

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 128.

Last time, Song Jiang was beating his head against the impenetrable defenses of Hangzhou Prefecture and losing chieftains left and right. So Li Kui the Black Whirlwind boasted that he and his posse could succeed where everyone else had failed. They sat up half the night drinking, and then insisted on going out to capture the rebel commander Shi (2) Bao (3) the next morning while they were still half-inebriated.

Against his better judgment, Song Jiang let them go, along with four cavalry chieftains as support. They went to the north gate, waved their banners, beat their drums, and demanded the rebels come out to fight. Li Kui gripped his twin axes and stood in front of the cavalry. Next to him stood Bao Xu the God of Death, holding his saber and glowering, ready to kill. Beside them were the two shield-bearers, Xiang Chong and Li Gun, each hoisting a shield with 24 flying daggers and gripping a steel javelin.

Soon, drums and gongs echoed from inside the city, and out rode the rebel commander Shi Bao, riding a yellow horse and hoisting his Wind Splitting Saber and flanked by two generals.

As soon as these three rode out of the city, Li Kui let out a mighty roar and charged forward with no fear. In the blink of an eye, he and his posse had dashed to right in front of their foes. Before Shi Bao could take a swing at them, Li Kui had already sliced off his horse's legs. But unlike other foes who had met their end in that situation, Shi Bao quickly leaped off his falling horse and ran and hid within his own lines. Bao Xu, meanwhile, cut down one of the two rebel generals with one swing of his saber, and the two shield-bearers let fly their daggers.

Buoyed by this display, Song Jiang directed his forces to charge. But when they got to the foot of the city, they were met by a fierce bombardment of logs and boulders. Fearing more losses, Song Jiang quickly ordered his troops to fall back. But Bao Xu had already charged into the city. Unbeknownst to him, though, the rebel commander Shi Bao was hiding right behind the gate. As soon as Bao Xu set foot inside the gate, Shi Bao cut him in half.

When the Song forces returned to camp, Song Jiang was once again brooding. Even Li Kui broke down in tears at the loss of Bao Xu, and Wu Yong said, "That wasn't a good idea either. Even though we killed one of their generals, it also cost Li Kui his right-hand man."

Just then, the hunter brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao arrived with news. They told Song Jiang that they were conducting recon at a village a few miles outside the south gate when they came across dozens of ships moored by the river bank. They went to have a look and asked around. Turns out those were grain ships commanded by an administrator from a nearby rebel-held county. Xie Zhen and Xie Bao were going to kill him, but the administrator wept and begged them for mercy, saying, "We used to be citizens of the Song, but Fang La is crushing us with levies, and if anyone refuses to pay, his entire family would be killed. We were hoping that we would see peace again now that the heavenly troops have come to pacify the rebels, but who knew we would run into even more calamity?!"

The Xie brothers were moved by this guy's sincerity and decided to spare his life. He then told them that Fang (1) Tianding (1,4), the overseer of Hangzhou and the eldest son of the rebel emperor Fang La, had issued a decree that all the surrounding villages had to clean out their grain reserves and hand over a total of 50,000 bushels of white rice. This guy was put in charge of the convoy and was on his way to Hangzhou to deliver the first shipment, about 5,000 bushels. But he did not dare to go any closer because of the current fighting, so he was laying low at that village for the time being.

Wu Yong was delighted by this intel. "This is a heaven-sent opportunity," he said. "We will succeed thanks to those grain ships."

The next day, the administrator and his fleet of grain ships approached one of the water gates and asked the guards to open up. The guards asked for their identity and then reported this to Fang Tianding. He sent one of his generals out to inspect the ships. He took a look and reported back that everything

seemed to be on the level. The only people on those ships were the rowers and their wives. Just to be safe, Fang Tianding sent out six generals at the head of 10,000 men to keep watch over the northeast corner, just in case Song Jiang's forces tried anything. It didn't take long for the administrator and his rowers to transport their grain into the city, and then the rebel generals brought their forces back inside. Just in time, too, because they could see Song Jiang's forces coming in the distance. The Song army arrived after the grain had all been delivered, and they now surrounded the city, setting up their lines about a mile off.

