

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 132.

Last time, Song Jiang and company, at the cost of much blood, were tightening the noose around the neck of the rebel emperor Fang La. While Fang La was out leading a last stand against Song Jiang, the Song naval chieftains who had pretended to defect to him started a fire in his palace, and soon, Song forces were pouring into the palace from every direction. Before long, the palace had fallen, but amid the chaos, Fang La, protected by his nephew Fang Jie (2), managed to escape with some forces and fled to Bangyuan (1,2) Cavern, where his rebellion had first begun.

Song Jiang now brought his entire army into Clear Stream County. His officers stormed the palace, confiscated all the bootleg imperial regalia and swag, cleaned out the storehouses, and then set the place on fire, reducing it to ashes.

Everyone then gathered to report their merits and receive their rewards. But there were also some heavy casualties on their side as well. Two chieftains were killed by the throwing knives of the rebel general Du (4) Wei (1). These were Sun Erniang the Female Yaksha and Yu (4) Baosi (3,4) the God of the Dangerous Road. Two others were trampled by enemy cavalry. These were Zou Yuan the Forest Emerging Dragon, one of the outlaws who had break the hunter brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao out of jail, and Du Qian the Skyscraper, one of Liangshan's original chieftains. Three more chieftains suffered severe injuries and died in camp. These were Li (3) Li (4) the Life-Taking Judge, who ran a black tavern and was part of the gang that ran with Li Jun the River Dragon; Tang (1) Long (2) the Gold Coin Spotted Leopard, Liangshan's former resident blacksmith; and Cai (4) Fu (2) the Iron Arm, one of the jailers who kept Lu Junyi alive while he was in prison. And that wasn't the end of it. The naval chieftain Ruan Xiaowu (2,3), the middle Ruan brother, was killed in the fighting by the rebels' left prime minister.

On the flip side, the Song forces captured 92 rebel officials, who were all sent to Military Governor Zhang for execution. Two conspicuous names missing among them were the left prime minister and the rebel general Du Wei, the guy whose throwing knives had killed three chieftains that day. But word soon

came from civilians of their fates. The left prime minister had hung himself in a pine forest after seeing the Song forces sack Clear Stream County. Du Wei, meanwhile, was hiding in the home of his mistress, but her handler turned him in.

Song Jiang rewarded the handler, and then ordered his men to go chop off the head of the left prime minister. He then told Cai Qing (4), the younger brother of the slain chieftain Cai Fu (2), to cut out Du Wei's heart and sacrifice it to all the chieftains who were killed in the battle for Clear Stream County, while Song Jiang personally offered incense and conducted a memorial service.

The next day, Song Jiang and Lu Junyi led their army straight to Bangyuan (1,2) Cavern and surrounded it. Fang La, by this time, had set up his forces in defense of the mouth of the cavern and refused to come out to fight. Song Jiang and company, meanwhile, had no way to breach the cavern either, so they were in a bit of a stalemate for the time being.

Inside the cavern, Fang La was on pins and needles. After being trapped for a few days, someone among his entourage suddenly stepped forth, kowtowed, and said, "My lord, I may be untalented, but I have no way to repay your immense kindness. I am willing to put all that I have learned and all my fighting skills to use. Please give me an army, and I will repel the Song forces and rekindle our state. Will you consent to it?"

Fang La looked and saw that this was Ke (1) Yin (3), the scholar from the Middle Kingdom who had recently so impressed him that he made the guy his son-in-law.

"It is a heaven-sent to have Prince Consort Ke volunteer to go fight those bandits," Fang La said. "I hope your amazing talents will revive our enterprise."

So Ke Yin immediately organized the remaining rebel forces and prepared to head out to fight. Fang La gave him his own suit of golden armor and a fine warhorse. Ke Yin then set out with Fang La's nephew

Fang Jie, along with 10,000 troops and 20-some officers. They went outside the cavern and lined up for battle.

On the other side, Song Jiang had been fretting this whole time, seeing how he had lost two-thirds of his chieftains and Fang La still had not been captured. But just then, he got word that the enemy had come out to fight. So he lined up his forces and saw the rebel prince consort Ke Yin galloping out to challenge for battle.

