the commander Dong Ping said, “These scoundrels will not confess without some pain!”

“Beat this knave, hard!” Prefect Cheng barked to his men. So the jailers pushed Shi Jin to the ground, splashed cold water on his legs, and then caned him hard, giving him 100 strokes on each leg. But Shi Jin still refused to talk.

“Put this knave in a long cangue for now and lock him up in the dungeon,” Dong Ping said. “Once we capture Song Jiang, we will take them both to the capital.”

Meanwhile, outside the town, after Shi Jin left on his mission, Song Jiang wrote to the strategist Wu Yong, who was accompanying Lu Junyi on his campaign, and informed him of what’s happening on this end. Later that night, he got a surprise visit from Wu Yong.

“Who told Shi Jin to go?” Wu Yong asked as soon as he walked into Song Jiang’s tent.

“He suggested it himself,” Song Jiang said. “He said that courtesan was his old flame and they were really close, and that’s why he went.”

“Brother, you should have said no; that’s what I would’ve done,” Wu Yong told him. “As the saying goes, prostitutes pretend, exaggerate, beg, leak, and leave. They get intimate quickly but discard the old for the new just as quickly. How many men have met their end because of this? They are as unstable as

water, and even if this one actually has some genuine feelings, she cannot go against the bawd who handles her business. Shi Jin will surely run into trouble.”

Song Jiang went oh crap and asked Wu Yong what they should do. Wu Yong summoned the female chieftain Gu (4) Dasao the Female Tiger and told her, “We must trouble you to make a trip. Disguise yourself as a poor peasant and slip into the town as a beggar. If there’s any movement, hurry back at once. If Shi Jin is in prison, you can go tell the jailers that he was kind to you in the past and you want to bring him a little bit of rice. Once you get in there, tell Shi Jin that we will attack the town around dusk on the last day of the month, and that he should ask to use the latrine and take that opportunity to break loose. On the last night of the month, you should start a fire in the town as the signal, and we will attack, and thus will we succeed.”

Wu Yong then told Song Jiang, “Brother, you should first attack the nearby county. The civilians there will no doubt flee to Dongping (1,2) Prefecture. Gu Dasao can then mix in with them and slip into the town without being detected.”

After laying out this plan, Wu Yong left to rejoin Lu Junyi, while Song Jiang dispatched the hunter brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao at the head of 500 men to attack the nearby county. Sure enough, all the civilians there scampered toward Dongping Prefecture. Gu Dasao, with disheveled hair and wearing some old rags, mixed in with the refugees and got into Dongping without any problems.

Once in, she made her way to the prefectural offices and found out that Shi Jin was indeed locked up in prison, just as Wu Yong predicted. The next day, Gu Dasao waited in front of the jailhouse with a bowl of rice. When she spotted an elderly jailer leaving, she quickly kneeled in front of him with tears streaming down her face.

“What are you crying about?” the old jailer asked her.

“That Shi Jin who’s locked up in jail used to be my master,” she said. “It’s been 10 years since we parted. I just heard that he was drifting around doing business. I don’t know why he ended up in jail, but seeing that he has no one to bring him any food, I went begging and cobbled together this bowl of rice so that he won’t starve. Brother, please have pity and take me in there. It would bring you more good karma than building a pagoda.”

The old jailer said, “He’s a Liangshan bandit, and he has committed a capital offense. Who would dare to take you in to see him?”

“Even if he deserves to be executed, please have pity on an old woman and let me go in to give him this rice to show I have not forgotten his past kindness.”

As Gu Dasao wailed some more, the old jailer thought to himself, “If it were a man asking to go in, that would be impossible. But what threat could a woman pose?”

So, he relented and brought Gu Dasao into the dungeon. At that moment, Shi Jin was sitting in his cell, weighed down by chains and the cangue. When he saw Gu Dasao, he was so stunned that he could not speak. Meanwhile, she pretended to sob while feeding him rice.

But just then, another jailer came over and barked at her, “Hey! This is a criminal who committed a capital offense! Not even a breeze can blow through a jail. Who let you in?! Get out right now and I’ll spare you a beating!”

With all the people around, Gu Dasao couldn’t really explain things in detail to Shi Jin, so she just quickly whispered, “Attacking on the last day of the month; fight your way out of here.” Before Shi Jin could ask for more details, she was already hustled out of the jailhouse. All Shi Jin could catch was “Last day of the month.”

Now, on the Chinese calendar, months either had 30 days or 29 days. The third month of the year had 30 days. On the 29th day of the month, Shi Jin overheard two jailers talking. One asked the other, "Hey, what day of the month is it?"

The other jailer got his months mixed up and said, "Today is the last day of the month. Tonight we should burn some paper money for the lost souls."