Around 9 p.m. that night, a string of cannon shots suddenly rang out from a hilltop inside the city, and soon, fires broke out all over. Fang Tianding was shocked when he got the news, and since he didn't know how big an enemy force had penetrated the city, he hurriedly donned his armor and got on his horse. By then, the guards at the gates had already fled for their lives, and Song Jiang's forces were in the process of breaching the gates.

So, as you may have guessed, the rowers on the grain ships were actually chieftains, including the three female chieftains who posed as rowers' wives. Among them was Ling Zhen the Sky-Quaking Thunder, and he was the one who set off the cannon blasts in the middle of the night, while the others set the city on fire.

While Song Jiang's land forces were storming into the city, the navy on the west side, commanded by Li Jun the River Dragon, was also advancing. They seized the harbor along the lake and the ships docked there, and then rowed across the lake to the city, where they then went on land and seized the various water gates.

As chaotic fighting engulfed the city, only the south gate was not under siege, so all the rebel forces were fleeing through that gate. Fang Tianding, the city's overseer, had only a few foot soldiers with him as he fled out through the south gate and ran like a dog that lost its home and a fish that slipped through the nets.

As he passed a place called Five Clouds Hill, he suddenly saw a man climb out of the river, naked and carrying a knife in his mouth. Fang Tianding didn't like the look of this guy as he approached, so he lashed his horse to make it go faster. But strangely, the horse refused to budge, as if someone had grabbed hold of its reins. Momentarily, the man from the river ran over to the horse, pulled Fang Tianding off his saddle, and with one swing of the knife, sliced off his head. This man then hopped on the horse, holding the head in one hand and the knife in the other, and rode back toward Hangzhou.

On the way, he came across the chieftains Lin Chong the Panther Head and Huyan Zhuo the Twin Staffs. They recognized him. It was the naval chieftain Zhang Heng the Boat Flame. At the very outset of the siege on Hangzhou, he had been deployed with Ruan Xiaoqi, the youngest Ruan brother, to sail down the river toward the sea to reach a strategic position from which to threaten the city. They had heard nothing from that group. So, what was he doing HERE? Lin Chong and Huyan Zhuo were stunned and called out to him, but he gave no answer and just rode on into the city.

Inside the city, Song Jiang had already occupied the overseer's palace, using it as his headquarters while his officers kept watch. Suddenly, they saw Zhang Heng gallop onto the scene. As everyone looked on in surprise, Zhang Heng rode up to Song Jiang, leaped off the horse, threw the knife and the head of Fang Tianding to the ground, kowtowed twice to Song Jiang, and started weeping.

"Brother Zhang Heng, where did you come from?" Song Jiang asked as he held Zhang Heng in his arms. "And where is Ruan Xiaoqi?"

"I'm not Zhang Heng," said Zhang Heng.

"Then who are you?" Song Jiang asked.

"I am Zhang Shun. I was killed outside these gates by arrows and javelins. My spirit was drifting around these waters, but the dragon king of West Lake took pity and made me a god in his palace. Today, when you sacked the city, my spirit followed Fang Tianding as he fled. When I saw my older brother

Zhang Heng in the river, I possessed his body, came ashore at Five Clouds Hill, killed this rebel, and brought his head to you.”

When he finished speaking, Zhang Heng suddenly collapsed. Song Jiang helped him up and brought him around. As he opened his eyes again, Zhang Heng was stunned to see Song Jiang, the other officers, and all the soldiers standing around.

“Brother, am I ... am I in the underworld?” he asked.

Song Jiang wept and told him, “Just now, your brother Zhang Shun’s spirit possessed your body and killed Fang Tiangding. You are not dead. We are still all living. You must be strong.”

“Wait ... does that mean, my brother is dead?” Zhang Heng asked.

“Zhang Shun tried to sneak into the city through the water gate and start a fire,” Song Jiang told him. “But he was discovered outside the gate and killed by arrows.”

When Zhang Heng heard that, he cried, “Brother!” and collapsed again. His limbs hung limp, and his eyes were tightly shut. Song Jiang and the others rushed to revive him, and he finally came to after a long while. Song Jiang told his men to help Zhang Heng to a room to rest before they would ask him about what happened to his expedition.

