

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 116.

Last time, Song Jiang and company got off to a great start in their campaign against the Liao kingdom, capturing two key prefectures. When word of this got back to the Liao court, one of the officials, Minister Ouyang (1,2), advised the king that he should offer Song Jiang and his former bandit buddies riches and cushy government jobs — you know, everything that they had NOT gotten from the Song court — to induce them to serve the Liao instead. The king agreed and sent Minister Ouyang to see Song Jiang to make this offer.

At this time, Song Jiang and his army were resting in Jizhou Prefecture. When he got word that an envoy from the Liao had arrived, Song Jiang took out the sacred scrolls he had received from his encounter with the goddess known as Mystic Queen and cast a divination, which produced a very good omen. He then asked Wu Yong the strategist, “I’ve received a good omen. It probably portends that the Liao is coming to try to convince us to join them. What should we do?”

Wu Yong said, “If that’s the case, we can play along and accept their offer. We will let Lu Junyi oversee this prefecture while we go sack Bazhou (4,1) Prefecture. If we succeed, then the Liao would fall for sure. We have already cut off their left hand by capturing this prefecture. This is easy enough. But play hard-to-get first, so that the envoy won’t be suspicious.”

So when Minister Ouyang arrived outside the city, Song Jiang let him in and welcomed him at the administrative compound, where they sat down as host and guest.

“Minister, what brings you here?” Song Jiang asked.

“I have a small matter to discuss with you. Let’s talk alone.”

So Song Jiang dismissed everyone and invited Minister Ouyang to a private room in the back. There, Minister Ouyang bowed and launched into his spiel.

“The kingdom of Liao has long heard of your great name, general. Alas, the great distance between us prevented us from paying our respects to you before. We also heard that when you were on

Liangshan, you and your brothers acted as one to carry out justice on heaven's behalf. Right now, corrupt officials in the Song court block the path of the talented. Those who offer them bribes are given high office. Those who cannot offer them bribes are left out in the cold, their great service left buried. These officials are corrupt, greedy, jealous, and petty. They are unjust in handing out punishments and rewards, thus causing great chaos across the realm. In the South, West, East, and North, bandits and rebels run rampant, and the civilians struggle to make a living.

General, you and the 100,000 crack troops under your command submitted to the Song court out of loyalty, and yet all you received was this appointment as the vanguard, without any official position. Your brothers are sacrificing to repay the country, and yet they are all without rank. And now you have been ordered to lead your men into the desert. You suffer so much in service of your country, and yet the court has not rewarded you. This is all the doing of the wicked officials.

If you rob and pillage along the way and send the loot back to the capital for the corrupt officials Cai Jing, Tong Guan, Gao Qiu, and Yang Jian, then you can secure a position. But if you refuse to do such a thing, then even if you repay your country loyally and render great service, you will be treated as a criminal upon your return to court.

Right now, I have convinced the lord of the great Liao kingdom to issue a decree, appointing you as the Grand General who Uplifts the State and giving you command of our forces. He is also bestowing upon you a load of gold, a load of silver, 108 bolts of satin, and 108 fine horses. He has asked me to copy down the names of all 108 chieftains so that we can appoint them all to government posts. I have not come to deceive you. My lord has long heard of your great virtue, so he sent me here to ask you and your officers to join us and serve our kingdom together."

After hearing this long speech, Song Jiang replied, "Minister, your words are quite right. Alas, I came from a humble background. I was a mere county magisterial clerk and a convict on the run. So I sought

refuge on Liangshan to temporarily dodge calamity. The Song emperor sent me three edicts offering me amnesty. Even though my rank is meager, I have also not yet rendered service to repay the court's kindness in pardoning us. I am touched by your lord's kindness, but I do not yet dare to accept it. Please return for now. It's very hot at the moment, so we are borrowing a couple cities from your king to rest our troops. When the weather gets cooler, then we may revisit this matter."

Minister Ouyang said, "General, if you do not spurn us, then please accept the gold, silver, satin, and horses. When I get back to court, I can continue to advocate for you."

"Minister, there are lots of eyes and ears among my brothers," Song Jiang said. "If this leaks out, it would cause trouble."

"But the army is under your command. Who would dare to disobey?"