Song Jiang took a look at Ke Yin, and then ordered Hua Rong the Archer to go face him. Hua Rong rode out with spear in hand and shouted, "Who are you that you dare to oppose our divine troops? When I catch you, I will cut you to p pieces and chop you into mud. Surrender now, and I will spare your life."

"I am Ke Yin from Shandong Province," Prince Consort Ke replied. "Who doe not know my name? You all are just a gang of brutes and two-bit bandits from Liangshan. You've just been taking advantage of us because we didn't know your dirty tricks. I wish nothing more than to kill you all and to reclaim our cities!"

The two now rode at each other and traded blows, trading verbal and literal jabs. But after just three bouts, Hua Rong rode away in defeat.

"I won't chase you!" Ke Yin shouted. "Send someone good to fight me."

Once Hua Rong reported back, Song Jiang sent out Guan Sheng the Great Saber, who rode out and roared, "You petty officer from Shandong! Do you dare to fight me?!"

Ke Yin wielded his spear and took on Guan Sheng, and neither showed any sign of fear. After a few bouts, however, Guan Sheng also turned and rode back to his lines in defeat. Ke Yin did not chase him and instead asked if anyone else dared to fight. Song Jiang now sent out Zhu Tong the Lord of the Beautiful Beard. They fought for about seven bouts before Ke Yin took a thrust with his spear that forced

Zhu Tong to abandon his horse and flee back to his own lines on foot. Ke Yin now ordered his troops to charge, and Song Jiang quickly ordered a retreat, falling back about three miles. Ke Yin then returned to the cave in victory.

When Fang La heard that his son-in-law had defeated three of the enemy's top remaining generals, he was ecstatic. He threw a feast to celebrate the victory, personally toasting Ke Yin, saying, "I never expected that you would be so skilled in civil and military matters! I thought you were just a scholar. If I had known you were such a hero, I would not have lost so many cities. I hope you will use all your skills to exterminate the enemy and rekindle our enterprise. Then you and I can enjoy peace and prosperity together for all eternity!"

"My lord, please have no worries," Ke Yin said. "I am your servant, so I should dedicate all I have to our kingdom. Tomorrow, please go to the top of the hill to watch me fight the enemy. I promise to cut down Song Jiang and his gang."

Fang La was delighted and they feasted deep into the night. The next morning, Fang La ordered his men to slaughter oxen and horses to feed the army. Ke Yin then set out again, accompanied by his personal servant, Attendant Yun (2), while Fang La and his attendants and top officials went to the top of the hill above the cavern to observe the battle.

Once again, the two sides lined up. This time, Fang La's nephew Fang Jie, who was a fierce warrior in his own right, told Ke Yin, "Please hold on and watch me cut down an enemy general. And then you can attack with the army."

So Fang Jie rode out, and he was met by Guan Sheng the Great Saber. The two dueled for a dozen or so bouts without a winner. So Song Jiang sent Hua Rong the Archer to go join the fight. Fang Jie showed no fear against two opponents, but he was soon put on the defensive. Song Jiang now sent in Zhu Tong the Lord of the Beautiful Beard and Li Ying (4) the Striking Hawk.

Seeing that it was going to be four against one, Fang Jie now turned and rode back toward his lines. He saw Ke Yin waving in his direction from under the main banner. He could also hear the four enemy generals giving chase from behind. So Fang Jie rode toward Ke Yin for help.

But when he approached Ke Yin, Fang Jie suddenly saw Ke Yin raise his spear and stab at him. Fang Jie was shocked and quickly hopped off his horse to dodge the thrust. But it was too late. Ke Yin ran him through with the spear, while Ke Yin's servant Attendant Yun ran up and finished him off with a knife.

Ke Yin now pulled off his mustache-and-glasses disguise and shouted, "I am NOT Ke Yin! I am Chai Jin!"

The rebel soldiers looked at each other and were like, "Who?"

"You know, Chai Jin, the Little Whirlwind?"

"Huh?"

"[Sigh] A general under Song Jiang?"

"Oh crap! A mole!" The rebel officers and soldiers were stunned and scrambled for their lives.

