

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 117.

Last time, Song Jiang and 15 chieftains had defected to the Liao kingdom under the persuasion of a Liao minister. They packed up in the middle of the night, left their base, and headed to Bazhou (4,1) Prefecture to hide from their former comrades who did not defect. They were soon followed by the strategist Wu Yong, who also defected. But hot on Wu Yong's tail was a pissed off Lu Junyi, leading an army to the foot of the Bazhou prefectural seat and demanding that Song Jiang come out and answer for his betrayal.

Accompanied by the city's overseer, Dingan (4,1), who was an imperial brother-in-law of the Liao king, Song Jiang stood atop the city wall and shouted down, "Brother, the Song court does not issue just rewards and punishments. Wicked officials hold sway and marginalize men of talent. So we have submitted to the king of Liao. You should join us and help us support him together. It would be in accord with why we convened on Liangshan for so long."

But Lu Junyi just grew angrier and cursed, "I was doing just fine at home in Daming Prefecture, but then you came and tricked me to go to Liangshan. The Song emperor issued three decrees of amnesty for us. When did he ever do you wrong? How dare you betray the court? You shortsighted, no-talent hack! Come out here and face me!"

Song Jiang now also got angry and barked for the front gates of the city to be opened. He then sent out four chieftains: Lin Chong the Panther Head, Hua Rong the Archer, Zhu Tong the Lord of the Beautiful Beard, and Mu Hong the Unrestrained. He ordered them to capture Lu Junyi alive.

When he saw these four coming at him, Lu Junyi ordered his troops to hold their ground while he galloped forth to take them on, showing no fear at all. They battled for 20-some bouts, but then, the four chieftains turned and rode back toward the city. Lu Junyi now gave a wave of his spear and ordered his army to sweep forward.

Seeing this, the imperial brother-in-law wanted to close the city gates and play defense, but the chieftains Lin Chong and Hua Rong stood on the drawbridge, keeping it down, while they turned and fought the oncoming Lu Junyi some more. But soon, they turned and fled into the city. But now Lu Junyi's forces had already reached the drawbridge, and they stormed into the city.

Inside the city, before the Liao forces could react, Song Jiang, his 15 chieftains, and the soldiers who defected with them now suddenly turned on their hosts, helping Lu Junyi's forces into the city and joining them in battle.

So, let's rewind to the last episode, to the scene where Minister Ouyang (1,2) of the Liao had just left after making his first pitch to convince Song Jiang to defect. Once he was gone, Wu Yong told Song Jiang that, you know, that guy was dropping some truth. The Song court IS overrun by corruption, and we probably won't get any rewards for our service in this war. So maybe we SHOULD switch sides.

But as soon as Song Jiang heard that, he immediately cut off Wu Yong. "Professor, you're mistaken," he said. "Do not ever mention submitting to the Liao again. Even if the Song court wrongs me, my loyal heart would never wrong the Song court. Even if we do not receive rewards for our service, we would leave a good name for posterity. If we turn from the righteous and join the wicked, not even heaven would tolerate us! We must serve the country loyally until our final breath!"

Seeing such strong convictions from Song Jiang, Wu Yong relented and said, "Brother, if that's how you feel, then the best course of action is to pretend to defect so we can capture Bazhou Prefecture."

Now, fast forward to earlier today, when Wu Yong rode up to one of the checkpoints leading into Bazhou Prefecture, followed by a few dozen peasants and a couple monks, fleeing the pursuing Song army. After the guards let Wu Yong through, the others tried to get through, too. While Wu Yong rode off toward the prefectural seat, the guards tried to stop the mob.

But then the two monks suddenly pulled out weapons. One of them, a fat monk wielding a steel Buddhist staff, started bashing guys on the head, while the other, a pilgrim, started chopping down people left and right with a pair of sabers. These, of course, were none other than Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk and Wu Song the Pilgrim. And they were accompanied by another gaggle of chieftains hidden among the dozens of peasants, who were, of course, all Song soldiers in disguise. Before long, the check point had fallen, and Lu Junyi then cruised right through on his way to the prefectural seat.

And now, let's jump back to the present. It did not take long for the prefectural seat to fall once the Song forces unveiled their surprise. The Liao imperial brother-in-law Dingan (4,1) was shocked and appalled, and he could do nothing before he and his ministers were apprehended and brought to Song Jiang's headquarters.

