

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 133.

Last time, Song Jiang achieved complete victory against the rebel Fang La. The rebels were wiped out, and Fang La was captured by Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk. The army then headed back to Hangzhou Prefecture on the bank of the Qiantang (2,2) River. One night, while camped out at a monastery, Lu Zhishen heard the tides of the river coming in and didn't know what the sound was. When the monks at the monastery explained it and showed him the tides, it reminded him of the prophecy that the abbot at his first monastery had given him. The last two lines of the prophecy said: 'When you hear the tide, round out the circle. When you see the tide, in silence rest.'

Lu Zhishen didn't know what that meant, but the other monks told him, "You are a monk, so how can you not understand? In Buddhist parlance, to 'round out the circle and in silence rest' means to die."

Hearing that, Lu Zhishen laughed and said, "Well, since rounding out the circle means to die, then today I must round out the circle. Please prepare some hot water for me to bathe."

Now, none of the monks in the monastery took him seriously, but they also didn't dare to say no on account of his temper. So they took him seriously and got him some hot water, and Lu Zhishen bathed and changed into monk clothes. He then told some soldiers under his command, "Go ask Brother Song to come see me."

He then asked the monks for brush, ink, and paper, with which he wrote a few lines. Then, he went to the meditation hall, pulled over a seat, sat down in the center of the hall, lit a pot of god incense, and put the paper with his writing on the meditation bench. He then crossed his legs and sat down.

Moments later, Song Jiang and the other chieftains rushed into the hall. They approached Lu Zhishen, but he was already motionless. They picked up the piece of paper he left, and it contained an ode that said:

In life I performed no virtuous deeds, preferring murder and arson.

Suddenly my metal shackles were opened, the jade lock shattered.

Hark! The Old Faithful Tide comes on the Qiantang (2,2) River, and today I know myself at last.

After they read Lu Zhishen's last words, Song Jiang and Lu Junyi could not stop sighing. Many chieftains now came and offered incense and their respects to Lu Zhishen. Even Military Governor Zhang, Chancellor Tong Guan, and other top officials came from the city to offer incense. Song Jiang distributed Lu Zhishen's Buddhist garments, as well as the rewards given to him by the court, to the monks of the monastery, who performed three days and three nights of memorial service. They put Lu Zhishen in a cinnabar red casket and invited the abbot of a nearby large monastery to come officiate at the cremation. Abbots from 10 other monasteries also came to join in the prayers.

Lu Zhishen's body was set on a pyre behind the Six Harmonies Pagoda. The presiding abbot approached with torch in hand, pointed at Lu Zhishen, and intoned these words:

"Lu Zhishen, Lu Zhishen. Grew up an outlaw, with fire in your eyes and murder in your heart. Now you have gone with the tide to where none can find you. Amazing! White jade flakes fill the sky, and the earth shall be covered with yellow gold."

So, from what I understand, the "white jade flakes filling the sky" is a reference to Lu Zhishen heading to the land of bliss, which is a favorable destination for the souls of the dead in Buddhist beliefs. And now, as the fire burned, all the monks prayed. Once the casket was consumed, they gathered Lu Zhishen's remains and interred them in the pagoda courtyard. All his clothing, money, and such were donated to the monastery for communal use.

Now Song Jiang turned to the other Buddhist in his ranks and asked Wu Song the Pilgrim, uhh, you're not ascending anywhere anytime soon, right? Well, Wu Song, who had lost his left arm in battle, said, "I am a cripple now. I don't want to go to the capital. I will donate all my possessions to this monastery for

its communal use, and I will stay here and live the carefree life of a monk. That will be perfect for me. When you submit the list of people who are going to the capital, leave my name off.”

At this point, Song Jiang had no choice but to oblige him, so Wu Song became a monk at the monastery, where he lived until the ripe old age of 80. So, good for him.

As for Song Jiang, he continued going into the city of Hangzhou every day to await orders. Once Military Governor Zhang and his forces left, Song Jiang garrisoned his troops inside the city. Half a month passed and an envoy from the court arrived with an edict, summoning Song Jiang and company back. By then, all his superiors had departed one by one, so Song Jiang and company now prepared to leave as well.

