

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 112.

Last time, Liangshan sent the chieftains Yan Qing the Prodigy and Dai Zong the Magic Traveler to the capital to try to procure another offer of amnesty from the imperial court. Yan Qing looked up the emperor's lover, the courtesan Li Shishi, staved off her advances, and got her to help him gain an audience with the emperor and get a personal pardon. He then delivered a message to Marshal Su, who was known to be a kind and honest official, and asked him to help put in a good word for them with the emperor.

All this done, Yan Qing and Dai Zong now went back to the inn to discuss how to accomplish their third mission on this trip — springing fellow chieftains Xiao Rang and Yue He, who had been dispatched to accompany Marshal Gao Qiu back to the capital to make a case for amnesty directly to the emperor but who were now presumably kept under lock and key at Gao Qiu's residence.

"We can disguise ourselves as bailiffs again and wait out by Marshal Gao's office," Dai Zong suggested. "When someone comes out from there, we can bribe them to help us see our brothers. Once we see them, we can figure it out from there."

So the two of them changed and headed to the Bridge of Peace. There, they waited near Marshal Gao's office compound. Soon, a young officer swaggered out, and Yan Qing quickly greeted him and invited him to join them for tea.

Once they sat down in a teahouse, Yan Qing said, "I'll be honest. Marshal Gao had brought two men from Liangshan. One of them, the one named Yue (4) He (2), is a relative of my friend here, and he would like to see him. That's why we are troubling you ..."

"Stop right there," the officer said. "Who can meddle in such top-level affairs?"

That was the cue, and Dai Zong now pulled out a big ingot of silver and plunked it down on the table.

"Sir," he told the officer, "if you can just bring Yue He out to see us quick at the gate, you can have this ingot of silver. He doesn't even have to set foot outside the compound."

“Hmm, those two are in the compound,” the officer said, his dedication to duty obviously offset by his love of bling. “The marshal has ordered that they be housed in the garden. I can bring Yue He out to talk to you. After that, you better make good on your promise.”

“Of course,” Dai Zong reassured him.

“Ok, then you guys wait here for me,” the officer said as he got up and rushed back into the compound. Dai Zong and Yan Qing waited in the tea house. Less than an hour later, the young officer hurried back out and whispered, “Give me the silver first. Yue He is waiting in a side building.”

Dai Zong whispered a few words to Yan Qing, and then gave the officer the silver. The officer then led Yan Qing to the side building and told them, “Hurry up and say what you need to say.”

Yan Qing told Yue He that they were planning to spring them, and Yue He told Yan Qing that he and Xiao Rang were being kept in the rear garden, where the walls are too high to climb and all the ladders had been put away.

“Are there trees near the wall?” Yan Qing asked.

“There are a row of big willow trees along one wall,” Yue He said.

“Tonight, listen for a cough,” Yan Qing told him. “That’ll be your signal. I will be waiting outside and I’ll throw a couple ropes over. You tie the ropes to the willow trees, the two of us will pull them taut, and then you guys can climb out on the ropes. We’ll be there at 3 a.m. Don’t be late.”

“Are you all done yet?! Go already!” the young officer suddenly interrupted. So Yue He went back to the rear garden to tell Xiao Rang the plan, while Yan Qing left and met back up with Dai Zong.

Around 3 a.m. that night, all was quiet behind the compound. Along the back of the compound ran a river, and on the river, two boats had been anchored near shore. Now, two shadows emerged from the boats. These were Yan Qing and Dai Zong. They had been lying in wait all night. And now, as the drums

sounded to signal that it was 3 a.m., they slipped on to shore, walked up to the back wall of the compound, and coughed. A second later, a cough came from the other side of the wall.

On the other side of the wall, Yue He and Xiao Rang were waiting. Suddenly, they saw two ropes fly over the wall. They quickly tied the ropes to the trees. Yan Qing and Dai Zong pulled the ropes tight, and a few minutes later, Yue He and Xiao Rang scaled over the wall along the ropes. They then threw the ropes over the wall and sneaked back to the inn. There, they packed up, cooked and ate breakfast, paid their tab, and left. They waited by the city gates, and as soon as the gates were opened, they rushed out and headed back to Liangshan.