Song Jiang asked them to all sit down, treated them with courtesy, and said, "You people don't know any better and misjudged us. My band of heroes are no mere mountain bandits. Every one of us is a star spirit. How would we ever betray our lord and submit to the Liao? We just wanted to use this opportunity to take your city. Now that we have succeeded, you may return to your kingdom. As for Bazhou Prefecture, it now belongs to our heavenly empire. Do not come to fight over it again. If we meet in battle again, I will not spare you."

And then Song Jiang ordered that all the Liao officials in the city were to be expelled, and they all followed the imperial brother-in-law back to the Liao capital. Meanwhile, Song Jiang posted more pro-Song propaganda to reassure the city's residents that no harm would come to them. He then sent Lu Junyi and half of his forces back to Jizhou Prefecture to defend that city, while he kept the other half of the army to guard Bazhou Prefecture. All this done, he sent an urgent report to Commissioner Zhao, who was supervising the campaign. The commissioner was delighted and sent word to the court.

While the Song forces celebrated, the Liao imperial brother-in-law, his ministers, and the other expelled officials slinked back to the Liao capital Yanjing (4,1), or present-day Beijing. When they recounted what happened, the Liao king flew into a rage and scolded Minister Ouyang, who had suggested trying to convince Song Jiang to defect.

“This is all your fault, what with your slavish schemes! Now you have lost the critical Bazhou Prefecture; how am I supposed to defend our capital?! Men, take him outside and execute him!”

But before the executioners could do that, Commander Wuyan (4,2) stepped forth and said, “My lord, please don’t trouble yourself. This knave is not worth your time. Listen to me: Don’t kill Minister Ouyang, or Song Jiang would laugh at us if he finds out.”

So the Liao king spared Minister Ouyang. Commander Wuyan now said, “Your servant will lead his 28 star-blest generals and 11 heaven-guided officers to go set up a battle formation and defeat those savages in one fell swoop.”

But before he finished speaking, a certain Vice Commander He (4) stepped up and said, “My lord, no need to trouble yourself. Your servant has an idea. As the old saying goes, ‘You don’t kill a chicken with an ox-slaughtering knife.’ There’s no need for the commander to go in person. Just let me use a little scheme and those bandits will meet their end for sure!”

This Commander He (4) was a tall, fearsome warrior who wielded a three-tipped saber and was skilled in wizardry. He was in charge of defending Youzhou Prefecture and oversaw the deployment of various armies. The Liao king was delighted by his confidence and asked him what his plan was.

“Within the borders of Youzhou Prefecture, there is a place called Green Rock Canyon,” Commander He (4) explained. “There is only one road leading into and out of the canyon, and it’s surrounded by tall mountains with no other way out. I’ll dispatch a dozen or so riders to lure the savages into the canyon, and then seal off the exit with my forces. They will be stuck and will starve to death.”

“How will you lure them?” Commander Wuyan asked.

“They have sacked three of our major cities and are full of themselves, so they will no doubt set their sights on Youzhou Prefecture. If I send some troops to lure them, they will surely follow. Once they enter the canyon, where can they go?”

Commander Wuyan was still skeptical about the plan, but he consented to let Commander He try it before resorting to a clash of huge armies. So Commander He immediately returned to Youzhou Prefecture and mobilized his forces. He divided them into three detachments. One would stay and defend Youzhou Prefecture, while the other two set out for Bazhou and Jizhou Prefectures respectively. He had two brothers, and he put the older one in charge of the army going to Bazhou and the younger one in charge of the army going to Jizhou. He told them both to feign defeat and lure the enemy into the territories of Youzhou Prefecture, and then he would take care of the rest.

Over in Bazhou Prefecture, Song Jiang received an urgent report that Liao forces were encroaching on Jizhou Prefecture and to send aid immediately.

“Since they are coming to attack us, we must respond,” Song Jiang said. “We will take this opportunity to go capture Youzhou Prefecture, too.”

So he left some forces to defend Bazhou Prefecture and set out with the bulk of his army toward Jizhou Prefecture, where he would meet up with Lu Junyi and set a date for moving out. On the way, they ran into the Liao army led by Commander He’s older brother. But they barely traded blows before the Liao forces turned and retreated. Song Jiang did not give chase. Meanwhile, the same thing happened in Jizhou Prefecture, where Commander He’s younger brother turned tail and ran after a perfunctory exchange of blows.

Once Song Jiang met up with Lu Junyi, they convened to discuss next steps for attacking Youzhou Prefecture. The strategists Wu Yong and Zhu Wu, however, sounded a note of caution.