But the hits just kept coming. More names now dropped off the list of chieftains who would be going back to the capital. Yang Xiong the Sick Guansuo got sick for real, and died from a tumor on his spine. Shi Qian the Flea on a Drum got appendicitis and died, which is perhaps the most ridiculous way to go after surviving all the battlefield carnage on this campaign. Then, word came from Dantu (1,2) County that Yang Zhi the Blue-faced Beast, who got sick there earlier on the campaign and had to stay behind, had also died from his illness.

Oh, and then to top it all off, Lin Chong the Panther Head was suddenly stricken by paralysis and showed no sign of recovering, so Song Jiang had to leave him behind at the monastery in Wu Song’s care. And the novel just ends any suspense here and tells us in the next breath that Lin Chong died after about six months. And that just sucks. Poor Lin Chong, who probably deserved the most sympathy out of all the outlaws in this novel, was one of the few who were actually forced into banditry, and really should have received the satisfaction of cutting off the head of his nemesis Gao Qiu. Instead, he just got killed off by some random illness after all that he had done, first for Liangshan and then for the Song court.

Once the army finally got on the road, Lu Junyi got a visit from his ever-faithful confidant, Yan Qing the Prodigy.

“Master, I have followed you ever since my youth and have received more kindness than I can put into words,” Yan Qing said. “Now that we have completed this great mission, I would like to ask you to resign your official position and come with me to live out our lives in quiet anonymity. What do you think?”

Lu Junyi said with surprise, “Ever since Liangshan accepted the court’s amnesty offer, we have labored and suffered much in defeating the Liao in the North and Fang La in the South. We have lost so many brothers, but thankfully the two of us made it, and now we are about to return home in glory. Why are you choosing such a pointless course?”

Yan Qing smiled and said, “Master, you are mistaken. There is a point to my course. I just worry about the course that you are on.”

“But I harbor not the slightest stray ambition,” Lu Junyi said. “So why would the court turn on me?”

“Master, have you not heard about how Han (2) Xin (4) achieved 10 great merits, only to be beheaded in front of the palace? Or how Peng (2) Yue (4) was turned into meat sauce? Or how Bu (4) Ying (1) was forced to choose between strangling himself with a bowstring or drinking poisoned wine? Think about it. It will be too late to run when disaster arrives.”

And by the way, all these names that Yan Qing just dropped were generals who played instrumental roles in the founding of the Han Dynasty some 1,300 years earlier, but then they all ended up dead due to suspicions from the Han court. In fact, their fates are frequently pointed to as examples of how, once a liege had no more use for the men who helped him ascend to the top, those men often ended up dead.

Lu Junyi, though, retorted, “I heard that Han Xin tried to declare himself king and incite a rebellion. Peng Yue refused to pay homage to his emperor. And Bu Ying plotted to steal the throne. That’s why they

were executed. I have not received the high posts that they did, nor have I committed the grave offenses that they did.”

Yan Qing cautioned him once more, “Master, if you don’t listen to me, it will be too late when you have regrets. I was going to take my leave of Brother Song, but he’s all about honor and would refuse to let me go. So I am only taking my leave of you.”

“Where will you go?” Lu Junyi asked.

“Oh I’ll be around.”

Hearing that, Lu Junyi chuckled and said, “Well, in that case, have it your way. Let’s see where you end up.”

So Yan Qing kowtowed to Lu Junyi eight times, and that night, he packed a load of valuables and disappeared. The next morning, soldiers discovered a letter that he had left and brought it to Song Jiang. It said:

“I, brother Yan Qing, offer my deepest respects to the vanguard general: Since you took me in, I have received much kindness. Even my utmost efforts can never repay you. Because of my feeble destiny and weak talents, I am not worthy of official honors. I will voluntarily retire to rustic life and live as a civilian. I was going to say goodbye to you, but I worried that you would not allow me to go on account of honor. So I left in the middle of the night. I leave behind these four lines by way of respectful farewell. Please forgive me.

I gladly relinquish official rank,

For wealth and honors I have no need.

Only the amnesty I retain,

With simple fare my life sustain.

When he saw the letter and the four parting lines from Yan Qing, Song Jiang was very unhappy. But what's done is done, so he just went about collecting the tablets of office from the chieftains who had died and sent them to the capital, so that their appointments could be canceled.

