

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 124.

Last time, Song Jiang and company used a little trickery, combined with some brute force, to cross the Yangzi River and capture one of the eight southern prefectures occupied by the rebel Fang La. But it came at the cost of the lives of three chieftains, the first time Song Jiang had lost any of his brothers in battle (Chao Gai notwithstanding since his name wasn't on the official list of 108 star spirits). After some grieving, Song Jiang pressed forward. He now split his army in two. He and Lu Junyi each led half the troops and half the chieftains to go attack two rebel prefectures. We will follow Song Jiang as he marched on Changzhou (2,1) Prefecture.

Changzhou was the current refuge of the rebels' Chancellor of Military Affairs, Lü (3) Shinang (1,2), who lost the first rebel prefecture to Song Jiang and was now stationed at a shire inside the borders of Changzhou. The prefecture was overseen by a commander whose last name was Qian (2). This commander used to be a constable in Clear Stream County, the home of the rebel emperor Fang La. He helped Fang La in his conquest of the eight prefectures and was thus entrusted to oversee Changzhou Prefecture.

When Commander Qian heard that Chancellor Lü had suffered a big defeat, he welcomed the chancellor into his prefectural seat and told him, "Don't worry. I may be untalented, but with his majesty's blessings and your lordship's prowess, I am willing to do all that I can to crush Song Jiang and company, send them back across the river, and recapture the lost prefecture, so that they would not dare to set their sights on our territory again."

Chancellor Lü was impressed and told him, "With such dedication as yours, our state will be safe for sure. Once we have defeated the enemy and reclaimed our territory, I will recommend you for high office."

So fast forward a bit, and Song Jiang was now marching on the shire where Chancellor Lü was stationed. Guan Sheng the Great Saber was leading the way, along with 10 other chieftains and 3,000

soldiers. They arrived outside the prefectural seat of Changzhou and started challenging for battle.

Commander Qian volunteered to go out and fight, and Chancellor Lü sent his six surviving commanders and 5,000 troops to help him.

Commander Qian rode out of the city on a red-hare horse with curly mane, wielding a saber. Guan Sheng ordered his troops to back up a bit and allow the enemy to line up for battle. Guan Sheng then shouted, "Rebels, listen up! You are helping a knave rebel. You are destroying lives and drawing the wrath of the gods. Today, the heavenly troops have arrived, yet you're still clueless and dare to oppose me. If we don't exterminate all of you, we will not fall back."

Commander Qian was enraged and cursed, "You all are nothing but bandits from Liangshan who do not know the will of heaven! Instead of establishing your own empire, you submitted to an immoral moron of a sovereign and are now coming to vie against our great kingdom. I will not retreat until I have wiped you all out!"

Now it was Guan Sheng's turn to get pissed. He charged at Commander Qian with saber raised, and the two went at it. After they fought for more than 30 bouts, Commander Qian started to falter. Seeing this, two of the rebel commanders galloped out to join the fight, but that prompted two chieftains from the Song forces to charge out to take them on. These were Huang Xin (4) the Suppressor of Three Mountains, and Sun Li the Sick Yuchi. So now there were six warriors dueling on the battlefield.

Watching this, Chancellor Lü ordered Commander Qian's two lieutenants to go out and join the fight. As they rode out, they were met by two other chieftains, Han Tao the Undefeated General and Peng (2) Qi (3) the General of Heavenly Vision. So now, there were 10 officers duking it out in five pairs.

So, one of Commander Qian's lieutenants who just joined the fight was named Jin (1) Jie (2), and he actually had long harbored thoughts of defecting to the Song. So now, as he was fighting the chieftain Han Tao, he got an idea. After a few bouts, he quit the fight and fled toward his own lines. His thought was that Han Tao would chase him into the lines and send his own troops into disarray. And sure enough,

Han Tao came after him. But what Jin Jie did not count on was that one of Chancellor Lü's commanders who were watching from the lines saw him being pursued and decided to save him. That commander pulled out his bow and arrow, took aim at Han Tao, and let fly. The shot struck Han Tao in the face and sent him off his horse. From the Song lines, Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt rushed out to try to save Han Tao, but before he could get there, another rebel general had rushed out and plunged his spear into Han Tao's throat, killing him.