So yeah, when Chai Jin and Yan Qing the Prodigy went off on their spy mission a few episodes back, they went and introduced themselves to Fang La's left prime minister under the assumed identities of a scholar and his servant, and Chai Jin ended up becoming Fang La's son-in-law. And it all led up to this moment. The previous day, everyone on Song Jiang's side recognized Chai Jin as soon as he rode out to the front lines. Then, when he was fighting with Hua Rong, Chai Jin whispered to Hua Rong that Song Jiang should pretend to lose that day and then prepare for the surprise reveal the next day. And now, that surprise reveal had taken the last bit of fight from the rebels.

Chai Jin now shouted aloud, "Whoever captures Fang La will become a high official and ride a fine horse! Whoever surrenders can save their own lives! Anyone who resists will see their entire family executed!" He then led the four chieftains on the battlefield and charged into the cave.

All this time, Fang La was watching this unfold with horror from the top of the hill. Seeing his army disintegrate, he kicked over his own chair and ran deep into the hills. By the time Song Jiang's army fought their way into the cavern, Fang La was long gone.

But there was plenty of mop-up duty, as they captured numerous rebel officials. Yan Qing the Prodigy had some trusted men carry out a couple loads of valuables from the rebel storehouses and then set the place on fire. Meanwhile, Chai Jin fought his way back into his own quarters, where he found that his wife, aka Fang La's daughter, had hung herself after learning that she had been unwittingly married to a spy who was now spearheading the destruction of the last remnants of her family and kingdom. So Chai Jin set that part of the cave on fire as well, but he allowed all their servants to escape.

Elsewhere in the cave, the Song forces were not so forgiving. As they entered, they slaughtered the palace maids, servants, Fang La's relatives, and pretty much anyone they came across. They also raided the fineries of Fang La's quarters.

One of the chieftains, Ruan Xiaoqi, the last surviving Ruan brother, fought his way into Fang La's private quarters and found a chest containing Fang La's bootleg imperial regalia. Seeing the bejeweled outfit, Ruan Xiaoqi decided, hey, why don't I put this on, just for laughs. So he threw the dragon robe over himself, put on the jade belt and the imperial headdress. Then he hopped on his horse, and rode outside.

All the Song soldiers and officers outside saw someone in imperial regalia ride out, and thought it was Fang La. So they rushed toward him. But then they realized it was Ruan Xiaoqi, and everyone indeed had a good laugh, which spurred on Ruan Xiaoqi even more, and he started riding everywhere to show everyone.

But then, he heard a couple people curse, "Are you trying to emulate Fang La, all dressed up like this!"

He turned and saw that it was two of the top generals who came to join the campaign with Tong Guan, the Chancellor of Military Affairs and long-time thorn in the side of the Liangshan heroes. Unlike Ruan Xiaoqi's fellow chieftains, those two guys were not amused at all by the sight of him parading around in the imperial regalia of a rebel who declared himself emperor. And so they let him hear it.

Ruan Xiaoqi, in turn, also got angry. He pointed at the two generals and cursed, "You two pricks! If not for my brother Song Jiang, you would have lost your heads to Fang La long ago!"

And things only escalated from there, and pretty soon, Ruan Xiaoqi was coming at them with a spear. Word of this altercation quickly got to Song Jiang, who rushed over, lectured Ruan Xiaoqi, and told him to take that off right now. Song Jiang then apologized to the two generals, who walked away seething.

That little kerfuffle notwithstanding, the day was a total success for the Song forces. The cavern was now littered with dead bodies of their enemies, and rivers of blood flowed. A literal head count showed that they had slaughtered some 20,000 rebel troops and captured numerous others. And the rebels' last palace was now reduced to ashes.

And yet, the one man they really wanted to get their hands on had fled. So Song Jiang now pitched camp outside the cavern, and posted notices all around, telling the locals that whoever delivered Fang La would become a high official, and whoever provided information on him would be rewarded as well.

Speaking of Fang La, the rebel emperor managed to slip through the Song forces' fingers, but he was fleeing alone, like a stray dog and a fish that slipped through the nets. He ditched his imperial regalia, put on some hemp sandals, and fled on foot deep into the mountains. In one night, he crossed over five peaks.

