

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 127.

Last time, Song Jiang had set his sights on sacking the rebel stronghold of Hangzhou Prefecture on the shores of West Lake. To help him in that cause, the naval chieftain Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves volunteered to swim over to the city at night, sneak inside, and start a fire. But the last we saw him, Zhang Shun was leaping back into the water with a barrage of arrows, javelins, and boulders coming at him from atop the city wall.

Over in Song Jiang's camp, they had gotten word of Zhang Shun's plan earlier in the day, so they had prepared to attack the east gate as soon as they see the flames. Song Jiang sat up all night with the strategist Wu Yong. By the time 3 a.m. rolled around, he was feeling quite fatigued, so he dismissed everyone and lay down for a little nap in his tent.

Suddenly, a chilling wind swept through the tent. Song Jiang startled awake. The candles were out, and an oppressive, cold draft hung in the air. As he squinted in the dark, he saw a figure looking like neither human nor ghost, standing in the cold mist, covered in blood.

"Brother," the figure murmured. "I have followed you for many years and received your kindness. Today, I have repaid you with my life. I was killed outside the enemy's gate, and I have come to say goodbye."

"Brother Zhang Shun, is that you?" Song Jiang asked. As he turned, he suddenly saw another three or four indistinct figures, also covered in blood. He let out a loud cry and suddenly found himself awake in his tent.

The guards had rushed in when they heard him cry. Song Jiang collected himself and summoned Wu Yong and told him about the dream. They sat around wondering if that was an ill omen about Zhang Shun, and as the night dragged on and still no sign came from within the city, they became more and more worried.

The next afternoon, an urgent dispatch came from Li Jun the River Dragon, the chieftain who had given Zhang Shun the ok for his mission. It said: "Zhang Shun tried to scale the wall at the enemy's water gate, but was killed by arrows and javelins in the water. His head is hanging from a pole on the wall west of the lake."

Song Jiang wailed so hard at this news that he collapsed. He had lost other chieftains on this campaign, but this one really hurt. Zhang Shun, remember, was one of his good friends from his time as an exile in Jiangzhou Prefecture. Also, Zhang Shun had always been kind and exceptionally good to others, so everybody else in camp also felt pangs of sadness when they heard the news.

"I feel worse than if I had lost my parents!" Song Jiang cried. "This pain goes to my very heart and marrow!"

"Brother, you must concentrate on the important affairs of the state," Wu Yong and everyone else said, trying to console him. "Don't let your grief damage your health."

"I must personally go to the lake side to mourn him," Song Jiang said.

"Brother, you must not venture into dangerous territory," Wu Yong cautioned. "If the rebels find out, they will surely attack you."

But Song Jiang's mind was made up. Later in the day, he and some of his men arrived in Li Jun's camp by the monastery in the hills. There, Song Jiang wept again, and they asked the Buddhist monks in the monastery to read scripture in honor of Zhang Shun.

The next evening, Song Jiang sent soldiers to erect a white banner on the bridge by the lake, bearing the words, "Soul of departed brother and general Zhang Shun." Then, around 7 p.m., Song Jiang donned a white cloak and a golden helmet wrapped in white silk, and headed down to the bridge, accompanied by Dai Zong the Magic Traveler and a few monks. There, the soldiers had already set up sacrificial items, so they now lit candles and incense, and Song Jiang presided over the service and wept bitterly toward

the gate where Zhang Shun met his end. Then, Dai Zong read a eulogy, while Song Jiang poured wine, looked up to the eastern sky, and wailed.

Just then, loud cries rose up from the hills to the south and north, as two rebel armies led by 10 generals and totaling 6,000 men charged toward Song Jiang's position. Song Jiang's activities had been noticed by the rebel overseer of Hangzhou, Fang (1) Tianding (1,4), the eldest son of the rebel emperor Fang La. So Fang Tianding immediately dispatched his forces to attack.

As the rebels closed in on Song Jiang's position, they were suddenly blindsided by armies that sprang out from under the bridge. Three chieftains — Fan (2) Rui (4) the Demon King of Chaos, Ma (3) Lin (2) the Iron Flute Deity, and Shi Xiu the Daredevil — led 5,000 men each and charged out with torches in hand. Seeing that Song Jiang was prepared, the rebels quickly fell back and retraced their steps while the Song forces gave chase.