Han Tao's buddy, Peng Qi, saw this and became incensed. He quit the fight against the other rebel lieutenant and came after the guy who shot his friend. But he was so focused on the guy who shot the arrow, that he wasn't watching out for the guy who delivered the killing blow, and that guy now suddenly charged out from the side, caught Peng Qi off guard, and ran him through with the spear as well.

Seeing two chieftains get killed, Guan Sheng's anger flared, and he fought with even more vigor than before against Commander Qian. Before long, his saber found its mark, and Commander Qian fell dead to the ground. Guan Sheng was just about to seize his dead foe's horse, but his own horse suddenly gave out from under him, sending him to the ground. In that moment, the two rebel commanders who had killed Han Tao and Peng Qi charged toward Guan Sheng. Fortunately, Xu Ning the Golden Lancer and two other chieftains rushed out to rescue him. But at the same time, Chancellor Lü ordered his forces to charge out of the city, which put Guan Sheng's army to flight. The Song forces fled north, and the rebels chased them for seven or eight miles before falling back.

After regrouping, Guan Sheng led his army to see Song Jiang and told him about the deaths of Han Tao and Peng Qi. Song Jiang broke down and wailed, "Who could have expected that we would lose five brothers since crossing the river! Could it be that heaven is angry at me and will not allow me to capture Fang La, and that's why we are losing our men?!"

The strategist Wu Yong again consoled him, telling him, "Commander, you're mistaken. Victory and defeat are commonplace in war. Each person's birth and death are preordained. This is not anything to wonder about. Our two chieftains were destined to die today; that's all there is to it. Please don't upset yourself. Focus on the important affairs."

Li Kui the Black Whirlwind now stepped up and said, "Have a few soldiers who recognize the men that killed our brothers point them out to me, and I will avenge our brothers."

The next day, Song Jiang ordered a white banner be erected in the army while he personally led the chieftains to the city to fight the rebels. Both the army and navy advanced on the prefectural seat of Changzhou. Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, along his posse of Bao (4) Xu (4) the God of Death and the shield-bearers Xiang Chong and Li Gun, led 500 stout infantrymen and went on ahead as the scouting party, and they headed straight for the city.

Inside the city, Chancellor Lü was very concerned after losing Commander Qian. He sent three urgent dispatches to Suzhou Prefecture to ask the prince Fang Mao (4) for help, and he also informed the rebel court. Then, he got word that there were 500 foot soldiers outside challenging for battle, and their leader was Li Kui the Black Whirlwind.

"That knave is Liangshan's top killer, a cold-blooded murder machine," Chancellor Lü said. "Who dares to go capture him?"

The two commanders who slayed Han Tao and Peng Qi yesterday volunteered, and the chancellor promised them promotions if they succeeded. So the two rode out with 1,000 men. When Li Kui saw them coming, he told his 500 foot soldiers to spread out in a line, while he stood in front of the line with twin axes in hand. Next to him stood Bao (4) Xu (4) the God of Death, holding a big cutlass. The two shield-bearers, Xiang Chong and Li Gun, were also nearby, holding barbed shields in one hand and steel javelins in the other. The four of them wore chest and back armor plates and stood in a line at the front.

On the other side, the two rebel commanders were feeling pretty full of themselves after yesterday's victory, so they also spread out their forces. On the Song side of the field, a few scouts recognized them and pointed out to Li Kui that those were the two guys who killed our chieftains yesterday.

That was all Li Kui needed to hear. Without saying a word, he took off on a sprint toward the enemy line. Seeing this, Bao Xu quickly followed, and called for the two shield-bearers to come along as well. The sight of this fearsome foursome dashing toward them caught the two rebel commanders off guard. Before they could turn around and ride back into their own lines, Li Kui and company had already arrived in front of their horses. The rebel commanders stabbed at them with spears, but the shield-bearers deflected their blows. At the same moment, Li Kui sliced off the legs of one of the commanders' horses, and that guy came tumbling down to the ground.

"Take him alive!" shouted Xiang Chong, one of the shield-bearers.

Yeah, good luck with that. Black Whirlwind was in one of his trademark hulking-out moments, and one of his axes was already cutting through the rebel commander's neck. Meanwhile, Bao Xu pulled the other rebel commander off his horse and cut off his head as well. Hmm, that was easy.