Eventually, he came upon a hollow, and in the hollow, he saw a thatched monastery. By now Fang La was starving, so he went toward the monastery to see if he could get some food. As he approached, a man suddenly emerged from behind a pine tree, smacked Fang La to the ground with one swing of his

weapon, and promptly tied him up. This man then went into the monastery and got some food for himself, and then he dragged Fang La with him and headed out of the mountain.

On the way, they ran into some of the Song soldiers searching the mountain, and they were surprised and ecstatic to see them, and promptly escorted them back to camp. As soon as Song Jiang laid eyes on them, he rejoiced. The captor of Fang La was none other than Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk.

So, in case you forgot, Lu Zhishen had vanished into the mountains a couple episodes back when he was chasing the enemy general Xiahou (4,2) Cheng (2) back during the intense fighting on Black Dragon Ridge. No one knew where he went, but now, all of a sudden he popped up in the most convenient of places. So, what gives?

“I chased Xiahou Cheng deep into the mountains and ended up killing him,” Lu Zhishen told Song Jiang. “But then I kept chasing and killing rebel soldiers until I got lost in the mountain. I wandered around the wilderness, but ran into an old monk, who led me to a thatched monastery and told me, ‘There is firewood, rice, and vegetables here. Just stay here and wait. When you see a big man approach from the woods, catch him.’ Last night I saw a fire break out on the front side of the mountain, so I kept watch all night, but I had no idea which path led where. And then this morning, I saw this rebel making his way over, so I knocked him down with my Buddhist staff and tied him up. Who knew it would turn out to be Fang La?!”

“And where is that old monk now?” Song Jiang asked.

“After he brought me to the thatched monastery, I don’t know where he went,” Lu Zhishen answered.

“That monk must be a saint, intervening to enable us to secure such a huge accomplishment!” Song Jiang said. “When we get back to the capital and inform the court of what you have done, you will receive a high rank, and you can return to secular life, start a family in the capital, bring honor to your ancestors, and repay your parents for their kindness in raising you.”



But Lu Zhishen said, “I have lost faith in the mundane world. I don’t want to be an official. I just want a quiet place to live out the rest of my life in peace.”

“Well, even if you don’t want to return to secular life, you can still return to the capital and be the abbot of a big monastery. That would be very honorable, too, and would also repay your parents.”

But Lu Zhishen now shook his head and shouted, “I don’t want that, either! What’s the point of having all those things? I just want to leave an intact corpse. That’d be better than everything else!”

Those words made Song Jiang fall silent, and now both he and Lu Zhishen became unhappy. But there was still plenty of business to attend to. Song Jiang now organized his troops. He put Fang La in a prison cart to be sent to the capital. He then led his army out of Clear Stream County and headed back to Muzhou (4,1) Prefecture.

By now, all the higher-ups had gathered at Muzhou, including Military Governor Zhang, District Commander Liu, and Tong Guan, the chancellor of military affairs. When they got word that Song Jiang had captured Fang La and brought him back to the prefectural seat, they all went to congratulate him.

Once they exchanged courtesies, Military Governor Zhang said to Song Jiang, “I know you have labored much and lost many brothers. But now you have achieved complete success. This is a great thing.”

Song Jiang wept and bowed, saying, “Back when the 108 of us defeated the Liao kingdom, we did not lose a single brother and we all returned to the capital. Who knew that we would first lose Gongsun Sheng, and then a few brothers were kept in the capital by the court. And since we crossed the river and came south, we have lost 70 percent of our brothers. Even though I am still alive, how can I go back to face the elders of Shandong Province and my relatives in my home village?”

“Don’t say that, general,” Military Governor Zhang consoled him. “As the old saying goes, ‘Poverty or wealth, high rank or low, short life or long — all are predestined.’ Those fortunate enough to live must

send off the unfortunates who have died. You have no reason to be ashamed of your losses. You are successful and famous now. And when the court hears of your service, you will no doubt receive a high rank. Then you will bring honor to your house and return home in glory and be the envy of all! Don't worry about the other stuff; just focus on leading your army back to the capital."

Song Jiang thanked all his superiors and then went to tend to his own officers. Meanwhile, Military Governor Zhang ordered that every captured rebel official was to be beheaded in the city's public square. Fang La alone would be taken to the capital. In the meantime, there were a few other counties that the Song army had not yet captured, but when their rebel officials heard that Fang La had been captured, half of them fled, while the other half came and surrendered. Military Governor Zhang accepted their surrender and allowed them to return to civilian life as law-abiding citizens.

