

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 122.

Last time, Song Jiang and his band of brothers returned victorious from their campaign against the Liao, but more machinations at court by the corrupt officials denied them their just rewards. As more and more little insults added up, Song Jiang brooded while his chieftains seethed with thoughts of rebelling once more.

One day, the naval chieftains Li Jun the River Dragon, the two Zhang Brothers and the three Ruan Brothers got together and invited the strategist Wu Yong to their ship. There, they said to him, “The court broke its promise, and the corrupt officials wield power and block the path of talented men. Our brother defeated the Liao, and yet only got appointed to guard the palace. And none of us got any promotions. And now, they have posted a notice prohibiting us from entering the city. Those wicked officials are going to try to split us up slowly and send us to different places. Strategist, please take charge of this matter. If we were to bring this up with Brother Song, he will flatly refuse. Let’s start a fight right here, raid the capital, and head back to Liangshan to be outlaws.”

But Wu Yong told them, “Brother Song will surely refuse. You are wasting your breath. If the arrow point doesn’t leave the bow, the shaft will snap. A headless snake cannot crawl. How can I give the ok on something like this? We must convince Brother Song; only then would it work. If he refuses, no matter how much you want to rebel, you will fail.”

Seeing that Wu Yong was refusing to sanction their idea, the naval chieftains did not dare to speak anymore of it. But when Wu Yong returned to camp, he went to chit chat with Song Jiang about the state of the army. During the conversation, he said, “Brother, how free we used to be. And how happy were our brothers? Yet, now that we have accepted amnesty and become servants of the country, we are always under someone’s thumb and not entrusted with anything. All our brothers are angry.”

When he heard that, Song Jiang said with alarm, “Did someone say something to you?”

“No one has to say anything; it’s common sense,” Wu Yong replied. “As the old saying goes, ‘People want wealth and rank and despise being poor and lowly.’ You only have to look at their faces to see their mood.”

“Professor, if our brothers are harboring stray thoughts, I would rather die than betray my loyal heart,” Song Jiang declared.

The next morning, Song Jiang assembled his chieftains and told them, “I was a lowly magisterial clerk from Yuncheng County, and I committed grave offenses. It was only your support that made me your leader. And now, we are government officials. As the old saying goes, ‘A mature man deals with restraints, and without restraint one cannot achieve maturity.’ The court has its reasons for restricting our access to the city. You are not to enter the capital without permission. Many of us from the mountains and forests are just rough soldiers. If we cause any trouble, we will be punished according to law, and it will damage our reputation. So it’s actually a good thing that we are not allowed in the city. If you feel so hampered that you must rebel, then cut off my head first, and then proceed according to your plans. If you refuse to kill me, I would still be too ashamed to stay alive, and I would slit my own throat. The choice is yours!”

Well, when the boss puts it that way, what could anyone say? All the chieftains were brought to tears by that speech and they reaffirmed their loyalty and the meeting broke up.

From that day forth, Song Jiang and his officers just stayed out of the city. Soon, the First Lunar Festival was approaching, and the capital, by custom, always held a big lantern festival. And you should know by now that our heroes were drawn to lantern festivals like moths to a flame.

This time, it was Yan Qing the Prodigy and Yue (4) He (2) the Iron Whistle saying to each other, “The capital is putting on big lantern displays, and the emperor will be celebrating with the people. Why don’t the two of us change into civilian clothing and sneak into the city to have a look?”

But just then, someone else chimed in and said, “Hey, bring me along!”

This was none other than Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, and he came in and said I heard everything, and want in.

“It’s no problem to take you along,” Yan Qing said. “But you’ve got a bad temper; you will surely cause trouble. The Council of Military Affairs has posted notices barring us from entering the city. If we take you with us and you cause trouble, that will play right into the council’s hands.”

“I’ll just not cause any trouble this time and do as you say,” Li Kui replied.

Now, given his track record at lantern festivals, I think we all know what’s likely coming. And yet, Yan Qing said ok, we’ll travel in disguise tomorrow, and that made Li Kui very happy.

The next day, they all dressed as travelers. Along the way, they ran into Shi Qian the Flea on a Drum, and the triplet became a quartet. Shi Qian and Yue He the Iron Whistle sneaked into the city first. Yan Qing, though, could not shake Li Kui and had to enter the city with him. They did not dare to go through the Chen Bridge Gate, so they swung around to another entrance and made their way in.