Back in the capital, our heroes' absence was soon felt. The courtesan Li Shishi didn't see Yan Qing come back to her house that night and suspected something was up. The next morning, folks at Marshal Gao's residence noticed that Xiao Rang and Yue He had vanished. Upon investigating, they found a couple ropes tied to a willow tree near the wall, and realized that they had escaped. When Gao Qiu got word of this, he was alarmed and grew even more troubled, so he just kept staying home under the pretense of illness.

The next morning at 5 a.m., the emperor held court. Once all the officials assembled, he summoned Tong Guan, the chancellor of the Bureau of Military Affairs, and asked him, "Last year you led 100,000 men to attack Liangshan. How did that go?"

Tong Guan kneeled and said, "I did lead an army on campaign against Liangshan. It's not that I did not try, but the weather was too hot, and the soldiers were not used to the climate. About 30 percent died of disease. Because of those obstacles, I decided to temporarily call off the campaign and send the troops back to their bases to train. But many in the imperial guard fell ill on the way back. Later, when your majesty issued a decree of amnesty, those bandits refused to submit. So Gao Qiu led a navy to attack them, but he fell ill on the way and had to come back."

At that, the emperor flew into a rage and shouted, “You inept, wicked, narrow-hearted scoundrels have been keeping me in the dark! Last year, when you went on campaign to Liangshan, you lost all your forces in just two battles. And then that knave Gao Qiu wasted huge amounts of money and provisions and lost tons of soldiers and ships. He himself was captured alive by the bandits; it’s just that Song Jiang refused to kill him and released him. I have heard that Song Jiang and his men do not attack cities and do not disturb innocent civilians. They’re just waiting for amnesty so they can serve the country. But you useless, greedy lot have been receiving the court’s benevolence for nothing and have derailed important state affairs. You are the chancellor of the Bureau of Military Affairs. Are you not ashamed?! I should punish you, but I will spare you this one time, but never again!”

Tong Guan could say nothing and just meekly stood aside, probably feeling lucky to get off with just a tongue-lashing and not a real lashing, or worse. The emperor now asked the rest of the officials present if anyone was willing to go issue another offer of amnesty to the heroes of Liangshan. Marshal Su immediately volunteered. The emperor was delighted and personally wrote another decree. He also ordered the official in charge of the imperial storehouses to issue 36 golden plaques, 72 silver plaques, 36 bolts of red brocade, 72 bolts of green brocade, and 108 jugs of top-grade imperial wine. He also gave Marshal Su 24 bolts of cloth for coats and linings, and a banner proclaiming amnesty in golden characters. Marshal Su set out the next day, and all the officials saw him off.

When court adjourned that day, Tong Guan went away humiliated and stayed away from court on the excuse of illness. When Gao Qiu heard what had happened, he was scared and also did not dare to show his face at court.

Meanwhile, on Liangshan, the four chieftains who had returned from the capital reported on their trip, and Yan Qing showed everyone the personal pardon he had secured from the emperor. The strategist Wu Yong said, “This time, there will definitely be good news.”

So Song Jiang burned some incense, and offered a prayer. He then cast the divinity sticks and received a most auspicious omen. He was ecstatic and sent Dai Zong and Yan Qing to go conduct more recon. They returned after a few days and said, "The court has sent Marshal Su to deliver an edict, along with imperial wine, gold and silver plaques, and red and green brocade. They will be here soon."

Song Jiang was delighted and hurriedly ordered his men to get ready. From Liangshan all the way to the borders of Jizhou Prefecture, they set up 24 shelters and decorated them with buntings and hired musicians from the nearby towns and cities to staff each one to play music to welcome the imperial envoys. Each shelter was supervised by a lower-level chieftain. They also sent people out to procure all manners of delicacies to prepare for the party to end all parties.

Meanwhile, Marshal Su and his entourage arrived at Jizhou Prefecture, where Prefect Zhang welcomed them and set them up in the government guest house. Over the welcome banquet, Prefect Zhang said to Marshal Su, "The court has already sent two decrees of amnesty, but both failed because the wrong people were in charge. This time, with you in charge, you will succeed for sure!"

Marshal Su told Prefect Zhang how this mission came about and all the swag he brought along. He then asked the prefect if he thought that was enough to convince the bandits to accept amnesty.