Just as the rebel force that came out of the northern hills were preparing to cross the river to get back to safety, they were hit by an army of 5,000, led by the two older Ruan brothers and Meng (4) Kang (1) the Jade Flagpole. This attack cut off the rebels' path of retreat, captured one of the rebel generals and killed another.

As for the rebel force from the southern hills, as they were retreating, they ran into 500 infantrymen led by Li Kui the Black Whirlwind and his posse of berserkers. In the clash, three rebel generals were slain, and most of the rebel forces were pushed into the lake, where they drowned.

By the time the rebels sent reinforcements from the city, Song Jiang and his men had already fallen back to their camp in the hills. There, they tallied up each chieftain's accomplishments in the fighting. Aside from all the slain enemies, they had also captured 500-some good horses. Song Jiang left three chieftains to help Li Jun the River Dragon while he returned to his own camp with Dai Zong the Magic Traveler and Li Kui and his posse. Once he got back to camp, he briefed Wu Yong on how he had slain four enemy generals, and then he sent the captured general to his superiors for execution.

While Song Jiang was engaged in fighting outside Hangzhou Prefecture, his second-in-command Lu Junyi was overseeing two other campaigns in the field. Lu Junyi himself was leading half of his forces to attack a key location called Lone Pine Pass, while the other half of the troops were marching on Deqing (2,1) County under the command of the chieftain Huyan Zhuo the Twin Staffs. Song Jiang had not gotten an update on either unit for a while, so he sent Dai Zong the Magic Traveler to go see what's up.

Dai Zong returned after a few days and told Song Jiang, "Lu Junyi has made his way through Lone Pine Pass and will be here any day now."

Song Jiang was half elated and half concerned and asked how Lu Junyi's troops and officers were faring.

"I know all the details of the fighting there, and the official report is right here," Dai Zong said. "But you must not let it trouble you."

"What?! Did we lose a few more brothers?!" Song Jiang asked with alarm. "Don't lie to me; tell me the truth!"

And so Dai Zong told him the truth, and here's what happened.

Lu Junyi, as we mentioned, was attacking Lone Pine Pass. This place was flanked by high mountains, with only one road through the pass, which was built right into the mountains. Next to the pass was a huge tree that could be seen from far away. The area below the pass was covered with pine trees. The location was defended by three rebel generals. In the initial stages of the siege, the rebel generals came out to fight against Lin Chong the Panther Head, and he quickly wounded one of them, so they all fell back into the pass and refused to come out.

Then, the commander leading the rebel relief force from Hangzhou Prefecture sent four more generals to help defend the pass, including his own younger brother. They came out to fight, and that

younger brother was slain by the chieftain Lü Fang, one of the halberd twins, so the rebels again holed up in the pass and refused to come out.

After waiting at the foot of the pass for a few days without seeing any enemy movement, Lu Junyi sent four chieftains up the mountain to conduct recon. But suddenly, they were accosted by a rebel force led by the commander who was looking to avenge his younger brother. The chieftains were caught off guard, and before they could react, that rebel commander had cut down one of them, Zhou Tong the Little Conqueror. The other three barely got back to camp alive.

The next day, the chieftain Dong Ping the General of Double Spears wanted to avenge Zhou Tong, so he rode up near the pass and cursed the rebels, challenging them to come out and pick on someone who was, you know, actually good. But the rebels answered with a cannon blast in his direction. The projectile missed Dong Ping, but the concussion from the shot injured his left arm. When he got back to camp, Dong Ping couldn't grip a spear in that hand, so they had to put that arm in a splint.

Dong Ping wanted to go back and seek revenge the next day, but Lu Junyi stopped him. The day after that, Dong Ping's arm felt a little better, so he and Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow decided to go behind Lu Junyi's back and made their way up the mountainside on foot. The rebel commander and another general came out of the pass to fight them. Dong Ping wanted to capture the commander, so he fought the guy on foot. But after 10 bouts, Dong Ping was at a disadvantage because he still couldn't really use his left arm. Step by step, he started being forced back down the hill, while the rebel commander kept coming.

Seeing this, Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow hoisted his spear to join the fight. As he thrustated at the rebel commander, his foe ducked behind a tree, and Zhang Qing's spear became lodged in the trunk of the tree. While Zhang Qing was busy trying to pull his spear out, the rebel commander stabbed him in the stomach.