“Youzhou Prefecture sent two forces to encroach on our territory; they must be trying to trick us into chasing them,” they said. “We must not advance yet.”

But Lu Junyi disagreed. “Strategists, you’re mistaken,” he said. “Those knaves have lost time and again. How could they be trying to trick us? If we let this opportunity slip away, we won’t get another. If we don’t go take Youzhou Prefecture now, when would we ever do it?”

So, Song Jiang heard both arguments and thought to himself, “Hmm. On one hand, I have guys with nicknames like The Wizard and the Divine Strategist telling me I shouldn’t attack yet. But on the other hand, I have an argument for attacking from a guy who once decided he should definitely take a long trip past a swamp controlled by bandits because a not-at-all-shady fortune teller told him he should. I think the choice is clear here.”

“Those knaves have exhausted their strength; what good schemes could they have?” Song Jiang declared aloud. “We must capitalize on this golden opportunity!”

While Wu Yong and Zhu Wu exchanged a look and let out inaudible sighs, Song Jiang proceeded to divide his forces into three detachments and set out for Youzhou Prefecture. Soon, the front column sent word that Liao forces were blocking their way. Song Jiang rode to the front and saw a squad bearing black flags coming from behind a hill. So he ordered his front column to line up in battle formation.

On the other side, the Liao forces, coming in four detachments, also spread out in front of the hill, swarming around a general wielding a three-tipped saber and dressed in impressive armor. The banner behind him identified him as none other than Commander He (4).

“The Liao commander must be an elite warrior. Who dares to fight him?” Song Jiang asked.

Before he finished speaking, Guan Sheng the Great Saber galloped out and started trading blows with Commander He without exchanging a word. After 30-some bouts, Commander He started to falter, so he rode back toward his own lines. Guan Sheng gave chase, and the Liao forces turned and fled around the hill.

Song Jiang ordered his troops to sweep in after the enemy. The chase went on for about 15 miles when suddenly, war drums started beating from all around. Song Jiang hurriedly ordered his troops to fall back, but an enemy force had already dashed out from the left side of the hills. Just as Song Jiang's men turned to face them, another enemy force charged out from the right, and Commander He turned his army around and came back to attack as well. Song Jiang's forces were caught off guard and quickly split into two.

Lu Junyi was commanding the back half of the army. When he could not see the front half of the army anymore, he hurriedly tried to fight his way through the enemy between them. But then his forces were attacked by yet more enemy ambushes, and they soon found themselves surrounded.

Lu Junyi deployed his officers to charge this way and that to find a path through. Everyone put up a dogged effort and pushed against the enemy in all directions. But just then, dark clouds gathered, turning day into night and making it impossible to know which way was what. Lu Junyi panicked, so he led a squad of troops and tried to mount a desperate charge. All they could hear in the darkness was the sound of horse bells coming from the front, so they charged in that direction. When they came upon the mouth of a canyon, they could hear people and horses on the other side, so they rushed in.

But as soon as they set foot inside the canyon, a violent gale kicked up, sweeping up sand and pebbles, making it impossible to see the person next to you. Lu Junyi and company kept pushing forward amid this blinding chaos. It wasn't until about 9 p.m. that the winds died down and the clouds dissipated, revealing a heaven littered with stars. Only now could Lu Junyi and his men see their surroundings, and they immediately went ah crap!

All around them were tall, unscalable peaks. Lu Junyi had with him 12 chieftains and about 5,000 soldiers. Under the dim glow of the stars, they searched for a way out, but was rebuffed by mountains in every direction.

“Our men have fought all day and are exhausted,” Lu Junyi said. “Let’s rest here tonight, and then search for a way out tomorrow.”

Outside the canyon, Song Jiang was involved in his own dogged fight with the Liao forces when he suddenly saw the dark clouds and felt the strong gale that made it hard for his soldiers to see each other. But fortunately for him, he had with him Gongsun Sheng the Daoist priest. Gongsun Sheng recognized this to be dark magic, so he quickly pulled out his sword, uttered an incantation, and shouted, “Speed!”

Where his sword pointed, the dark clouds parted and the winds dissipated. And with that, the Liao forces retreated on their own. Song Jiang and his men fought their way out and retreated to the top of a high hill to regroup, setting up their provision carts in a circle to serve as the outer walls of a makeshift camp. When they did a head count, they realized that 13 chieftains, including Lu Junyi, were missing, along with about 5,000 men.