Li Kui hung the head of his slain foe from his waist, and the four chieftains now turned their attention to the rest of the rebel forces, slaughtering them en masse. They killed about 400 enemies and sent the rest scurrying back into the city. Li Kui and Bao Xu even wanted to run across the drawbridge and charge into the city, but the two shield-bearers pulled them back before the guards atop the city wall started raining down logs and boulders. The four of them now returned to their own, where their 500 foot soldiers had not even budged.

Li Kui and Bao Xu now brought the heads of the two rebel commanders to Song Jiang, which shocked everyone.

"How did you get our enemies' heads?" the other officers asked.

“We killed lots of enemies,” Li Kui and Bao Xu said. “We were going to bring these back alive, but we were on a roll and couldn’t help ourselves, so we killed them.”

Song Jiang said, “Since we have the heads of the men who murdered our brothers, we can look up at the sky from under the white banner and offer them as sacrifices to our departed brothers.”

And so they held an impromptu mourning ceremony, and Song Jiang wept again before taking down the white banners and rewarding Li Kui and his posse. They then marched to the foot of the city.

Inside the city, Chancellor Lü was panicking after losing a couple more officers. So he discussed the matter with his four remaining generals and the two lieutenants who had served under Commander Qian. Everybody was scared after witnessing Li Kui’s deadly display. Chancellor Lü asked time and again who would go out and fight, and everyone remained silent as if they were geese with an arrow through their beaks or fish with a hook in their cheeks. That made Chancellor Lü even more anxious. He sent someone to the top of the city walls to scout out the situation, and they reported that Song Jiang’s army was surrounding the city, beating war drums, and chanting battle cries, challenging them to combat. Chancellor Lü told all the officers to go oversee the defenses atop the walls. Once the officers left, he started thinking about getting the heck out of there and began making plans with his confidants.

Jin Jie, the rebel lieutenant who had unsuccessfully tried to turn on his own side in the previous day’s battle, returned home and said to his wife, “Right now Song Jiang has surrounded the city and is attacking on three sides. We lack provisions, so we cannot hold out for long. And they might sack the city before then, and then we will all be killed.”

His wife told him, “You have long harbored a loyal heart and wanted to defect to the Song. Besides, you used to be an official of the Song, and the Song court did not mistreat you. Why not abandon the wicked and return to the righteous path? If you capture Lü Shinang (1,2) and present him to Song Jiang, you could even move up.”

“But Lü Shinang has four commanders under him, who each have their own armies. And my fellow lieutenant does not get along with me. I worry that I alone cannot make anything happen, and might invite disaster instead.”

His wife now had an idea. “You can write a secret letter, tie it to an arrow, and shoot it into Song Jiang’s camp,” she said. “Let him know that you will be his inside man. Tomorrow, you can go out to fight, and then pretend to lose and lead them into the city. That will be your service to them.”

“Your words are quite right,” Jin Jie said. “I will do as you suggest.”

The next day, Song Jiang redoubled his siege on the city. Chancellor Lü gathered his officers to discuss what to do. Jin Jie said, “The city’s walls are tall. We should defend rather than attack. Let everyone maintain their defensive position until the relief force from Suzhou Prefecture arrives. Then we can go out and fight.”

Chancellor Lü agreed, so he put two of his commanders in charge of the east gate, another two in charge of the north gate, Jin Jie in charge of the west gate, and the other lieutenant in charge of the south gate.

That night, Jin Jie wrote a secret letter, tied it to an arrow, and waited until late at night. When no one was watching, he snuck on to the city wall and shot the arrow toward the Song soldiers who were conducting recon outside the west gate. The message was rushed to Song Jiang, who read it with Wu Yong, was delighted by Jin Jie’s proposal, and immediately sent word out to his forces to be prepared.

The next day, the Song forces again besieged the city on three sides. Chancellor Lü was standing in the watchtower atop the city wall, observing the enemy setting up their artillery. Suddenly, the chieftain Ling (2) Zhen (4) the Sky-Quaking Thunder, fired a cannon blast right at the watchtower. The shot struck the corner of the tower, flattening half of it. Chancellor Lü barely got out alive and rushed off the wall. He now ordered the officers at each of the four gates to charge out and push the enemy back.