When he heard that, Shi Jin could barely wait until nightfall. When it finally came, he asked to use the latrine. A low-level jailer who had been drinking all night and was buzzing big time took him out of his cell and brought him to the latrine pit.

"Hey, who's that?" Shi Jin asked.

The jailer turned around, and before he could turn back, Shi Jin had broken out of his cangue and smashed the jailer on the face with it, sending him to the ground. Shi Jin then picked up a brick and broke off the rest of the cangue. Now, with eyes glaring, he stomped out to the courtyard in the jailhouse, where a few other jailers were also dead drunk. Before long, a few of them were just dead, and the rest had fled as Shi Jin did his thing.

Next, Shi Jin freed all the other prisoners, who totaled about 60. He then threw open the jailhouse and waited for backup.

There was just one problem: Backup wasn't coming until the next night, the actual last night of the month. Meanwhile, word of this jailbreak had gotten to the prefect, and the color drained from his face.

Prefect Cheng quickly consulted with his commander Dong Ping, who said, "There must be spies in the town. Send lots of men to surround the jailhouse and keep that knave inside, while I take this opportunity to go out and capture Song Jiang. You should keep a close guard on the town and send dozens of cops to surround the jailhouse so the prisoner won't get away."

So while Dong Ping rode off to mobilize his troops, Prefect Cheng sent a bunch of his cops to surround the jailhouse and make lots of noise. Hearing and seeing all those men, Shi Jin did not dare to



storm out. But at the same time, the guys outside did not dare to storm in. So they were just at a stalemate. Gu Dasao, meanwhile, could only lament the miscommunication.

Outside the town, Dong Ping and his forces were charging toward Song Jiang's camp. When Song Jiang heard this news, he figured Gu Dasao must have also run into trouble, and he ordered his men to prepare to face the enemy. As dawn cracked, the two sides met on the field of battle, and Dong Ping rode out, looking quite the gallant hero. So, this Dong Ping was clever and intelligent, and there was nothing he could not master, be it martial arts or musical instruments. He also cut a fine figure, and he was renowned throughout Shandong and Hebei Provinces as the Dashing General of Double Spears. In fact, his quiver had a small flag bearing a couplet informing people of this. The couplet said: "Heroic General of Double Spears, Dashing Marquis of Ten Thousand Households."

Quite impressed by Dong Ping, Song Jiang first sent the chieftain Han (2) Tao (1), the Undefeated General, out to face him. Dong Ping's twin spears flashed and whirled, and he was unstoppable. So Song Jiang sent out Xu Ning the Golden Lancer to relieve Han Tao. Xu Ning and Dong Ping traded blows for 50-some bouts without a winner.

Fearing that Xu Ning might slip up, Song Jiang signaled for him to fall back with the banging of gongs. As Xu Ning rode back, however, Dong Ping charged right into Song Jiang's lines. Song Jiang pointed with his whip and ordered his soldiers to surround Dong Ping. As Song Jiang looked on from a high vantage point, he directed his men to flock to whichever direction Dong Ping went in. Nonetheless, Dong Ping charged to and fro within the enemy's lines until around noon, at which point he managed to carve out a path and charged out.

Song Jiang did not give chase, and Dong Ping decided to return to town that night since it was clear he could not win the battle. Song Jiang now advanced his troops to surround the town. But inside the

town, the female chieftain Gu Dasao did not dare to start a fire, since the plan had gone all haywire. And Shi Jin was still stuck in a stalemate at the jailhouse.

With the two sides in a holding pattern that night, Dong Ping tended to other business — personal business. Prefect Cheng had a very beautiful daughter, and Dong Ping was still single. Dong Ping had sent matchmakers to the prefect on many occasions to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage, but the prefect had refused, which caused some tension between them.

Well, that night, after Dong Ping returned to the town, he once again sent someone to renew the marriage proposal, figuring that the prefect might be singing a different tune now that he needed Dong Ping's skills.

"Well, I am a civil official and he is a military officer, so it WOULD be an eligible and proper match," Prefect Cheng said. "But right now bandits are threatening our town and the situation is urgent. If I agree to the marriage under these circumstances, I would be a laughingstock. Once we have repelled the bandits and the town is safe, then we can discuss the marriage."

When the matchmaker brought this message back to Dong Ping, he said, "That's true," but in his heart, he was unhappy and worried that the prefect would go back on his word once the threat had passed.

Later that night, Song Jiang intensified his siege on the town. So the prefect asked Dong Ping to go out and fight, and Dong Ping was irate at the bandits' persistence, so he led his troops out.

Shouting from under his own banner, Song Jiang said, "You are but one general. How dare you resist us? Have you not heard the old saying, 'When a tall building is about to collapse, a single beam cannot hold it together'? I have 100,000 stout soldiers, thousands of fierce generals. We carry out justice on heaven's behalf, aid the needy, and protect the threatened. Surrender now, and I will spare your life!"