"That group does not care about how many presents you have brought," Prefect Zhang said. "They are after the opportunity to repay the country with loyalty and honor and to leave a good name for posterity. If you had come earlier, the state would not have had to lose soldiers and squander money and provisions. Once this group of valiants submit, they will surely render great service to the court."

Marshal Su then asked the prefect to personally go let the bandits know he was coming, and Prefect Zhang set off immediately with a dozen or so attendants. When they arrived at the foot of the mountain, they were met by lackeys who sent word up to the base. Soon, Song Jiang rushed down the mountain and welcomed Prefect Zhang up to the Hall of Loyalty and Honor.

When the prefect told him that Marshal Su had arrived with a legit offer of amnesty, Song Jiang prayed to heaven and declared, "We are born again!"

He then asked the prefect to stay for dinner, but the prefect said he had to get back right away and insisted on leaving immediately. Song Jiang then offered him a tray of gold and silver, which the prefect steadfastly refused.

"It's but a trifle, a small token of my gratitude," Song Jiang said. "Once the matter is concluded, I will repay you properly."

But Prefect Zhang said, "I thank you, hero, for your sincerity. Please keep this here for now. I can always come to claim it later."

So Song Jiang sent his strategists Wu Yong and Zhu Wu, along with Xiao Rang and Yue He to go back to Jizhou Prefecture with Prefect Zhang, to deliver word that two days from now, all the chieftains will await the marshal 10 miles from Liangshan. The prefect and the four chieftains set off that night.

The next day, they went to pay their respects to Marshal Su. The four chieftains kneeled and kowtowed, and the marshal asked them to rise and take a seat, but they all said they would not dare to sit in his presence. Wu Yong then introduced himself and the other three chieftains and relayed the message about the rest of the gang waiting for the marshal.

Marshal Su was delighted. He told Wu Yong, "Professor, it has been many years since we parted ways at Huazhou Prefecture. Who knew we would meet again today. I know that you and your brothers are loyal and honorable. It's just because wicked officials have seized power at court that you all could not convey your intentions to his majesty. But his majesty knows what's in your heart now, and has sent me here with a decree in his personal hand, along with gold and silver plaques, red and green brocades, and imperial wine to offer you amnesty. Please do not harbor any suspicions and accept them with confidence."

Wu Yong and company bowed again and thanked him, saying, "We are but wild men of the mountain. Thank you for gracing us with your presence. It's all thanks to you that we are receiving his majesty's kindness. This shall be forever engraved on our hearts and bones, and we will never be able to repay you."

So already this was going much, much better than the two previous two attempts at amnesty. Prefect Zhang now held a banquet for everyone, and on the morning of the appointed date, they set off for Liangshan. Three carts were loaded with burning incense, and the imperial wine was placed in cases decorated with phoenixes and dragons to be carried by porters. Another group carried the gold and silver plaques and bolts of brocades, while the imperial decree was placed in a miniature pavilion. Marshal Su got on his horse and rode alongside the decree, while Prefect Zhang followed right behind, along with the four Liangshan chieftains.

The whole entourage set out with the yellow amnesty banner leading the way, along with flagbearers and drummers. They left Jizhou Prefecture and headed toward Liangshan. They had gone just a few miles when they came upon the first welcome shelter that the bandits had set up. The musicians' instruments blared as Marshal Su rode past. Another few miles later, they came upon another welcome shelter, and they could see incense smoke wafting in the air.

Here, Song Jiang and Lu Junyi kneeled on the ground, and behind them kneeled all the other chieftains. Marshal Su asked them all to mount their horses and ride with him to the edge of the marsh. There, hundreds of ships awaited, and they all sailed across together, without any wine-swapping shenanigans this time. They arrived on Golden Sand Beach, and were greeted by more blaring music and incense as they made their way up the mountain.

Once they arrived at the Hall of Loyalty and Honor, everyone dismounted, the gifts were placed in the center of the hall, and there were three tables set up, and they were all decorated with skirts with imperial yellow gauze of dragon and phoenix design. The imperial decree was placed on the center table,

the gold and silver plaques on the left table, and the brocades on the right. All the jugs of imperial wine were placed in front of the tables, and fine incense was lit in a golden pot.