Seeing Zhang Qing collapse to the ground, Dong Ping rushed forward to try to save him. But he was so focused on the rebel commander, that he didn't see the other rebel general sneak up behind him. With one swing of the saber, the rebel general cut Dong Ping in half. By the time Lu Junyi learned that Dong Ping and Zhang Qing had gone off to fight without permission and rushed over with reinforcements, it was too late. The two chieftains were dead, their bodies still strewn in enemy territory in front of the pass, and the rebel forces had gone back up behind their walls. And just like that, Lu Junyi had lost two of his top warriors.

But Lu Junyi eventually came up with a plan. He had the husband-and-wife tandem of Sun (1) Xin (1) and Gu Dasao dress up as civilian refugees, and they went into the mountains and discovered a back road that led around the pass. So they and four other chieftains snuck onto the pass at night and started a fire. Realizing that the enemy had gone around their defenses, the rebels abandoned the pass and fled. In the subsequent fighting, Lu Junyi's forces captured three rebel generals alive, which they sent back to Military Governor Zhang for execution. They then collected the bodies of the three slain chieftains: Dong Ping, Zhang Qing, and Zhou Tong, and buried them at the pass.

Lu Junyi then pursued the fleeing rebels for 15 miles and caught up to them. He killed the rebel commander, and the tattered remnants of the rebel forces, led by three surviving generals, retreated. Lu Junyi now headed toward Hangzhou Prefecture and should arrive any day.

As Song Jiang read the official report, his tears flowed like a spring at the loss of yet three more chieftains. Wu Yong now advised him to send troops to stage a pincer attack and to link up with the third army led by Huyan Zhuo the Twin Staffs. Song Jiang agreed and sent Li Kui, his posse, and 3,000 infantrymen for the mission. Li Kui happily accepted the task and headed off.

Song Jiang, meanwhile, led his forces to attack the east gate of Hangzhou Prefecture. A unit of 5,000 men, led by Zhu Tong the Lord of the Beautiful Beard, advanced from the village where they had been

camped to a spot outside the east gate, marching through heavily populated suburbs along the river.

Once they lined up outside the gate, Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk stepped out and hurled a barrage of verbal abuse at the rebels atop the city wall, challenging them to come out and fight.

When the rebel high command inside the city got word that a monk was challenging them to battle, they were like, hey, what a coincidence. We have our own warrior monk. That monk, the Imperial Preceptor Zheng (4) Yuanjue (2,2), rose and said to the overseer Fang Tianding, "I have heard about that monk from Liangshan. His name is Lu Zhishen and he is supposed to be quite skilled with his steel Buddhist staff. Please go to the wall above the east gate and watch me trade a few blows with him."

So Fang Tianding, accompanied by the commander Shi (2) Bao (3) and eight generals, went to the east gate to watch the show. The imperial preceptor Zheng (4) Yuanjue (2,2), meanwhile, donned a red robe, a large string of beads, and deer-felt monk shoes, and went out holding his own steel Buddhist staff and flanked by 500 foot soldiers wielding broadswords.

When he saw them coming, Lu Zhishen said, "Turns out these rebels also have a baldy! Let me give him 100 strokes with my staff."

Without exchanging a word, Lu Zhishen sprinted toward Zheng Yuanjue, who did likewise. After 50-some bouts, they were evenly matched and neither had the upper hand. Watching from the tower, the rebel overseer Fang Tianding said to his commander Shi Bao (3), "I had only heard of Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk from Liangshan. Who knew he would live up to his reputation. He has given up anything to the Imperial Preceptor yet."

"I am also dazed from watching this fight," Shi Bao replied. "I have never seen such an even match."

Just then, an urgent report arrived that more enemy forces had showed up by the north gate, so Shi Bao rushed off to see what's up.

Meanwhile, back at the east gate, Wu Song the Pilgrim grew worried and impatient when he saw Lu Zhishen in such a dogged fight against Zheng Yuanjue. So he raised his twin sabers and charged out.

Seeing this, Zheng Yuanjue turned and ran toward the city. Wu Song gave chase, but suddenly, a stout rebel general rode out from the city gate and galloped right at Wu Song. They faced off right on the drawbridge. The general stabbed at Wu Song with his spear, but Wu Song dodged the thrust, dropped one of his sabers, grabbed hold of the spear's shaft, and pulled the rebel general off his horse. In the same motion, Wu Song's other hand brought his other saber down, and that rebel general's head went rolling away.