Hand in hand, the two of them walked past the entertainment center. Li Kui heard music coming from inside and insisted on going in, and Yan Qing obliged him. They mixed in with the audience and saw that on stage was a storyteller, captivating the crowd with tales from the Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms. At one point, the storyteller was relaying the tale of the warrior Guan Yu getting his arm bone scraped to remove poison from an arrow. I won’t go into all the gory details here, but in case you are interested in that story, go check out episode 95 in my Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast at [3kingdomspodcast.com](http://3kingdomspodcast.com), spelled with the number 3. The episode title, “Anesthesia is for wusses,” pretty much says it all.

In the midst of that story, Li Kui suddenly shouted from the crowd, “Now THAT is a real man!”

Everyone in the audience was startled and looked back toward Li Kui. Yan Qing quickly shielded him and said, "Brother Li, what are you doing?! Why are you causing such a ruckus?"

"Well, I couldn't help but cheer that part of the story," Li Kui said.

Realizing that oh yeah this is why I can't take you anywhere and always regret it when I do, Yan Qing pulled Li Kui out of the entertainment house and hurried down some back alleys. As they did so, they came upon a man hurling roof tiles at someone's house. The guy whose house was being attacked shouted, "I've lent you twice, and not only do you refuse to pay it back, you are bombarding my house in broad daylight!"

Well, that sounds like a job for Black Whirlwind. Li Kui wanted to go intervene, but Yan Qing pulled him back with all his might. As Li Kui glowered at the tile-thrower, the guy said to him, "We are settling a financial matter; what's it to you?! I'm about to go on campaign to the south with Military Governor Zhang's army any day now, so don't bother me. I'll be a dead man once I get to the south anyway, so I might as well fight you here. At least if I get killed here, I would get a decent burial."

"What is this about going south?" Li Kui asked. "We haven't received any deployment orders."

Yan Qing broke up the confrontation and dragged Li Kui out of the alley. They spotted a small teahouse up ahead and sat down inside. As they drank their tea, they saw an old man sitting across the way, so they asked him to join them. As they shot the breeze, Yan Qing asked the old man, "Grandpa, just now a soldier was fighting in that alley and saying he's about to go on a campaign south of the Yangzi River with Military Governor Zhang. Do you know what he's talking about?"

The old man said, "Sir, it's like this: The rebel Fang (1) La (4) has occupied eight prefectures and 25 counties south of the Yangzi River, declaring his own kingdom. Sooner or later, he's going to attack Yangzhou Prefecture. So the court has sent Military Governor Zhang and District Commander Liu (2) to put them down."

Hearing this, Yan Qing and Li Kui quickly paid their bill and rushed out of the city. They returned to camp and informed the strategist Wu Yong of what they had learned. Wu Yong was delighted and immediately went to tell Song Jiang that the court had sent an an army to pacify the rebel Fang La in the south.

When he heard that, Song Jiang said, "It's not good for our troops to be idle here for long. Why don't we send someone to ask Marshal Su to relay to his majesty that we are willing to mobilize our forces to join the campaign."

That night, he assembled the officers and told them his idea, and they all were delighted at the chance for some more action. I guess this was the classic "Keep the soldiers busy to keep them from rebelling" tactic. In any case, the next day, Song Jiang changed and went with Yan Qing into the capital. They went to Marshal Su's residence and relayed their names to the doorman. Marshal Su hurriedly invited them in, and after Song Jiang paid his respects, the marshal asked what he was doing there in civilian clothing.

"Recently, the Council of Military Affairs barred us from entering the city without being summoned," Song Jiang explained. "So I have come in secret to talk to you, benefactor. I have heard that Fang La has rebelled in the south and has occupied territory and declared himself emperor. Sooner or later, he will cross the river and invade Yangzhou Prefecture in the north. My troops have long been idle, and it is not good for them to remain here for too long. I am willing to lead my forces to pacify the rebels. I hope you will mention this to his majesty."

Marshal Su was delighted. "General, your words match my thoughts exactly," he told Song Jiang. "This would be a service to the country and the people. I will strongly recommend you. Please return to camp, and I shall inform his majesty tomorrow. He will no doubt put you to good use."