The bandits now asked Marshal Su and Prefect Zhang to take the seats of honor. To the left of them stood the chieftains Xiao Rang the Sacred-Handed Scribe and Yue He the Iron Whistle, and to the right stood the chieftains Pei (2) Xuan (1) the Iron-Faced Scribe and Yan Qing the Prodigy. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi led the rest of the chieftains and kneeled in front of the hall. Pei Xuan called for everyone to kowtow, and they did. After that, Xiao Rang opened the imperial decree and read it aloud. It said:

“Edict: Since I inherited the throne, I have ruled the realm with benevolence and honor, changing the world by ceremonial rectitude, bringing peace through punishments and rewards. Never have I stopped searching for talent, nor have I ceased to love the people. All the civilians, near and far, know my heart. I know that Song Jiang, Lu Junyi, and company have long valued loyalty and honor. They do not act in malice. They have long harbored thoughts of submitting to the court, and their desire to repay the state is awe-inspiring. Although they have committed crimes, there were reasons in each case, and upon close examination, they merit pity. I have dispatched Marshal Su (4) Yuanjing (2,3) to carry my decree to Liangshan Marsh to pardon Song Jiang and all his followers of all their offenses. I am bestowing 36 golden plaques and bolts of brocade, and 72 silver plaques and bolts of green brocade upon Song Jiang and his chieftains. When you receive this decree, do not disappoint me. Submit immediately, and you will be given important posts. Let this document be proclaimed so that all may know.”

So, this decree was much, much friendlier than the previous two, and the bandits reacted accordingly. When Xiao Rang finished reading the edict, everyone chanted, “Long live his majesty!” and kowtowed again to thank the emperor’s kindness. Marshal Su then presented the gold and silver plaques and the bolts of fabric, and the chieftain Pei Xuan distributed them, calling out each chieftain by name.



But now, the real moment of truth, the thing that can make or break this third attempt at amnesty: the wine. They poured all 108 jugs of imperial wine into a large vessel, warmed it up, and poured it into a silver bottle. Marshal Su picked up a golden chalice, poured a cup of wine, and said to the chieftains, "I have delivered this wine here on the order of his majesty. It is a gift to you all, but to allay any suspicions, I will drink this cup first, so as to set your minds at ease."

All the chieftains complimented his thoughtfulness, and Marshal Su chugged the goblet and showed everyone, "See? It's all good!" He then offered a cup to Song Jiang, who kneeled to receive it and drank it. He was followed by Lu Junyi, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, and so on down the line, until all 108 chieftains have downed a cup. Song Jiang then ordered the wine be stored away for now and asked the marshal to sit in the center of the hall while the chieftains bowed to him again.

Song Jiang now said to Marshal Su, "I had the honor of meeting your excellency at Huazhou Prefecture. I am grateful for your kindness in convincing his majesty and allowing us to see the light of day again. This will forever be engraved on my heart and bones, and I shall never dare to forget it."

Marshal Su said, "I knew you heroes were men of honor and loyalty and that you were carrying out justice on heaven's behalf. But I did not know how you were being wronged. That's why I had not dared to talk to the emperor on your behalf for the longest time. But then I received Scholar Wen's letter and your generous gift. Only then did I know the truth. Then one day, the emperor was chatting with me and asked about you, and so I informed him of your situation. Who knew that his majesty already knew the details, and they matched what I had told him. The next day, his majesty held court and in front of all the officials, he scolded Tong Guan and Gao Qiu for their ineptitude. And then he personally wrote this decree and sent me here to present it to you all. I hope you will pack up and head to the capital quickly, so as not to let his majesty down."

All the chieftains were delighted at this, and they thanked Marshal Su profusely. Song Jiang now invited Scholar Wen to join them, and he and the marshal had a happy reunion and caught up on old

times. And then, it was party time, as a huge feast commenced. This was another one of those “mountains of meat and oceans of wine” affairs. Everyone got stinkin’ drunk that day before retiring. Then they gathered to do it again the next day, and everyone talked freely and poured out their hearts. On the third day, they threw another banquet and also took Marshal Su on a tour of the mountain, and they did not part until they were all sufficiently soused.