Song Jiang now ordered all the chieftains’ contributions be recorded. As morning approached, everyone assembled and reported their deeds. In all, they had killed two rebel generals and captured two others. Only the rebel commander Shi Bao, the Imperial Preceptor Zheng (4) Yuanjue (2,2), and three other generals managed to escape. Song Jiang put out notices to assuage the civilians’ fears, rewarded his troops, and sent the two captured generals to his superiors for execution. As for the grain-delivery guy who helped them get into the city, he was recommended to be a county magistrate.

As all the officers were catching their breath, word came that the youngest Ruan brother, Ruan Xiaoqi, had just climbed ashore from the river and was coming into the city. Song Jiang summoned him and asked what happened with his expedition down the river.

Ruan Xiaoqi said, "I went with Zhang Heng, Hou Jian the Long-Armed Ape, Duan Jingzhu the Golden-Haired Hound, and some sailors. We found some ships along the coast and set sail. We were hoping to steer the ships inland up the Qiantang (2,2) River, but the winds and tides drove us out to sea. When we tried to get back, we ran into a gale that capsized our ship, and everyone fell into the sea. Hou Jian and Duan Jingzhu didn't know how to swim and they drowned. All the other sailors just scattered and fled for their lives. I alone swam back and was swept by the tides to a hill. There, I saw Zhang Heng in the river off Five Clouds Hill. I waited for him to come ashore, but then he disappeared again. Last night, I saw the city erupt into flames and heard the cannon shots. I figured you were fighting in the city, so I came ashore. Has Zhang Heng arrived?"

Song Jiang recounted what happened with Zhang Heng, and then told Ruan Xiaoqi to go see his two brothers and resume his duties as a naval chieftain. He then ordered the navy to go collect all the ships from the river and prepare to advance on the next target.

Still thinking of Zhang Shun, Song Jiang now went to the gate where he was killed and erected a temple on the bank of West Lake in his honor and personally offered sacrifices to Zhang Shun. But Song Jiang wasn't done. Thinking of all the chieftains that he had lost since the campaign began, Song Jiang fell into a deep melancholy. He went to the local monastery and held a seven-night service to mourn the lost souls and erect altar tablets in their memory.

After the service, Song Jiang ordered that all the imperial regalia in the overseer's palace be destroyed, since they were symbols of treason. All the gold, silver, and other valuables were distributed to the soldiers. The civilians of the city, meanwhile, feasted in celebration as they rejoiced in the ... umm ... restoration of peace.

While the city celebrated, Song Jiang and Wu Yong began planning the attack on their next target, Muzhou (4,1) Prefecture. It was now the end of the fourth month of the year, and while they were planning, they got a visit from a deputy district commander and an envoy from the emperor. Song Jiang and his officers welcomed the visitors into the city, and the envoy read the imperial edict, which said:

“To vanguard general Song Jiang and company: You all have rendered great service time and again in the expedition to pacify Fang La. We are therefore bestowing 35 bottles of imperial wine and 35 sets of silk clothing to your senior generals. For your junior generals, we bestow bolts of satin.”

When Song Jiang heard the edict and saw the 35 bottles of wine and 35 sets of silk clothing, he couldn't help but tear up. The imperial court did not know. It did not know about the heavy casualties his band of brothers had suffered. It did not know about all the chieftains, senior or junior, who had been lost since the campaign began. It only knew that Gongsun Sheng the Daoist priest had left before the campaign, and it sent rewards for 35 senior generals, even though there were now no longer 35 senior generals, and many fewer junior generals, too. When the envoy asked why he was crying, Song Jiang informed him about the losses, and the envoy promised to tell the emperor when he got back to the capital.

Song Jiang then held a banquet to welcome the envoy and the deputy district commander. All the officers sat down according to rank, received their imperial wine and expressed their gratitude to the emperor. As for the deceased officers, their wine and clothes were kept. The next day, Song Jiang took a bottle of imperial wine and a set of silk clothing to Zhang Shun's temple and presented them to his spirit, putting the silk clothing on the clay figure in his likeness. The rest of the imperial gifts for the deceased were then cremated.