"You don't understand, minister. There are many stubbornly valiant men among my brothers. Let me slowly talk them around so that all of them are of one mind, and then we can revisit this."

Song Jiang then offered Minister Ouyang wine and food, and saw him out.

After Minister Ouyang departed, Song Jiang invited Wu Yong the strategist to join him. Wu Yong, of course, had been eavesdropping on the entire conversation.

"What do you think about what Minister Ouyang said?" Song Jiang asked.

At that, Wu Yong let out a long sigh, looked down at the floor, and did not say a word.

"Professor, why are you sighing?" Song Jiang asked.

"Brother," Wu Yong said, "I know you are big on loyalty and honor, so I do not dare to say too much, but if you think about it, what Minister Ouyang said was quite right. Right now, the Song emperor allows those four corrupt officials to hold sway, and he believes them. No matter what service we render for the court, we will definitely not be rewarded. After three amnesty offers, we submitted, and yet you, as our leader, only received an appointment as the vanguard. If you ask for my foolish opinion, then

abandoning the Song and joining the Liao is the better move, even though it goes against your loyal and honorable nature.”

The next day, neither Song Jiang nor Wu Yong said a word about the Liao envoy’s offer or their conversation to anyone else. Instead, Song Jiang asked Gongsun Sheng the Daoist priest about his master, Priest Luo (2). Remember that Gongsun Sheng was from these parts, and his master Priest Luo resided in a nearby mountain and was quite a powerful Daoist, as Li Kui the Black Whirlwind could attest to. Song Jiang now asked if Gongsun Sheng would be willing to take him to go pay his respects to Priest Luo.

Gongsun Sheng said, “I’ve been thinking about visiting my mother and my master. I just haven’t said anything because military matters have not yet been settled. I was just about to ask you for leave today. Turns out you want to come along. Tomorrow morning, let’s go visit my master together, and I can see my mother as well.”

So the next day, Song Jiang temporarily handed command over to Wu Yong, and then prepared some nice incense, fruits, and valuables. He, Gongsun Sheng, and six other chieftains not named Li Kui then rode out with 5,000 foot soldiers and headed to Double Immortal Peak. When they arrived, Song Jiang could see that the mountain was covered with green pines and the oppressive heat dissipated into a cool breeze.

They made their way up the scenic mountain and arrived at the Daoist sanctuary. They tidied up their outfits, entered with gifts in tow, and headed to the main hall. The priests in the sanctuary recognized Gongsun Sheng and came forth to greet him and welcome his companions. Gongsun Sheng asked where his master was, and the other priests told him that Priest Luo has been spending most of his time meditating in a secluded place in the back lately and rarely came out to the common areas of the sanctuary.

So Gongsun Sheng and Song Jiang headed to the private quarters on the backside of the mountain along winding paths. After less than a mile, they saw a fence of brambles. Outside the fence stood pines and cypress trees. Inside the fence were pretty shrubs and flowers. In the center, there were three connected snow caverns, and Priest Luo was sitting inside reading scripture.

An acolyte came out to open the door for the visitors. Gongsun Sheng went in first and paid his respects to his master, and then said, "Your disciple's old friend, Song Jiang, has accepted amnesty. Now, he has received a royal edict to serve as vanguard and lead troops against the Liao invaders. When he came to Jizhou, he wanted to come pay his respects to you. He is waiting outside."

Priest Luo immediately invited Song Jiang in. After exchanging greetings, Song Jiang asked Priest Luo to sit and receive a bow from him.

"General, you are a top officer of the state, while I am a mountain rustic. How would I dare?" the priest protested. But Song Jiang insisted, and so Priest Luo relented and sat down. Song Jiang now burned some incense, and then offered up eight deep bows. He also told the other six chieftains who accompanied him to bow as well. After all this, Priest Luo asked them to sit down, and his acolyte brought out tea and fruits.

Priest Luo now said to Song Jiang, "General, you correspond to a heavenly spirit, and your fame is known throughout the land. You and your brothers carry out justice on heaven's behalf. Now that you have submitted to the Song court, your great name will no doubt live on for all posterity!"