After this went on for a few days, Marshal Su said he needed to go. Song Jiang tried to keep him, but the marshal said, “Hero, you don’t understand. I came on his majesty’s command and have been here for a number of days. If you heroes return promptly, then all will be well. But if we don’t hurry back, I worry that the crooked officials will stir up trouble.”

“In that case, I dare not keep you,” Song Jiang said. “Let’s drink to our hearts’ content today, and we will see you off tomorrow morning.”

Well, why not? So all the chieftains gathered once more and feasted. And as they drank, they all once again expressed their gratitude to Marshal Su, and he in turn buttered them up with more kind words. Gotta keep stroking those egos, you know.

The next morning, as the marshal prepared to depart, Song Jiang presented him with a tray of gold and pearls. The marshal steadfastly refused, until Song Jiang steadfastly insisted, at which point the marshal relented. They did the same routine with Scholar Wen and Prefect Zhang, and both of them eventually relented as well. As for the marshal’s entourage, they all naturally got their share of wine, food, and silver, so everybody was in a jolly mood. The bandits then started playing music and drums as they escorted the marshal and his companions down the mountain, sailed across the marsh, and traveled for another 10 miles. At that point, everyone dismounted and presented the marshal with wine again to take their leave.

Song Jiang went first. As he raised a cup, he said, “Benefactor, when you return to court, please speak well of us to his majesty.”

Marshal Su told him, “Heroes, don’t worry. Just pack up and come to the capital quickly. When your forces approach the capital, send word to me first. I will inform his majesty, and we will send a welcome party so that you will arrive in style.”

“Your excellency, I beg your indulgence,” Song Jiang said. “Wang Lun established the base on Liangshan. It then passed to Chao Gai and then to me, and it has been our home for many years. We have done much harm to the nearby residents. So I would like to hold a 10-day closeout sale to distribute our possessions among the civilians. Once that’s done, we will all pack up and come to the capital. We dare not delay. I hope you can oblige us and convey this to the emperor so that he will give us a little more time.”

So first, umm, what is this “much harm to the nearby residents” thing you just mentioned? I thought you guys never attacked cities or harmed innocents. Are you telling me your guys might have lied to me when they asked me to put in a good word for you with the emperor? Second, to make up for the robbing and pillaging you have been doing, you are going to, what? Sell the stuff you robbed and pillaged BACK to the civilians? That’s ... SO generous of you. But in any case, the marshal consented to this request. He and his entourage then took their leave and headed to Jizhou Prefecture.

Song Jiang and company then returned to Liangshan and assembled all the chieftains and lackeys at the Hall of Loyalty and Honor. Song Jiang announced, “Brothers, Wang Lun established this base, and then Lord Chao Gai came here and built this great enterprise. After you all rescued me and brought me here, you made me your leader, and it has been many years. Today, we are fortunate to have received amnesty from the court. It’s like seeing the sky again. Soon, we will go to the capital to serve the state, earn prestige for our children and wives, and enjoy the blessings of peace together. Those of you who have things that should go into the storerooms, deliver them there for our common use. The rest shall be divided equally among us in a righteous manner with no contention.

“The 108 of us are all stars from heaven. We live and die together. Today, his majesty, in his great kindness, has issued an amnesty and forgiven our offenses. Everyone has been pardoned. The 108 of us must go to the capital soon to meet his majesty. We must be worthy of his benevolence. As for your soldiers, some of you came here to join our band of outlaws. Some of you followed others here. Some were government soldiers who were captured in battle. And some were kidnapped and brought here. Now that we have accepted the amnesty and are going to the court, if you are willing to come with us, then submit your name quickly. If you are not willing to go, then let us know and take your leave. I will give you money so that you may start a new life.”

Once that order was given, Song Jiang put the chieftains Pei Xuan and Xiao Rang in charge of keeping track of who was coming with and who was leaving. About 5,000 guys did end up taking their leave, and Song Jiang gave them each money and sent them on their way. The names of those who decided to stick with the gang and join the army were passed along to the authorities.

Next up was the big close-out sale. To see how many civilians will come by to buy back their stuff, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we see what kind of reception will Song Jiang and company get at the capital. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!