So after three rounds of drums, the two commanders at the north gate rode out to fight, and they were facing Guan Sheng the Great Saber. Meanwhile, at the west gate, Jin Jie rode out and he was facing the chieftain Sun Li the Sick Yuchi. They had not traded blows for three bouts when Jin Jie turned and rode back toward the city. Sun Li gave chase, followed by a whole gaggle of chieftains. Jin Jie took his time retreating, and by the time he made it into the city, Sun Li was already at the gate and took it.

Now, chaos broke loose inside the city as word quickly spread that the Song forces had entered through the west gate. The civilians, the novel tells us, were fed up with all the harm that Fang La had done to them, and they were already pissed at this administration. So when they heard that the Song forces had breached the city, they apparently came out to help them fight the rebels. Honestly, that sounded like a whole lot of propaganda, but the bottom line was that the Song forces quickly gained the upper hand.

The two rebel commanders at the north gate heard that things were going south, and they tried to run back into the city to save their families. But they were quickly swarmed by the Song forces and captured alive. Song Jiang and Wu Yong now directed the main army into the city, and their forces fanned out and started hunting down and killing rebels all over the place.

Amid this chaos, Chancellor Lü and the other lieutenant managed to escape through the south gate and eluded capture. But nobody else got away. One of his commanders was killed in the chaos, while another hid in a civilian home before being captured by the civilians and turned over to Song Jiang. Song Jiang now posted notices to put the civilian population at ease. Civilians old and young came to the prefectural office to thank him, and he in turn showered them with kind words, telling them that they were once more good, law-abiding citizens. Because I'm sure they had a choice in the matter of which emperor claimed their city.



Jin Jie now came to pay his respects to Song Jiang, and he was received warmly. The novel now praised his wife, saying that it was all thanks to her support and advice that her husband was now once again a good, loyal servant of the Song. So hey, a positive portrayal of a female character!

Next, Song Jiang put the three captured rebel commanders in prisoner carts and told Jin Jie to deliver them to Runzhou (4,1) Prefecture so that Military Governor Zhang could deal with them. Jin Jie did as instructed, and Song Jiang also had Dai Zong the Magic Traveler go on ahead to deliver a letter recommending Jin Jie for his loyalty. When Military Governor Zhang received first the letter and then the prisoners, he was quite delighted. He rewarded Jin Jie handsomely, and one of his vice commanders took Jin Jie into his ranks. And as a postscript, Jin Jie would go on to serve the Song loyally, receiving his own command in the later battles against the Jin (1) kingdom before dying in battle.

Military Governor Zhang now put the three prisoners to death, cutting them to pieces and putting their heads on public display. He then sent someone to reward Song Jiang's troops.

As Song Jiang rested his army at Changzhou Prefecture, he sent Dai Zong to check on Lu Junyi's progress in attacking the rebel-held prefectures of Xuanzhou (1,1) and Huzhou (2,1). He also got word that Chancellor Lü had met up with the rebel relief force from Suzhou Prefecture and was coming back this way to attack. So Song Jiang dispatched 10,000 men and 10 chieftains to march south to meet this incoming enemy force.

While that army set out, Dai Zong the Magic Traveler returned with the chieftain Chai Jin the Little Whirlwind, who was part of Lu Junyi's army and was on his way to see Song Jiang. He brought good news: Lu Junyi had taken Xuanzhou (1,1) Prefecture. Song Jiang was delighted and welcomed Chai Jin with wine and then asked him for details. Chai Jin showed him a letter from Lu Junyi, recounting what happened.

Xuanzhou was defended by a garrison general who had six officers under his command. He sent all six of them at the head of three armies to face Lu Junyi, so Lu Junyi also divided his army into three units to counter. Well, Lu Junyi's chieftains made quick work of four of those six rebel officers, sending the rebel forces back into the city. Lu Junyi then ordered his troops to storm the city. After an intense siege, the east gate fell, and the city fell with it. The rebel garrison general fled with some tattered troops toward Huzhou (2,1) Prefecture. Of the two rebel officers who survived the initial battle outside the city, one was killed when the city fell, and the other just vanished in the chaos.