"I was but a lowly county magisterial clerk," Song Jiang said. "I fled to Liangshan because of my crimes. Thankfully, heroes came from all over to join us. We are of one mind and as close as family, as if we were born from the same womb. It was only because heaven gave us a sign that we realized we correspond to heavenly spirits. Now we have been commanded by his majesty to lead a large army to attack the Liao kingdom. It's my great fortune to pass by your immortal realm and get the chance to pay my respects. I hope you can point me toward the right path; I would be most fortunate."

Priest Luo replied, "General, please stay a while and have a vegetarian meal. It's getting late, so please stay at my humble abode tonight. You can depart tomorrow morning. How does that sound?"

"I was intending on asking for your guidance, so of course I will stay," Song Jiang said.

He then told his entourage to offer up the valuables they had brought, but Priest Luo said, "I am an old man living quietly in a rustic retreat. I have no use for riches. A cloth gown to cover my body is good enough. I have never worn silks. But you, general, command armies and must spend thousands every day to reward your troops. Please take back your offering. I have absolutely no need for such things. I will just keep the platters of fruits."

After much back and forth, Priest Luo prevailed and Song Jiang had to put away his gift offerings. After they ate and drank tea, Priest Luo told Gongsun Sheng to go home and see his mother, and then come back the next morning to accompany Song Jiang back to the city. That night, the priest kept Song Jiang in his quarters, and Song Jiang poured out his heart and asked him for guidance.

Priest Luo said, "General, your loyalty and honor are the equal of heaven and earth, so the gods will definitely protect you. In life, you will receive a high office. In death, you will be worshipped. I have no doubt about it. But, you have an unfortunate imperfect destiny."

"Master, are you saying I will not come to a good end?" Song Jiang asked.

"Not so! You will die in your bed, and after death you will receive a proper burial. It's just that you have a rough lot in life. You will have more rough spots than smooth goings, and more sorrow than happiness. When you are at the height of your success, you should back away. Do not long for wealth and rank."

"Master," Song Jiang said, "I have never wanted wealth or rank. I just want to always be with my brothers. If we can all be together and safe, I would be content even in poverty."

But Priest Luo laughed and said, "When the final parting comes, who among us can hope to linger?"

Song Jiang now bowed again and asked for a prophecy. Priest Luo told his acolyte to fetch brush and paper, and he wrote down eight lines of prophecy and gave them to Song Jiang. They said:

Few are the loyal,

Rare are true friends.

Success in the Northland

Is but the moon's sickly glow.

At winter's start

The geese fly away.

When dynasties change

Old titles must go.

Song Jiang read these lines but did not understand their meaning, so he asked for an explanation, but Priest Luo told him, "This is a decree from heaven; its must not be prematurely revealed. Once the prophecy comes true, you will realize it. It's getting late, please get some rest. We will see each other tomorrow. Some years ago, I received something while asleep. I want to enter that dream again so I can return it. Forgive me, general."

So Song Jiang stashed away the prophecy, took his leave, and turned in for the night in the sanctuary. The next morning, he went back to see Priest Luo. Gongsun Sheng had already returned to his master's side. Priest Luo treated them to breakfast. After the meal, he said to Song Jiang, "General, please hear me. My disciple Gongsun Sheng's destiny lies with the Way, not the outside world. But if he stays here today to look after me, he would be neglecting his bond with his brothers. So today, he will follow you back to achieve great success. When you return to the capital in victory, then he will take his leave of you. I hope you will allow him to go then, so that I have someone who can carry on my knowledge and

his mother won't have to keep worrying about him. You are a loyal and honorable man, so you will no doubt act loyally and honorably. Will you oblige me in this?"

Song Jiang replied, "Master, how would I dare to disobey your command? Besides, Master Gongsun is my brother. Where he goes is up to him; I would not dare to stop him."

Both Priest Luo and Gongsun Sheng offered their gratitude for that promise. Everyone then took their leave of Priest Luo, and he saw them out to the front of the sanctuary and wished Song Jiang good luck. Their horses were already fed and prepped, and the priests at the sanctuary saw Song Jiang and company out. Out of respect for the sanctuary, Song Jiang told his entourage to travel on foot and lead their horses behind them until they were halfway down the mountain. Then, they got back in the saddle and rode back to Jizhou Prefecture.