He then posted notices everywhere to assure the civilians that all was well. Former rebels who had not harmed anyone and who voluntarily surrendered were allowed to return to civilian life, and their land and property were returned. He also appointed officials and deployed armies to oversee the recaptured territories. So throughout the region, the civilians lived on in peace and resumed their lives as before.

Military Governor Zhang then threw a feast in the city to celebrate the peace, congratulate the officers, and reward the troops. He then ordered Song Jiang to lead his army and set out back toward the capital.

But even amid this jubilant celebration, Song Jiang got more reasons for melancholy. Six chieftains had previously fallen ill and had to stay behind in Hangzhou Prefecture, and Song Jiang also left two others to watch over them. Well, out of those eight, six of them eventually died of the plague. These were: Zhang Heng the Boat Flame, Mu Hong the Unrestrained, Kong Ming the Hairy Star, Zhu Gui the Dryland

Crocodile, Zhu Fu the Smiling Tiger, and Bai Sheng the Daylight Rat. The only two to join back up with the army were Yang Lin the Multi-colored Leopard and Mu Chun the Little Restrained.

This blow added to Song Jiang's grief as he kept thinking about all the chieftains who had died on the campaign. Now that peace had been won with their blood, he decided to find a quiet spot in a temple in the city and held a memorial service. He hung up a long banner, had 360 scriptures read, and prayers offered so that the deceased might ascend from the underworld into heaven.

The next day, he slaughtered oxen and horses and prepared a sacrifice. He then went with his officers to the temple of the Black Dragon Spirit and offered thanks for the dragon spirit protecting him from the rebels' black magic during the fighting on Black Dragon Ridge. Upon returning to camp, he collected the bodies of all the chieftains who had died and gave them proper burials.

All this done, he now packed up his forces and followed Military Governor Zhang back to Hangzhou Prefecture to await an imperial edict to summon them back to the capital. He also sent along the records of all his officers' merits. As he watched his forces set out, he saw that only 36 of the 108 chieftains, including himself, were left. Now, if you are expecting a list of who's left, just hold on. That'll come later, because, well, you'll see.

Once back at Hangzhou, Song Jiang and his army camped at Six Harmonies Monastery outside the city. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi went into the city during the day to await orders, while all the other officers rested at the monastery.

While there, Lu Zhishen and Wu Song saw how gorgeous the scenery outside the city was, and they fell in love with the place. Then one night, the moon was clear, the breeze cool, and the water and sky an azure blue. Lu Zhishen and Wu Song were sleeping in one of the monk's quarters when suddenly, they heard a thunderous sound coming from the river.

This was the sound of incoming tides, but Lu Zhishen was from an arid part of the north and never heard the sound of river tides. He thought it was the sound of war drums, signaling more trouble from rebels. So he leaped to his feet, grabbed his Buddhist staff, and charged out with a roar.

All the resident monks were taken aback, and then they asked him what he was doing.

“I heard war drums, so I am going out to fight!” he said.

All the monks laughed and told him, “Master, you’re mistaken. That’s not war drums. That’s the sound of the Old Faithful Tide on our river.”

“Why do you call it that?”

The monks pushed open a window, pointed at the incoming tides, and told him, “That tide comes twice a day and is always on time. Today is the 15th day of the 8th month, so the tides are coming at midnight exactly as expected. That’s why we call it Old Faithful.”

As he looked out on the tides, Lu Zhishen suddenly clapped his hands and laughed. “My master, Abbot Zhizhen, once gave me four lines of prophecy. The first line was ‘Take Xia when you encounter him,’ which I fulfilled when I captured Xiahou Cheng. The second line was ‘Seize La when you meet.’ And so I caught Fang La. And now, I am fulfilling the last two lines: ‘When you hear the tide, round out the circle. When you see the tide, in silence rest.’ Well, I have heard the tide and I have seen the tide, but what am I supposed to do?”

To find out what he’s supposed to do, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, Song Jiang finally makes it back to the capital. See how many other chieftains make it back with him. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!