But this victory came at a cost. During the initial siege, the rebels showered the Song forces with projectiles and poison arrows. One chieftain was hit and killed by a grindstone. Two others were struck by poison arrows and died upon returning to camp. The one who got killed by the grindstone was Zheng (4) Tianshou (1,4) the Fair-faced Gentleman, who was part of the gang on Clear Winds Mountain that had saved Song Jiang when he got into trouble with the local authorities. The two who were killed by poison arrows were Cao (2) Zheng (4) the Knife-wielding Demon, who had helped Yang Zhi and Lu Zhishen take over Double Dragon Mountain, and Wang (2) Dingliu (4,4) the Living Goddess of Lightning, who had helped Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves when the latter almost died at the hand of a shady boatman.

So, this was starting to get out of hand. It was no longer just, hey let's kill off a couple minor characters to show that the situation was serious. It seemed like the flood gates had opened and these formerly seemingly indestructible heroes were falling left and right. Really, it reminds me of that scene from the Transformers animated movie from the 1980s where they killed off a bunch of Autobots in one early scene, and you were just left dazed and confused because you had watched those same guys survive getting shot time and again in the TV show, only to bounce back up on their feet a few minutes later. I guess our heroes were running low on energon cubes.

When he heard that he had lost three more brothers, Song Jiang let out a loud wail and collapsed to the ground. His face was yellow, his lips were purple, his fingernails were pale, and there was no spark in his eyes.

His officers helped him up and brought him back around after a bit, and Song Jiang now wept to Wu Yong and the others, "We will definitely fail in our attempt to pacify Fang La. It has been such a calamity since we crossed the river, and it has cost us eight of our brothers!"

Wu Yong again consoled him, saying, "Don't say that, commander, or you will demoralize the troops. When we defeated the Liao kingdom, all of us returned to the capital. That was preordained by heaven. And now, we have lost some brothers, and that, too, is each person's destiny at work. Since we crossed the river, we have captured three major prefectures. This is all due to the blessing of his majesty, and your prowess as commander. How can you say it's been a calamity? Don't sap our own morale."

"You are right," Song Jiang said, "but even if it is destiny, I guess I have been thinking that all 108 of us are star spirits and our names all appeared on the stone tablet. And we were so close that we were like arms and legs to a single body. I couldn't help but be grieved by today's bad news."

"Don't worry so much or you will hurt your health," Wu Yong said. "Please deploy the troops to attack the rebel chancellor at Wuxi (2,1) County."

"Let Lord Chai Jin stay by my side," Song Jiang said. "I will have Dai Zong deliver a message to Lu Junyi, telling him to attack Huzhou (2,1) Prefecture and then meet us at Hangzhou (2,1) Prefecture."

So Wu Yong told the chieftain Pei Xuan the Iron-Faced Scribe to write the official reply and sent Dai Zong to deliver the message to Lu Junyi.

Meanwhile, the rebel chancellor Lü (3) Shinang (1,2) fled back to the city of Wuxi (2,1), where he met up with the relief force sent by Prince Fang Mao (4). This force was led by a general named Wei (4) Zhong (1), who commanded more than a dozen officers and 10,000 men. They combined their forces

and set up headquarters at Wuxi (2,1). After hearing Chancellor Lü recount the debacle at Changzhou (2,1) Prefecture, General Wei (4) said, “Don’t worry Chancellor. I will reclaim Changzhou for sure.”

Just then, word came that a Song army was approaching, so General Wei rode out to meet them. He saw the Song forces charging this way with a full head of steam, led by Li Kui the Black Whirlwind and his posse. General Wei couldn’t even get his army lined up properly before he was forced to flee back into the city. But Li Kui and company were hot on his heels and followed him into the city. That forced Chancellor Lü to flee out of another gate. Soon, the Song forces, led by Guan Sheng the Great Saber, had taken the city and started torching it. While the rebels all fled back to Suzhou Prefecture, Song Jiang arrived in Wuxi and posted notices congratulating the city’s civilians on becoming good, law-abiding citizens once again. He then sent word to his superiors, telling them to move into Changzhou Prefecture behind him.

Chancellor Lü, meanwhile, fled back to Suzhou Prefecture and told Prince Fang Mao (4) how the enemy had been invincible. Fang Mao was not pleased, to say the least, and barked for his men to execute Chancellor Lü. To see if Chancellor Lü will get to keep his head, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, Song Jiang goes toe-to-toe with this Prince Fang Mao. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!