Seeing this, the rebels quickly pulled up the drawbridge and fell back into the city. On the other side, Zhu Tong also commanded his forces to fall back a few miles and pitch camp, while he sent word of the victory to Song Jiang.

Song Jiang was presently engaged in his own battle at the north gate. The rebel commander Shi Bao rode out with his saber and throwing mallet. From Song Jiang's lines, Guan Sheng the Great Saber rode out to fight him. The two traded blows for 20-some bouts, and then Shi Bao turned and rode away. But Guan Sheng reined in his horse and did not give chase.

When Song Jiang asked why, Guan Sheng said, "Shi Bao's skills are not beneath mine, so he must have some trick up his sleeve."

Wu Yong chimed in, "I have heard that he is skilled with the throwing mace, so he must have been trying to lure you in."

So Song Jiang decided to not press his luck and instead returned to camp, whereupon he rewarded Wu Song for his kill.

Meanwhile, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind was leading an infantry unit to meet up with Lu Junyi's army. On the way, he ran into the defeated rebel forces that were fleeing from Lone Pine Pass, and Li Kui pounced on them, killing one of the rebel generals and sending the other two fleeing back up the road



toward the pass. Of course, Lu Junyi was coming down that road, so he also took a chunk out of this tattered rebel force. The two remaining rebel generals were pressed so hard that they abandoned their horses and fled into the hills. But suddenly, two men emerged with tridents, knocked the rebel generals down, and captured them. These were the hunter brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao. They brought their prisoners to Lu Junyi, and then they met up with Li Kui, and they all returned to Song Jiang's camp together. There, they caught up on everything that had transpired and mourned the losses of the three chieftains in the siege on Lone Pine Pass.

The next day, they sent one of the two captured rebel generals to Military Governor Zhang for execution. The other rebel general, however, was the one who had killed Dong Ping the General of Double Spears. He got the special treatment. Song Jiang had him sliced open and his heart removed as a sacrifice to the spirits of the three chieftains who died at Lone Pine Pass. This done, they decided to send Lu Junyi and his army to meet up with Huyan Zhuo's army and then they would all combine their forces and attack Hangzhou Prefecture.

Lu Junyi went, and on the way, he ran into a rebel force. This was the reinforcement that had been sent from Hangzhou to relieve the county that Huyan Zhuo was attacking, but they were now fleeing back in defeat. Lu Junyi intercepted and routed them. The rebel commander in charge of that army ended up drowning in the river, while the soldiers all scattered and fled. Lu Junyi then met up with Huyan Zhuo, and they returned to Song Jiang's camp together.

When Song Jiang looked around Huyan Zhuo's army, he noticed two chieftains missing. These were Lei Heng the Winged Tiger and Gong (1) Wang (4) the Flowery Neck Tiger. Huyan Zhuo told him that Lei Heng fought against the rebel commander outside the county they were attacking, but was cut down after 20 bouts. Gong Wang was fighting a rebel general and pursued him across a stream, but he and his horse fell in the water, and the rebels stabbed him to death. But Suo Chao the Impatient Vanguard managed to kill a rebel general, while other chieftains captured two other rebel generals alive. The rebel

commander, as we mentioned, ended up drowning, and yet another rebel general fled and disappeared in the chaos.

When Song Jiang heard that two more chieftains had been lost, his tears fell like rain yet again. He said to everyone, "A few days ago, when Zhang Shun visited me in my dream, I saw several other blood-stained figures standing around. That must have been the five chieftains killed in these recent battles. If I sack Hangzhou, I must have monks perform a proper service to mourn our brothers."

After grieving, Song Jiang shipped the captured rebel generals off to his superiors for execution and then rewarded his troops with a feast. The next day, he and Wu Yong deployed their forces to lay siege on Hangzhou. They divided their chieftains and soldiers into six columns, one attacking each gate.