When they got back, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind met them and said, "Brother, why didn't you take me along when you went to visit Priest Luo?"

Uhh, dude, the last you saw him, you split his head in two and he gave you a cloud Uber ride that you will never forget.

Dai Zong the Magic Traveler, one of the chieftains who accompanied Song Jiang on the trip, said to Li Kui, "Priest Luo is still mad at you for trying to kill him."

"Well, he fixed me good, too!" Li Kui retorted, which made everyone burst into laughter.

Song Jiang and company now entered the administrative compound and sat down. He took out the prophecy from Priest Luo and showed it to Wu Yong the strategist. But no one could decipher its meaning. Gongsun Sheng now said, "Brother, this is a message from heaven. Its meaning is not to be leaked. Just keep it with you and think of it always, rather than trying to guess its meaning. My master's prophecy will reveal itself in time."

So Song Jiang stashed the prophecy inside the sacred scrolls he had received. After that, he got back to military affairs. His army remained stationed in Jizhou Prefecture for the next month-plus, with no action. Then, in the second half of the seventh month, a message arrived from Commissioner Zhao (4), who was supervising the campaign. It said that the Song court had issued an edict urging them to press on with the campaign. So Song Jiang discussed strategy with Wu Yong, went to Jade Field County to join up with Lu Junyi's army, and then returned to Jizhou Prefecture to offer sacrifices and pick an auspicious date to resume the campaign.

While he was back at Jizhou, Song Jiang got another visit from Minister Ouyang of the Liao kingdom, the guy who had brought him the Liao king's offer for him to switch sides. Song Jiang received him in a private room and dismissed everyone as he requested.

"My lord really admires your virtue," Minister Ouyang said. "If you are willing to defect and help our cause, you will receive high office. I hope you will answer this call of honor soon and not leave my lord hanging."

"Well, there's no one else here, so I can tell you the truth," Song Jiang said. "When you came last time, everyone in my army could guess the purpose of your visit. Half of them refuse to join the Liao. If I accompany you to Youzhou (1,1) Prefecture to see your lord, my vice vanguard general Lu Junyi will no doubt pursue us. If we come to blows, it would dishonor the past bond between me and my brothers. So how about I just take some confidants with me, and you let me hide out in a city somewhere. Doesn't matter which city, so long as I can find shelter there. Even if Lu Junyi finds out my whereabouts and comes looking for me, I can hide inside the city and avoid him. If he refuses to listen to reason, then we can still fight him. If he doesn't find out where I went, he will report back to the capital, and that will lead to trouble anyway. When that time comes, I can lead the Liao army against him."

Minister Ouyang was delighted by that idea. He told Song Jiang, "We are near Bazhou (4,1) Prefecture. There are two key choke points. One is called Yijin (4,1) Pass. There is only one narrow road,

flanked by high peaks on both sides. The other is Wen-an (2,1) County, which is flanked by treacherous mountains on both sides, and the pass is the county seat. These two are the gates to Bazhou Prefecture. You can go hide in Bazhou. It's commanded by the imperial brother-in-law. You can stay in the prefectural seat with him. What do you think?"

"If that's the case, then I will send someone home to relocate my father right away so I have no lingering worries," Song Jiang said. "You can send someone to lead me to Bazhou in secret. I will pack tonight."

The plan thus set, Minister Ouyang excitedly took his leave and rode away.

Two days later, Minister Ouyang rode back to Jizhou Prefecture and told Song Jiang, "My lord knows you are a good man. Since you have decided to defect, there's no need to fear the Song soldiers. Our kingdom has ample stout troops and officers to assist you. Since you are worried about your father, please stay with the imperial brother-in-law at Bazhou Prefecture, and I will send someone to go get your father."

Song Jiang replied, "The officers and soldiers who are willing to come with me are ready to go. When should we leave?"

"Tonight. Please send out the word."

So Song Jiang sent word to his followers that they were to remove the bells from their horses and march with sticks in their mouths to ensure absolute silence.

Around dusk, the west gate of the city swung open, and out rode Minister Ouyang with a few dozen riders. Behind them followed Song Jiang and the 15 chieftains and about 10,000 soldiers who were coming with him. They quietly sneaked away from the city.