While Song Jiang returned to camp to update his chieftains, Marshal Su went to court the next day, where the emperor was consulting his officials on how to deal with the rebels in the south.

“I have already dispatched Military Governor Zhang and District Commander Liu to lead a campaign against the rebels, but I haven’t seen any results so far,” the emperor said.

Marshal Su now stepped forth and said, “These rebels have become a serious menace. You have already sent Governor Zhang and Commander Liu. If you also send Song Jiang, the vanguard general in the victory against the Liao, and his forces as the front column, then they will surely succeed in eliminating the rebels.”

“You are quite right,” the emperor agreed. He immediately issued a decree to the Council of Military Affairs. At the same time, Governor Zhang and his two staff officers were also requesting that Song Jiang and his troops be mobilized as the vanguard for the expedition. Soon, the word was given, and Song Jiang and Lu Junyi were summoned to an audience with the emperor to receive their charge.

The emperor appointed Song Jiang as Commander-in-Chief of the Southern Pacification and Vanguard of the Expedition against Fang La, so you know, two more meaningless titles that basically meant serving as cannon fodder. Lu Junyi was appointed as his second-in-command. Each received a golden belt, a silk robe, a set of golden armor, a fine horse, and good cloth for 25 garments. The other chieftains were given fabric and silver and a promise of promotions commensurate with their performance in battle.

Upon receiving their orders, Song Jiang and Lu Junyi took their leave of the emperor, but he was like, “Wait, not so fast.”

“In your ranks, there is a skilled carver of jade seals named Jin (1) Dajian (4,1), and an expert judge of horses named Huangfu (2,3) Duan (1),” the emperor said. “I want to keep those two here in my service.”

Welp. When the emperor asks, you weren’t going to say no. So Song Jiang and Lu Junyi bowed again to thank the emperor and then returned to camp.

As the two of them rode back to camp, Song Jiang and Lu Junyi were feeling quite upbeat about being entrusted with this new mission. As they headed out of the city, they came across street peddler who was beating out a rhythm on a pair of wooden castanets. They clattered with the movements of his hand. Song Jiang had never seen such a thing and had a soldier ask the peddler what that is.

“It’s a foreign clapper,” the man said. “When you shake your hand, it makes noise.”

Hearing this, Song Jiang composed a poem on the spot:

Now a low sound, now a high,

Clackety-clack into the sky.

Though heroic strength pervades the air,

If not used, it’s wasted there.

He then laughed and said to Lu Junyi, “This thing is like you and me. Despite our immense talents, without someone to shake us into action, we can’t make any noise.” He then tipped the peddler with a few pieces of loose silver and continued on. As they chatted, Song Jiang was inspired to compose another verse. This one said:

Though by the finest craftsmen made,

Feeble chime the hearts of jade.

Only taken well in hand,

Will they ring throughout the land.

Hearing this, Lu Junyi was like, first of all, stop projecting onto every bird, tree, or random knickknack you come across. And secondly, why would you say such a thing? Our talents are equal to those of the famous generals of old. If we didn’t have such skills, even if someone wants to lift us up, what good would that do?”

“No, brother, you’re mistaken,” Song Jiang said. “If not for Marshal Su’s recommendation, how could we be given such important assignments from the emperor and make a name for ourselves? We must not forget those who brought us here.”

That convinced Lu Junyi that he had indeed misspoken, and he did not dare to object or say any more.

Upon returning to camp, they assembled the officers, prepared their equipment, and got ready to set off on the expedition. The next day, they distributed the silver and fabric from the treasury to the officers and the troops, and sent the jade carver Jin Dajian and the horse expert Huangfu Duan to the palace. Song Jiang then deployed his warships, ordering his naval chieftains to get the vessels in ship-shape condition and prepare to sail to the Yangzi River. The cavalry chieftains were to prepare their weapons and armor. The navy and army would set out together.

Suddenly, Premier Cai sent a messenger to Song Jiang, asking for the services of Xiao Rang the Sacred-Handed Scholar. The next day, a District Commander Wang also sent a man to camp, asking for the services of Yue He the Iron Whistle, who was a renowned singer. Song Jiang had no choice but to comply in both cases. So now, he had first seen Gongsun Sheng take off back to his Daoist sanctuary, and then had to give up four other chieftains whose non-killing-and-pillaging skills were in high demand by the imperial court. He was very unhappy about the departure of five chieftains, but he had to press on. The rebellion in the South awaited.