Song Jiang was leading the army attacking the north gate, and the rebel commander Shi Bao came out to meet them again. From Song Jiang's side, Suo Chao the Impatient Vanguard rode out to fight Shi Bao, and the two traded vicious blows for less than 10 bouts before Shi Bao turned and rode away. Suo Chao gave chase. Guan Sheng the Great Saber shouted for him to stop, but the words had not even left his lips when he saw Suo Chao get hit right in the face by Shi Bao's throwing mallet and fall off his horse. The chieftain Deng (4) Fei (1) the Fiery-Eyed Lion raced out to try to save Suo Chao, but Shi Bao turned back around and cut him down as well. The rebel forces then charged out of the city and put Song Jiang to flight. Fortunately, Hua Rong the archer and Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt showed up with backup and saved him. The rebels, meanwhile, returned to the city in victory.

Back in camp, Song Jiang once again brooded over the loss of another two chieftains. I've already lost track of the body count, but this is becoming a regular, everyday affair now. Wu Yong advised Song Jiang that they cannot take the city by force, only by cunning.

"With the losses we've been taking, what strategy can we use?" Song Jiang lamented.

Wu Yong said, "You've already arranged for our forces to attack all the gates. Hit the north gate again tomorrow. The rebels will no doubt come out to fight. We can feign defeat and lure them away from the city. Then, fire a cannon to signal our forces to attack all the gates. We just need to breach one gate, and then they can start a fire, and the rebels will not be able to help each other, and success will be ours."

So Song Jiang had Dai Zong the Magic Traveler send word to all the units. The next day, he sent Guan Sheng the Great Saber with a small force to challenge for battle outside the north gate. Sure enough, the rebel commander Shi Bao rode out to fight. After trading a few blows, Guan Sheng retreated, and Shi Bao gave chase. Once they were away from the city, Ling Zhen the Sky-Quaking Thunder let loose his cannons, and the Song forces at every gate let out a loud roar and threw themselves at the city.

Lu Junyi was leading the assault on the southeast gate. When their forces charged to the foot of the city, they saw that the gates were open and the drawbridge was down. Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil wanted to be the first one across, so he galloped out ahead of everyone and charged into the city. But alas, that's what the guards were waiting for. See, Hangzhou's city gates had three layers. The outermost layer was a heavy slab gate, and the middle layer was a two-leafed set of iron doors, and the innermost layer was a large grill gate. When the guards saw Liu Tang riding across the drawbridge, they cut the rope holding up the exterior slab gate, and this huge sheet of stone came crashing down, crushing Liu Tang and his horse. And just to be sure, there were rebel soldiers lying in ambush on both sides of the gate, so poor Liu Tang never had a chance.

With that loss, the Song forces attacking that gate returned to Lu Junyi. At the same time, none of the other units were able to breach their gate either, so they had to fall back. When word reached Song Jiang about Liu Tang's death, he wept bitterly.

"Pity that brother!" Song Jiang wailed. "Ever since he swore the oath of brotherhood in Yuncheng County, he had followed Chao Gai to Liangshan and suffered years of tribulation, never knowing any

happiness. He had survived countless battles and never lost his prowess. Who knew he would die here today?!"

Wu Yong now said, "This current plan is no good. It didn't work, and we lost a brother. Tell our forces to back off from the gates, and we'll figure out something else."

Song Jiang was feeling quite restless and impatient for revenge. Seeing this, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind said, "Brother, don't worry. Tomorrow my posse and I will go capture that knave Shi Bao."

"But he's quite formidable; how can you get close to him?" Song Jiang asked.

"I don't buy it," Li Kui scoffed. "If I can't capture him tomorrow, then I won't come back to see you."

"Just be careful. Don't underestimate him," Song Jiang cautioned.

When he returned to his own tent that night, Li Kui had big bowls of wine and big platters of meat laid out, and then he invited the members of his posse: Bao Xu the God of Death and the shield-bearers Xiang Chong and Li Gun. He told them, "We have always been a team. Today I boasted in front of Brother Song that I will capture that Shi Bao tomorrow. So you three must not let up."

Bao Xu said, "Brother Song keeps sending cavalry in. Let's swear on it tonight: Tomorrow we will give it all we've got and capture that knave Shi Bao, so that the four of us will look good."

So they ate and drank deep into the night. The next morning, they grabbed their weapons and asked Song Jiang to watch them do their thing. But Song Jiang saw that they were all still half-drunk and tried to dissuade them.

"Brother, stop underestimating us!" Li Kui scoffed.

"I just pray that you will live up to your boast," Song Jiang said.

To see if Li Kui and his posse can live up to their boasts, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, Song Jiang gets a little supernatural assistance. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!