When dawn broke, Song Jiang sent the chieftains Huyan Zhuo the Twin Staffs, Lin Chong the Panther Head, Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt, and Guan Sheng the Great Saber to lead some troops and search in all four directions. They searched for a whole day but did not find the missing men.

Song Jiang now took out his divine scrolls, offered a prayer, and cast a divination. The divination said, “The men are ok for the most part. But they are trapped in a dark place and cannot be extracted quickly.”

That fortune left Song Jiang unsettled, so he sent the hunter brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao to disguise themselves as, umm, hunters and search the mountains. He also dispatched four other chieftains to conduct recon in every direction.

We’ll follow the hunter brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao on their search. They replaced their soldier uniforms with cliché hunter outfits, complete with tiger-skin vests and steel tridents, and made their



deep into the mountains. As evening descended, they did not see any sign of houses anywhere. It was just cragged peaks in every direction. They pressed on and climbed over a few more peaks. Then, under the faint glow of the moon, they saw a speck of light in the distance.

“There must be someone living there,” they said to each other. “Let’s go ask for some food.”

So they hurried toward the light, and after less than mile, they came upon three thatched huts by the foot of a tree-lined hill. Rays of light escaped from the cracks in the walls. Xie Zhen and Xie Bao pushed open the doors to one of the huts and saw amid the light of lamps an old woman of more than 60.

The two brothers set down their tridents and bowed to the old lady, who said, “I thought it was my own children coming home. I didn’t expect to have guests. Please don’t bow to me. Where are you hunters from? How did you end up here?”

“We came from Shandong Province,” Xie Zhen said. “We used to be hunters. We came to this area to do some business, but ran into a raging war. We lost all our capital and had no way to make a living. So my brother and I came to these mountains to find some game to feed ourselves.”

The old lady replied, “Well, as the old saying goes, ‘Who takes their house on the road with them?’ I have two sons, and they are also hunters. They should be back any time now. Please sit for a while, and I’ll prepare some dinner for you.”

Xie Zhen and Xie Bao thanked her for her hospitality. While the old lady went into the back, the two brothers sat out front. Momentarily, they saw two men approach, carrying a deer and shouting, “Mom, where are you?”

The old lady came out and told them to set down the deer and meet their guests. Xie Zhen and Xie Bao quickly bowed to them, and after the prerequisite courtesies, they repeated their story to the old lady’s sons.

The two sons said, "We have lived here for generations. Our names are Liu the Second and Liu the Third. Our father was Liu the First, but he has unfortunately passed away. It's just our mother with us now. We have been making a living as hunters here for about 30 years. The roads around here are complicated; even we don't know them all. If you two are from Shandong Province, how could you have found your way here to make a living? Don't lie to us. You are not hunters, are you?"

Realizing their cliché hunter outfits were insufficient compensation for their unconvincing cover story, Xie Zhen and Xie Bao decided to come clean.

"At this point, we can't deceive you anymore," they said. "We actually were hunters in Shandong. We are brothers, named Xie Zhen and Xie Bao. We followed our brother Song Jiang into banditry on Liangshan for a long time. Now we have accepted amnesty from the Song court and followed our brother here to defeat the Liao. The day before, we were engaged in a big battle against Commander He (4). One of our detachments was separated and we don't know where they are. So we have been dispatched to search for information."

The two Liu brothers laughed and said, "Since you are heroes, please get up. We will point you in the right direction. Sit for a bit. We will cook a leg of deer, warm up some wine, and treat you."

Soon, the meat was ready, and the two Liu brothers sat down and drank with the Xie brothers. As they drank, the Liu brothers said, "We have long heard that Song Jiang of Liangshan delivers justice on heaven's behalf and never bothers civilians. His reputation is known even here in the Liao kingdom."

The Xie brothers replied, "Our brother is all about loyalty and honor. He has sworn to never harm innocent civilians, only corrupt and greedy officials and those who would bully the weak."

At that, the Liu brothers said excitedly, "We had only heard about it; turns out it really is so!" overlooking the fact that, you know, they still have actually only heard about it. But in any case, everybody was getting along smashingly.

Xie Zhen and Xie Bao now said, "Our missing detachment has more than a dozen chieftains and about 5,000 soldiers. We have no idea on their whereabouts, but they are probably trapped in a decent-size area."