Speaking of the rebellion in the South, let’s pause now and give you some background on that. The rebel leader Fang La had long been a thorn in the imperial court’s side. Remember that his name was among four major rebel leaders written on the screen in the imperial library. Song Jiang’s name, if you remember, was also on that list, but that seemed like ages ago. Now, Song Jiang was in the service of the imperial court and fresh off a victory in the northern borderlands. Actually, in the 120-chapter version of



the novel, Song Jiang and company went on a couple other campaigns after defeating the Liao, as they helped put down the other two rebel leaders on that list. But in the original 100-chapter version, they go from fighting the Liao to fighting Fang La's southern rebellion.

This Fang La used to be a lowly woodcutter in Shezhou (4,1) Prefecture. One day, as he was washing his hands in a mountain stream, he saw a reflection of himself wearing a crown and a dragon robe. So he began telling people that he was destined to become emperor, and that was the beginning of his uprising. In a cavern in his home county of Clear Stream, he constructed his own royal garden and imperial palace. He also set up smaller palaces in a couple other places and started handing out official civil and military positions and establishing a whole system of government. He then began expanding his holdings until he controlled eight prefectures totaling 25 counties south of the Yangzi River. So he was hitting the big times, not just some two-bit bandit holed up on some mountain somewhere. It was even said that he fulfilled some heavenly prophecy, but you know how these things go. Every self-proclaimed son of heaven was the fulfillment of this or that prophecy.

So anyway, Song Jiang set out on an auspicious day, and Marshal Su and Commissioner Zhao both came to see him off and reward the troops. The naval chieftains steered their ships into the Huai (2) River and would meet up with the army at Yangzhou Prefecture. The land army, meanwhile, set off in five units and proceeded without incident to Huai'an (2,1) County. The local officials there welcomed them with a banquet and invited Song Jiang into the city to discuss the situation.

They told Song Jiang, "Fang La's forces are immense; you must not underestimate them. In front of us lies the great Yangzi River, which flows some 3,000 miles into the sea. It is the first dangerous barrier you have to cross to get to the South. Then you come to Runzhou (4,1) Prefecture, which is overseen by Fang La's Chancellor of Military Affairs, Lü (3) Shinang (1,2) and 12 commanders. If you don't seize Runzhou as your base, it will be difficult to repel the enemy."

So this Chancellor Lü (4) Shinang (1,2) used to be a rich man in Shezhou (4,1) Prefecture. He received his current role in Fang La's administration because he had donated a lot of grain to Fang La's forces. He had studied military texts since his youth, and was quite handy with a long spear. He had 12 commanders in his forces, who were dubbed the 12 gods of the Southlands. He also had 50,000 troops at his command, along with 3,000-some warships, moored at a place called the Dew Pavilion. It was nothing but clear water between there and Guazhou (1,1), the ferry point on the opposite north shore.

Upon receiving this information, Song Jiang turned to Wu Yong to ask for ideas on how to cross the river. When they took on the Liao, almost all the fighting was on land, so the naval chieftains didn't really do that much. But now, their services would be crucial.

"There are two islands in the Yangzi River near Runzhou Prefecture," Wu Yong said. "One is called Jinshan (1,1), and the other Jiaoshan (1,1). Both are next to the city walls of Runzhou Prefecture. Let's send a few brothers there to conduct recon and find out what kind of ships we need to cross the river."

So both Jinshan and Jiaoshan were hilly islands in the middle of the river. On the top of the hill on Jinshan Island, there was a monastery that wound up the slopes into the heights, so the hill was called the Monastery-Embracing Hill. On Jiaoshan Island, there was a monastery built into a crevice, hiding it from view. So that monastery was called the Hill-Embracing Monastery.

So Song Jiang summoned the chieftains and asked who among them would go conduct recon. Four of them immediately volunteered. These were Chai Jin the Little Whirlwind, Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves, Shi Xiu the Daredevil, and Ruan Xiaoqi, the youngest of the Ruan brothers. So Song Jiang told them to break into pairs. Zhang Shun and Chai Jin would pair up, and Shi Xiu and Ruan Xiaoqi would form a duo. They were to go scout out the two islands and report back.