Oh, and by the way, in the TV adaptations of the novel, they love having Yan Qing end up with the courtesan Li Shishi. In one version, they both ran away from their prior lives and disappeared to live happily ever after. But that doesn't happen in the actual novel.

So anyway, Song Jiang's army pressed on. When they arrived at the outskirts of Suzhou Prefecture, however, another chieftain suddenly fell ill. This time, it was Li Jun the River Dragon, who suddenly became bed-ridden. When Song Jiang personally brought a doctor to come see him, Li Jun said, "Brother, don't miss the deadline for the army's return or the court will hold you responsible, especially now that Military Governor Zhang has returned to the capital for so long. If you take pity on me, then leave the two Tong brothers to tend to me. Once I recover, we will come join you in the capital. In the meantime, you and the army should move on."

Song Jiang was reluctant, but he had just received a message from his superiors telling him to pick up the pace, so he was feeling the deadline pressure. So he obliged Li Jun and left the two Tong brothers there to tend to him.

Well, guess what? Li Jun wasn't sick at all. As soon as Song Jiang and the army disappeared over the horizon, he and the Tong brothers left as well. Remember that back in episodes 125 and 126, they had met four local outlaws-turned-fishermen on the nearby Lake Tai (4). Those guys helped them capture Suzhou, but they also warned Li Jun that it was best to give up this life in service of the Song court and go find some peaceful spot somewhere. Li Jun promised to join them as soon as the campaign was over, and now, he and the Tong brothers were making good on that promise.

The three of them sought out the four local outlaws. They spent all their money building a ship, which they then sailed from the lake out to sea, and from there, to foreign lands. In fact, the novel says that Li Jun later became the king of Siam, while the rest of his gang all became foreign officials, which, umm, sure, let's go with that. The point, I think, is that they lived happily ever after.

Meanwhile, Song Jiang's army continued its journey home. On the way, they passed by some of the places where they had waged war during the campaign, and Song Jiang was overcome with grief each time as he reflected on the fact that only about 30 percent of the army that crossed the river remained. Around the last week of the ninth month, they arrived outside the capital. While Military Governor Zhang's army had already entered the city, Song Jiang's forces remained camped outside by Chen Bridge Station, awaiting their summon.

While they waited, Song Jiang asked Pei Xuan the Iron-faced Scribe to write down a list of all the officers who will be entering the capital for the audience with the emperor. In all, only 27 chieftains now remained, including 12 senior chieftains and 15 junior ones. He also produced a list of all those who died on the campaign.

After three days, they received their summon. So that morning, the emperor held court and decreed that Song Jiang and his officers were to enter in their formal dress. As the eastern sky began to lighten, Song Jiang, Lu Junyi, and the rest of the 27 chieftains rode into the city. This was the third time the residents of the capital had seen the Liangshan heroes enter their city in a formal procession. The first time was when they accepted amnesty, and they were all dressed in the green and red brocade outfits that the emperor bestowed upon them. The second time was when they returned after defeating the Liao kingdom, at which point they were dressed in full armor, displaying their martial vigor. This time, they were dressed in formal attire, and there were far, far fewer of them. The sight of this greatly diminished band of brothers made the civilians sigh in lament.

Once they arrived at the palace gate, Song Jiang and company dismounted and entered. They kowtowed eight times at the foot of the vermilion jade stairs, then backed up two steps and kowtowed eight times, and then took one step forward and kowtowed eight more times, kowtowing 24 times in all. As they did so, they chanted, "Long live his majesty!"

Seated on his throne, the emperor saw how depleted Song Jiang's ranks had become, and he, too, was moved. He summoned them into the hall, and they all kneeled in front of the pearl curtain separating the emperor from the others in the hall. The emperor told them to rise, and the attendants raised up the pearl curtain so they may gaze upon the emperor's visage.

The emperor now said to Song Jiang and company, "I know that you all have endured much in the campaign to pacify the south. You have lost the majority of your brothers, and it grieves me to no end."