"You don't know the terrain here," the Liu brothers said. "This is within the boundaries of Youzhou Prefecture. There's a location here called Green Rock Canyon. There's only one road in and out, and it's surrounded by high peaks. If you block that road, no one can get out. Your men are probably trapped there. There are no other areas that size around here. Right now your army is camped out at a place called Lone Deer Mountain. There's a flat plain in front of that mountain where you can wage battles. If you climb to the top of that mountain, you can see armies approaching from all sides. If you want to save your detachment, you must concentrate your forces on breaking open the mouth of Green Rock Canyon. Only then can you save your troops. There will no doubt be large enemy forces at the mouth of that canyon. There are lots of cypress trees on those mountains, including two gigantic ones at the mouth of the canyon that look like giant canopies and can be seen from a great distance. The mouth of the canyon is right next to those trees. But you must be on guard. Commander He (4) knows how to wield magic, so you must defeat that first."

Having gathered all this intel, the Xie brothers thanked their hosts and rushed back to camp and told Song Jiang what they learned. Song Jiang was alarmed and consulted with the strategist Wu Yong. Just then, word came that Bai Sheng the Daylight Rat had arrived in camp.

"Bai Sheng was trapped with Lu Junyi," Song Jiang said. "If he's here, something must be wrong."

So he summoned Bai Sheng, as well as the two chieftains who found him while on recon. One of the chieftains, Duan Jingzhu the Golden-Haired Hound, said, "We were searching along a mountain stream when we saw a giant bundle come rolling down from the top. When it got to the foot of the mountain, we saw that it was a big ball of felt clothing, with cords attached. When we opened it up, we found Bai Sheng inside."

Bai Sheng then said, "Chieftain Lu and the rest of us were fighting the enemy when the sky grew dark and we couldn't tell which way was up. We just heard the sounds of people and horses. So chieftain Lu ordered us to charge in that direction. But we stumbled into a trap surrounded by tall mountains and had no way out. And we were short of provisions. Our unit is barely hanging on. So chieftain Lu ordered me to roll down the mountain side and find a way to get word to you. Please send help at once, or our brothers will be dead for sure."

So Song Jiang mobilized his forces immediately. With the hunter brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao leading the way, they headed toward the giant cypress trees. Around dawn, they spotted the trees in the distance, and it was just as the Liu brothers had described. So Xie Zhen and Xie Bao led the army and charged toward the mouth of the canyon. On the other side, Commander He ordered his Liao forces to line up for battle.

Eager to seize control of the entrance to the canyon, Song Jiang and his forces poured into the enemy. Lin Chong the Panther Head was out front, and he ran into Commander He's older brother. Within two bouts, Lin Chong skewered his foe. Seeing this, the Song infantry also charged forward, with Li Kui the Black Whirlwind leading the way and cutting a path through the enemy, followed his usual posse of Fan (2) Rui (4) the Demon King of Chaos, Bao (4) Xu (4) the God of Death, and the shield-bearers Xiang (4) Chong (1) and Li (2) Gun (3).

As this crew was carving their way through the enemy, they came upon Commander He's younger brother. Li Kui stomped forward and, with one swipe of his axes, cut off the legs of his enemy's horse. That sent his foe to the ground, whereupon Li Kui started going to town on him and his horse with his twin axes, turning them into meatloaf mix. The Liao soldiers that tried to come to their general's aid were quickly dispatched by Li Kui's entourage.

Seeing both of his brothers bite the dust, Commander He started muttering an incantation and summoned a strong gale and dark clouds. But just then, Gongsun Sheng the Daoist priest rode out with

sword in hand, muttered his own spell, and shouted, "Speed!" At that, the winds halted and the clouds vanished, replaced by a clear red sun.

Seeing his magic broken and the enemy swarming in, Commander He now wielded his saber and charged toward the Song forces as the two sides scrummed. Soon, the Liao army was scattered. While the Song cavalry gave chase, the infantry went to dislodge the piles of giant green boulders that the Liao forces had used to block off the entrance to the canyon. Once they cleared an opening, they stormed into the canyon.

There, they found Lu Junyi and his unit, and Lu Junyi was feeling mighty embarrassed. He wept aloud and said to Song Jiang, "If not for your rescue, my life would've been forfeit!"

Song Jiang now ordered his troops to stop pursuing the enemy and return to camp at Lone Deer Mountain.

To see what Song Jiang will do next, tune into the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, see what other trick might Commander He have up his sleeve. So join us next time.

Thanks for listening!