The envoy left after a few days, and soon, a dozen or so days had passed, and word came from Military Governor Zhang, telling Song Jiang it was time to get back to the campaign. Next up were two

targets: Muzhou (4,1) Prefecture and Shezhou (4,1) Prefecture. From Hangzhou, they could go along the river and reach Muzhou, but they would have to take mountainous back roads to reach Shezhou. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi decided to draw lots to see who will attack which city. Song Jiang ended up drawing Muzhou, while Lu Junyi got Shezhou.

“Fang La’s rebel lair is in the caverns of Clear Stream County in Shezhou,” Song Jiang told Lu Junyi. “So once you have captured the prefectural seat, garrison your troops there, send me an urgent message, and we will arrange a date to attack the rebel lair together.”

They then divided up their forces and officers. Song Jiang would lead 36 chieftains to attack Muzhou Prefecture by way of Black Dragon Ridge. Lu Junyi would lead 29 chieftains and make for Shezhou Prefecture. This, however, did not include eight chieftains. You see, a plague was ravaging Hangzhou at the time, and six chieftains had fallen ill. These were Zhang Heng the Boat Flame, Mu Hong the Unrestrained, Kong Ming the Hairy Star, Zhu Gui the Dryland Crocodile, Yang Lin the Multicolored Leopard, and Bai Sheng the Daylight Rat. So Song Jiang had to leave them behind to recuperate, and he left Mu Chun the Little Restrained and Zhu Fu (4) the Smiling Tiger to look after them.

While Song Jiang and company prepared to continue their campaign, let’s jump on over to the base of their enemy, the rebel emperor Fang La. One day, Fang La held court in his palace in the Bangyuan (1,2) Caverns in Clear Stream County. His left prime minister stepped forth and said, “The Middle Kingdom is the land of Confucius. Now, I have met a talented man from there named Ke (1) Yin (3). He is skilled in both military and civil matters, intelligent and brave, well-versed in the ways of heaven and earth, all the religions and schools of philosophy. He was drawn here by the emanations of an imperial emergence and is waiting outside the palace for your summon.”



Fang La immediately summoned this rare gem of a man, and that Ke (1) Yin (3) entered, kowtowed, hailed Fang La as emperor, and then approached as instructed. Fang La took a look at him and was quite impressed by his uncommon appearance, which bore the air of someone from an imperial lineage.

“Sir, you said you were drawn here by the emanations of an imperial emergence. Where are those coming from?” Fang La asked.

Ke Yin replied, “Your servant came from the Middle Kingdom. My parents have both passed away, so I have dedicated myself to my studies and carrying on the teachings of my masters. Recently, I have been observing the night sky and saw the emperor star shining brightly over this region. So I made the long journey here to the Southlands. Then, I saw a five-colored imperial glow rising from Shezhou Prefecture. Now that I have gazed upon your majesty’s royal visage. You possess the prowess of dragons and phoenixes and your face resembles the sun. Truly, you are the manifestation of that glow. It is my greatest fortune to meet you.”

At that Ke Yin kowtowed again. Fang La now said to him, “Even though I control the Southeast, recently Song Jiang has been invading my territory and is closing in on my location. What should I do?”

Ke Yin replied, “I have heard the ancients said, ‘Easily obtained, easily lost; arduously gained, strongly held.’ Since your majesty launched your enterprise, you have gained many prefectures without trouble. Even though you are currently being invaded by Song Jiang at a number of places, the tide will soon turn in your favor. Your empire will not be limited to just the Southlands. One day the Middle Kingdom will also belong to you, and then you will enjoy boundless happiness. Even the great Han and Tang Dynasties would not be your equal.”

Fang La was delighted by that prognostication, so he granted Ke Yin a seat and treated him to a banquet. He also appointed Ke Yin as the royal secretary. From that day forth, Ke Yin was always by Fang La’s side, telling him exactly what he wanted to hear. Ke Yin also had a way with other people, and within half a month, everyone in the inner and outer circles of the palace were on good terms with him.