Song Jiang wept and remained kneeling. He kowtowed again and said, "With my meager talents, I can never repay the country's great kindness, not even with my life. I still remember when the 108 of us gathered in the name of honor and reaffirmed our brotherly pledge when we were on Wutai Mountain. Who knew that today we would have lost 80 percent of us. I have a list here, but I dare not submit it without your approval. I hope that, in your great benevolence, you will give them appropriate rewards for their service."

He then bowed again and presented his petition. It said:

"Song Jiang, the vanguard general and commander-in-chief for the pacification of the South, and others respectfully report: Though we are ignorant, crude, and have committed heinous crimes, we have received great kindness from your majesty, which we can never repay even if our bones be ground to dust and our bodies pulverized. Upon leaving the marsh, we and our brothers have done our utmost to eradicate evil. As one, we swore the pledge of fraternity on Wutai Mountain, and have been wholly dedicated to protecting the country and its people. In Youzhou Prefecture we defeated the Liao, and in Clear Stream Cavern we captured Fang La. Even though we have rendered some slight service, we have



lost many excellent generals. For this your servant Song Jiang grieves day and night. I hope that in your great benevolence, you will consider the matter and bestow your kindness on those still living. I wish to return to the countryside and till the land. I hope your majesty will oblige me. Earnest and trembling, we await your majesty's decision with bowed heads."

And then the petition goes on to provide a full accounting of every chieftain who died, opted not to come back, or is still alive and in the capital. In all:

- 59 chieftains were killed in battle;
- 10 died of illness on the campaign;
- one ascended while at a monastery, that being Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk;
- one lost an arm and refused to come back, that being Wu Song Pilgrim;
- one went home before the campaign started, that being Gongsun the Daoist priest;
- four left on the way back from the campaign, those being Yan Qing the Prodigy, Li Jun the River Dragon, and the two Tong brothers;
- and of course there were five who were kept in the capital by the court for their special expertise, these being An Daoquan the Miracle Healer, Huangfu Duan the horse expert, Jin Dajian the jade carver, Xiao Rang the Sacred-Handed Scholar, and Yue He the Iron Whistle.

And that brings us to the 27 chieftains who were still alive and presently in the palace. These were: Song Jiang, Lu Junyi, Wu Yong the strategist, Guan Sheng the Great Saber, Hyuan Zhuo the Twin Staffs, Hua Rong the archer, Chai Jin the Little Whirlwind, Li Ying the Striking Hawk, Zhu Tong the Lord of the Beautiful Beard, Dai Zong the Magic Traveler, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, Ruan Xiaoqi, the youngest and surviving Ruan brother, Zhu Wu the Divine Strategist, Huang Xin the Suppressor of Three Mountains, Sun Li the Sick Yuchi, his brother Sun Xin and Sun Xin's wife Gu Dasao the Female Tiger, Fan Rui the Demon King of Chaos, Ling Zhen the Heaven-Quaking Thunder, Pei Xuan the Iron-faced Scribe, Jiang (3) Jing (4)

the Divine Mathematician, Du (4) Xing (4) the Demon Face, Song Jiang's little brother Song Qing (1), Zou Run the Single-Horned Dragon, Cai Qing (4) the Single Stem of Flower, Yang Lin the Multi-colored Leopard, and Mu Chun the Little Restrained.

Upon reading the petition, the emperor sighed nonstop and said to Song Jiang, "You and your band of brothers correspond to star spirits. Yet, only 27 of you remain, and four others left. You have lost so many!"

The emperor now issued a decree, bestowing posthumous titles on those who died. If they had surviving sons, he summoned them to the capital to receive official posts. For those without sons, he ordered temples be built in their honor so that they may receive sacrifices.

There were also some special dispensations:

- Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves was the Golden Glory General because his spirit had played an active role in the sack of Hangzhou Prefecture.
- Lu Zhishen, for capturing Fang La and then ascending to a higher plane, was granted the posthumous title of the Chivalrous Illustrious Reverend.
- Wu Song the Pilgrim was named the abbot of the Six Harmonies Monastery, where he was living out the remainder of his long life. He was also given 100,000 strings of coins.
- The two slain female chieftains — Hu Sanniang the Ten Feet of Steel and Sun Erniang the Female Yaksha — also received posthumous titles.