The four chieftains took their leave and disguised themselves as merchants, heading first toward Yangzhou Prefecture. On their way, they noticed that all the civilians had moved their homes off the main thoroughfares and were hiding in the villages, hoping to avoid the ravages of war. Once the four

chieftains arrived in Yangzhou Prefecture, they secured some provisions and went their separate ways. Shi Xiu and Ruan Xiaoqi brought a couple men with them and headed to Jiaoshan. Meanwhile, Chai Jin and Zhang Shun also took a couple men with them and headed to the ferry point at Guazhou (1,1).

We will follow Chai Jin and Zhang Shun first. Carrying provisions and armed with daggers and long-handle broadswords, they and their two bodyguards arrived on the bank of the Yangzi River just as early spring arrived. The weather was warm, and the fragrance of flowers hung in the air. As they gazed out on the river, they saw its white waves roaring in a majestic scene.

On the other side of the river, they could see a stretch of green and white flags, along with numerous vessels. But on the north bank, the bank that they were on, there wasn't so much as a single stick of wood.

"All the houses along the road here are deserted, and there are no ships on this side of the river," Chai Jin said. "How can we cross over?"

Zhang Shun told him, "Find a house to rest in for a bit, and let me swim across and see what I can find out at the foot of Jinshan Island."

So the four of them went down to the edge of the river and saw a number of thatched huts. The doors were all shut and locked. Zhang Shun went around the side of one of the huts and managed to pull open part of the wall and squeeze inside. There, he saw a white-haired old lady by the stove.

"Grandma, why are your doors shut?" he asked.

"Sir, to tell you the truth, I heard that the court has sent a huge army to fight Fang La," she answered. "We are right at the ferry point. Some folks have moved away to hide, leaving me here to tend to the houses."

"Where did your husband go?" Zhang Shun asked.

"He went to the village to see his relatives."

"There are four of us looking to cross the river; is there a boat?"

“Where would you find a boat? Recently Lü Shinang (1,2) heard that the court’s army was approaching, so he seized all the boats and moved them to the opposite bank.”

“The four of us have provisions. Can we borrow your home to rest for a couple days? We will pay you rent and will not bother you.”

“You can rest here, but I don’t have any spare beds.”

“We’ll manage.”

“But sir, the army might get here any day.”

“That’s ok; we’ll be able to hide.”

Thus convinced, the old lady opened the door and let the rest of Zhang Shun’s party into her house. They stashed their luggage and ate some of their dry rations. Then, Zhang Shun went back out to the riverbank and checked out the scene. He saw that Jinshan Island was in the heart of the river. After looking around for a bit, Zhang Shun thought, “The enemy’s Chancellor Lü must frequent that island. Let me pay it a visit tonight, and I will gather some intel for sure.”

He then went back to the hut and told Chai Jin, “There is not a single boat here, so how can we find out what’s happening on the other side? Tonight, I’m going to tie my clothes into a bundle and wrap two ingots of silver in it, and put the whole thing on top of my head while I swim over to the monastery on Jinshan Island. I will bribe the monks there, get some news, and report back to Brother Song. You all just wait here.”

Chai Jin agreed and told him to hurry back. That night, the stars and the moon were shining brightly, a soft breeze blew, and the waves were calm. Zhang Shun tied a set of clothes into a bundle, stuffed a couple ingots of silver into it, tied the bundle onto his head, stashed a dagger around his waist, and waded into the water. As he made his way across, he looked as though he was walking on dry land, as the water barely reached his waist.

As he approached Jinshan Island, he spotted a small boat tied up to some rocks. He climbed into the boat, took off his wet clothes, dried himself, and then put on the dry set of clothes. He then sat down in the boat and waited. He heard the drums inside Runzhou Prefecture beat to signal that it was midnight, and he peeked out from the cabin of the boat. Suddenly, he spotted another boat rowing in his direction.

“That boat is zigzagging all over the place,” he thought to himself. “Something must be up.”

To see what the deal is with that boat, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, our heroes get tricky in their attempt to cross the river. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!