Fang La was also impressed by how fair-minded Ke Yin seemed to be in dealing with matters, so he asked the left prime minister to play matchmaker and offered his own daughter's hand in marriage to Ke Yin. So now, this Ke Yin had risen from anonymous scholar to the Prince Consort. He also had with him a servant who followed him here from the Middle Kingdom named Yun (2) Bi (4), and everyone called him Attendant Yun (2).

Fang La now entrusted Ke Yin with all the ins and outs of the palace and often discussed key military matters with him. Ke Yin would often tell Fang La, "Your aura is the real thing, but it's currently being threatened by some star spirits. The next half year will be chaotic, but once Song Jiang has run out of generals, the star spirits will retreat, and you will be able to restore your empire and sweep across the Middle Kingdom."

"But many of my top officers have been killed by Song Jiang," Fang La said.

"Judging from the patterns of the night sky, even though your majesty has dozens of general stars, none are strong and they will all soon perish," Ke Yin said. "But 28 stars will soon come to replace them and help you rekindle your enterprise. Also, a number of Song Jiang's men will also submit to you. They are also star spirits, and they will all be instrumental in the founding of your dynasty."

Fang La was delighted by those predictions, and so he kept on keeping on.

Meanwhile, Song Jiang led his army and navy out of Hangzhou and set off for Fuyang (4,2) County, where the remnants of the rebel forces that had cleared out of Hangzhou were holed up, led by the imperial preceptor Zheng (4) Yuanjue (2,2), the commander Shi Bao, and three other generals. They sent urgent requests for help, and Fang La's right prime minister sent two stout generals to lead 10,000 men to reinforce them. The rebels combined their forces and staked out a position on a hilltop.

When Shi Bao saw Song Jiang's forces approaching, he left the hilltop to fight them. Guan Sheng the Great Saber was just about to go meet him, but Lü Fang, one of the halberd twins, shouted, "Brother, wait. Watch me fight him for a bit first."

So Lü Fang traded blows with Shi Bao for 50 bouts, but then Lü Fang started to falter. Seeing this, his fellow halberd twin Guo Sheng rode out to help. Shi Bao, however, showed no sign of fear as he took them both on. In the thick of this fight, Shi Bao suddenly heard gongs ringing on his side, telling him to fall back. As it turns out, the imperial preceptor Zheng Yuanjue saw Song Jiang's navy coming ashore with the wind, so he was afraid they would launch a pincer attack, so he signaled for a retreat.

Well, Shi Bao was currently tangling with two dogged warriors who refused to let him go. Then, Zhu Tong the Lord of the Beautiful Beard also joined the fray. The three chieftains finally proved to be too much for Shi Bao, and he deflected their weapons and fled. Song Jiang pointed with his whip, and his forces charged over the hill. Shi Bao's army could not hold their ground as they retreated, so they just kept falling back all the way to their base at Tonglu (2,2) County, and Song Jiang kept up the pursuit through the night.

After they passed White Hornet Ridge, Song Jiang pitched camp and sent 10 chieftains at the head of 2,000 men to raid the rebel base while instructing the seven naval chieftains to advance on the river.

The raid on the rebel base went smashingly. Around midnight, the rebel commander Shi Bao and the imperial preceptor Zheng Yuanjue were discussing military affairs when suddenly, a cannon shot pierced the night. As they rushed to their horses, the rebels saw torches coming from three sides, and they just fled behind Shi Bao's lead. The three Song raiding parties converged on the rebels and captured one of the rebel generals while setting the base on fire.

Upon receiving word of the successful raid, Song Jiang moved his troops up to the rebel base and garrisoned them there. He rewarded the chieftains and sent the captured rebel general to his superiors for execution.

The next day, Song Jiang's forces advanced to the foot of Black Dragon Ridge. Muzhou Prefecture lay on the other side of the ridge, but crossing the ridge was not going to be an easy task. The rebels had fled up the mountain and were garrisoned behind their pass. This Black Dragon Pass bordered the Yangzi River and was protected by steep ridges and raging torrents. To see how Song Jiang will try to cross the ridge, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, the rebel forces appeal directly to their emperor for help. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!