Now, as for the living. There were 15 junior chieftains, and they were all appointed to command various army units. All except one. The lone surviving female chieftain, Gu Dasao the Female Tiger, was appointed magistrate of a county, because god forbid you have a woman leading a military unit.

There were also 10 senior chieftains aside from Song Jiang and Lu Junyi, and these 10 were all made prefects or prefectural or district military commanders.

Now, as for the two leaders: Song Jiang was given the title of Marshal of Military Virtue and appointed to governor of Chuzhou (3,1) Prefecture and commander of its military. Lu Junyi, meanwhile, was given the title of Marshal of Military Contribution and made governor of Luzhou (2,1) Prefecture and deputy commander of its military.

Aside from the official positions and fancy titles, the emperor also bestowed upon each of the 15 junior chieftains 300 taels of gold and silver, and five sets of silk, while the 10 senior chieftains each got 500 taels of gold and silver and 8 sets of silk. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi each received 1,000 taels of gold and silver, 10 sets of silks, an imperial court robe, and a fine horse.

Upon thanking the emperor, Song Jiang then informed him that the dragon spirit on Black Dragon Ridge twice manifested itself to help the Song army, so the emperor bestowed a title on the dragon spirit, because I'm sure dragon spirits care about that sort of thing, though the dragon spirit did also get a new temple out of it.

The emperor then decreed name changes for Muzhou (4,1) and Shezhou (4,1), the two prefectures that were the heart of the rebellion, as well as the county and the cave where Fang La's palace was located. I guess place names associated with the rebels are like Voldemort and must never be spoken. Finally, the civilians in the territories controlled by Fang La were exempted from taxes and labor levies for three years as recompense for the harm they had suffered under the rebels and not, you know, the bloody war the Song court just waged to reclaim those territories.

All this done, the emperor now ordered a feast be held to celebrate the peace and congratulate the victorious officers. At the end of the feast, Song Jiang told the emperor, "Since we accepted amnesty, we

have lost more than half of our soldiers. Some wish to return home. I hope you will exercise your benevolence.”

The emperor promptly decreed that any soldier in Song Jiang’s forces who still wished to remain in the army would receive 100 strings of coins, 10 bolts of silk, and be assigned to the elite units named the Fierce Dragon Camp and the Imposing Tiger Camp. There, they would receive monthly allotments of money and grain. Those who did not wish to remain in the army would be given 200 strings of coin and 10 bolts of silk, and be allowed to return home as civilians.

Finally, Song Jiang had one last request. “Your servant was born and raised in Yuncheng County,” he told the emperor. “But I have not dared to return home since I committed my offenses. I hope you will exercise your benevolence and grant me leave to return home and visit my family before assuming my post in Chuzhou (3,1) Prefecture.”

The emperor was more than happy to grant that leave request. In fact, he was in such a good mood that he even threw in 100,000 strings of coins for Song Jiang as funds for maintaining his ancestral home. Then the feast concluded, everyone thanked the emperor again, and left. The next day, it was the Council of Administration’s turn to throw its own feast for the officers. The day after that, it was the Council of Military Affairs. Oh, and of course, Song Jiang’s superiors on the last campaign — Military Governor Zhang, District Commander Liu, Tong Guan the chancellor of military affairs, and his advisers and generals — all got handsome rewards and promotions.

Now, as for the captured rebel emperor Fang La, after all the celebrations, he was taken to the marketplace, executed via the dreaded death by 1,000 cuts, and left on public display for three days as a warning to all who might contemplate emulating him.

As for Song Jiang, once he saw to the distribution of rewards to all the soldiers and officers, he took his leave of his remaining band of brothers and set off toward his home of Yuncheng County with his

younger brother Song Qing. He had made it. He had steered his band of brothers onto the proper path. They had received amnesty. They had gone to the borderlands to defend the country. They had gone South to put down internal rebellions. They had returned to the capital in victory. And now, they had finally received the ranks and rewards they deserved for their loyalty. All it had cost was the lives of most of that band of brothers. Was it worth it?

So if this were a movie, this would be a great place to fade out to black. But we are not quite done yet with our band of heroes, and neither is the imperial court. So join us next time for the conclusion to the Water Margin Podcast. Thanks for listening!