After traveling for about six or seven miles, Song Jiang suddenly went "Ah crap!"

“My strategist Wu Yong was going to defect with us,” he told Minister Ouyang. “But this happened so suddenly that he couldn’t join us in time. Let’s slow down and send someone to fetch him quick.”

It was around midnight when they approached Yijin (4,1) Pass. Minister Ouyang shouted for the soldiers defending the pass to open up, and they did so promptly. Song Jiang and his entourage went through and headed straight for Bazhou Prefecture. They arrived around dawn, and Minister Ouyang invited Song Jiang into the prefectural seat and alerted the imperial brother-in-law.

So this imperial brother-in-law was named Kangli (1,3) Dingan (4,1). He was the brother of the Liao queen, which meant he was a very powerful individual at the Liao court, with the courage and valor to match. He had two ministers in his service, each assigned to defend one of the two choke points leading into his prefecture. When he heard that Song Jiang had defected to the Liao, he ordered Song Jiang’s forces to pitch camp outside the prefectural seat and only invited Song Jiang into the city. Minister Ouyang brought Song Jiang in to see him. The imperial brother-in-law was quite impressed by Song Jiang’s uncommon appearance, and stepped down from his seat to welcome him. He then invited Song Jiang to the back and offered him a seat as a VIP.

“Imperial brother-in-law, you are a member of the royal house, while I am surrendering to you,” Song Jiang said. “How can I bear to receive such an honor? How shall I ever repay you?”

“I have long heard of your great name,” the imperial brother-in-law said. “Your fame spreads across the central plains and has even reached the Liao. Our lord admires you greatly.”

“Basking in your reflected glory, I will do my utmost to display my gratitude for his majesty’s vast benevolence,” Song Jiang said.

The imperial brother-in-law now threw a welcome feast for Song Jiang and his troops. He also assigned a guesthouse in the city for Song Jiang and the 15 chieftains who defected with him.

Once they were settled in, Song Jiang said to Minister Ouyang, "I must trouble you to send someone to notify the soldiers defending the passes to let my strategist Wu Yong through if he comes to join us. He can stay with us. Last night, we left in such a hurry that I couldn't wait for him and left him behind while I came here with you. I can't manage military affairs without him. He is equally adept at civil and military matters and knows every aspect of strategy and tactics."

So Minister Ouyang sent word to the guards at the passes to be on the lookout for Wu Yong.

The next morning, the soldiers at Wen-an (2,1) County — one of the two choke points — saw a dust cloud in the distance, and before long, a group of about 100 men approached the foot of the city, and the soldiers atop the wall prepared their defenses.

But this was a group of peasants, a couple monks, and at the front, a rider dressed like a scholar. The scholar rode up to the pass and called out, "I am Song Jiang's strategist Wu Yong. I have come to find my brother. The Song army is hot on my tail. You must open up and save me!"

The soldiers on the walls had their orders, so they quickly opened up and let Wu Yong through. The group of peasants and monks tried to follow him through, but the soldiers were having none of it. While they scuffled with the peasants to keep them out, Wu Yong rode on toward Bazhou Prefecture.

Later that day, Wu Yong arrived outside the prefectural seat, and the guards sent word into the city. Song Jiang and Minister Ouyang welcomed him in and brought him to see the imperial brother-in-law. Wu Yong told them, "I came a little late. When I was leaving, Lu Junyi caught on that something was amiss, so he's been chasing me. He was still on my tail when I arrived at the pass. I don't know where he is now."

Soon, they had their answer. Word came that a Song army was charging this way, so the imperial brother-in-law mobilized his forces and prepared to go out and fight. But Song Jiang said, "Don't go out yet. Wait until he gets here. I will try to convince him to defect. If he refuses, then we can still fight him."

Soon, scouts reported that the enemy was near. So they all went up to the top of the wall to have a look. Below, they saw the Song army lined up in strict formation. Lu Junyi was decked out in armor, sitting atop his horse and wielding a spear, looking quite the impressive general. He reined in his horse under the command banner and shouted, "Tell that traitor Song Jiang to come out!"

To see if Song Jiang can convince his former comrades to join him, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we'll see what the fallout will be from Song Jiang's defection. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!