Dong Ping barked back angrily, "You lowly clerk and crazy convict. How dare you spew such nonsense?!"

He then galloped toward Song Jiang with twin spears in hand. From Song Jiang's lines charged out Lin Chong the Panther Head and Hua Rong the archer. The three warriors traded blows for a while, and then both chieftains retreated, and Song Jiang's troops scattered. Dong Ping had his heart set on capturing Song Jiang, so he gave chase.

After keeping up the pursuit for a while, Dong Ping was approaching the border of a nearby county. By now, he was a few miles away from his own town, and up ahead a village came into view. Here, the road narrowed and was flanked on both sides by thatched huts. Dong Ping could see Song Jiang up ahead, so he pressed on into the village.

Suddenly, he heard two men shout from behind, "Do not harm our leader!" These were the chieftain brothers Kong Ming and Kong Liang. That was followed by the ring of a gong, and the doors on the huts on both sides of the road swung open, pulling up tripwires that had been buried across the dirt path. Dong Ping's horse tried to turn around, but got tangled in a wire that sprang up behind it, and Dong Ping fell to the ground.

Before he could get up, from the left side of the road charged out Hu Sanniang the Ten Feet of Steel and her husband Wang Ying the Stumpy Tiger. From the right came Sun Erniang the Female Yaksha and her husband Zhang Qing the Gardener. They pounced on Dong Ping, tied him up, seized his armor, weapons, and horse, and hustled him off to see Song Jiang.

Song Jiang was waiting under a poplar tree just beyond the rows of thatched huts. When he saw the two female chieftains bring a bound Dong Ping toward him, he reproached them, "I told you to go invite General Dong here. Who told you to bound him?"

The two female chieftains backed away uttering apologies, and probably exchanging an eyeroll in the process. Song Jiang now did his usual kill-them-with-kindness thing and kowtowed to Dong Ping, prompting a return gesture from his prisoner.

“General, if you do not think us too unworthy, then please be our leader,” Song Jiang said.

Now, you probably know by now that this was Song Jiang’s typical routine with every government military officer he captured. But just once, I would love to see one of them take him up on his offer and say, “Ok, I’ll be your leader,” and see how that would go, especially since Liangshan was currently embroiled in a leadership dispute. But alas, Dong Ping did no such thing. Instead, he said, “I am your prisoner. Even 10,000 deaths would be a light punishment for me. It would be my greatest fortune to be given a refuge with you.”

Well, that was easy. Song Jiang said, “Your town is near our marsh and has never bothered us. We just came to borrow grain because we were short on provisions. We had no other intent.”

Umm, ok. That’s not exactly what’s going on here, but sure, let’s roll with that. Anyway, Dong Ping bought it and said, “That knave of a prefect used to be a retainer of Tong (2) Guan (3), the Chancellor of Military Affairs. That’s how he got this sweet gig. How can he not be squeezing the civilians for his own gain? If you would allow me, I will go trick them into opening the gates, charge in, and seize the stored money and grain to repay you.”

Song Jiang was delighted and returned Dong Ping’s weapons, armor, and horse. Dong Ping now rode back to the town, with Song Jiang’s army following behind with their banners lowered.

When they arrived outside the town, Dong Ping called for the guards to open up. The guards recognized him and did not realize that he had the bandit army behind him since their banners were not up. So they opened the gates and lowered the drawbridge. Dong Ping galloped onto the bridge, cut the chains so that the guards could not pull it back up, and Song Jiang’s troops followed Dong Ping into the town.

As soon as they breached the town, Song Jiang sent out orders that no civilians were to be harmed, nor was there to be any burning of houses. Dong Ping now broke into Prefect Cheng's residence, killed the prefect and his entire family, except for the daughter, whom he kept for himself, setting himself up for an awkward honeymoon.

Meanwhile, Song Jiang and company broke open the jailhouse and rescued Shi Jin. They then raided the town's storehouses and made off with all the valuables. Next, they did likewise with the grain stores, loading everything onto carts to be taken back to Liangshan. Oh, and now that Shi Jin was free, he had a score to settle. He took some men and went to his old flame's house and killed her and her handlers, cutting them all to pieces.

All this ... umm ... justice thus meted out, Song Jiang distributed the dead prefect's property to the town's residents. He also posted notices to announce to the civilians that, hey great news! We have executed your tyrannical governor — YES, tyrannical, trust us -- and you law-abiding citizens can now go back to living your lives in peace. And then, our heroes packed up and left town, as the civilians watched them ride away with all the town's wealth and grain.

So, Song Jiang had sacked his target town in a month. To see how Lu Junyi was doing at the other town, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, what can fly without feathers and really leaves a mark? To find out, join us next time. Thanks for listening!