

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 87.

Last time, Liangshan suffered a huge loss when its leader Chao Gai was killed in battle at the Zeng (1) Family Village. After Song Jiang assumed the leadership, he heard about a magnate named Lu Junyi, who was famous, wealthy, and a talented fighter. Song Jiang wanted to “recruit” this guy, so the strategist Wu Yong and Li Kui the Black Whirlwind took a little trip to Daming Prefecture, where Lu Junyi lived.

As we rejoin the story, Wu Yong, disguised as a fortune-teller, had been invited into Lu Junyi’s home and asked to tell the magnate about his future. Wu Yong did some calculations and produced a stunning prediction.

“Sir, within 100 days, you will suffer a blood tragedy,” he said. “You will not be able to protect your wealth, and you will die under the sword.”

When he heard this most dire of predictions, Lu Junyi chuckled and said, “Sir, you must be mistaken. I was born here and have grown up in a wealthy home. My ancestors have always been law-abiding, and no woman from my clan has ever remarried. Besides, I am cautious in my dealings and will never do anything that’s not on the level and profitable. So how could I be in for a blood tragedy?”

When he heard this, Wu Yong’s expression changed and he quickly returned the tael of silver that Lu Junyi had given him as prepayment and got up to go, sighing, “Turns out everyone wants to be lied to. Alas, so be it. I tried to point him to the right path, and yet he treats my loyal advice as lies. I shall take my leave now.”

Lu Junyi stopped him and said, “Sir, please do not be angry. I was just teasing you. I am willing to listen to your guidance.”

“In that case, I will speak plainly, but please do not take offense,” Wu Yong warned him.

“I shall listen; please hold nothing back.”

“Sir, your fortune has always been good,” Wu Yong said. “But your horoscope conflicts with this year’s god of fate, and the result is evil. Within 100 days, you will lose your head. This is preordained; there is no escape.”

“Is there no way to avoid it?” Lu Junyi asked.

Wu Yong worked on his abacus again for a bit, and then said, “The only way is to travel somewhere more than 300 miles to the southeast of here. That will avert the major crisis. You might get a scare, but it will not be serious.”

“If I can really avoid this calamity, then I shall repay you handsomely,” Lu Junyi said.

Wu Yong now told him, “I have four lines of prophecy. I will relay them to you, and you can write them on your wall. When they come true, then you will understand my wisdom.”

So Lu Junyi ordered his attendants to bring brush and ink. Wu Yong now said the four lines out loud:

A boat sails through the reeds,

A hero this place wanders by,

Valiant, if this you can understand,

Out of trouble you shall fly.

As Wu Yong spoke, Lu Junyi dutifully wrote down each line on the white walls of his parlor. Wu Yong then packed up his abacus and took his leave. Lu Junyi tried to keep him, but Wu Yong begged off, saying he had a living to make and would call another day. So Lu Junyi saw him and Li Kui out. Wu Yong and Li Kui then left the city, went back to the inn, packed their bags, and left. As they departed, Wu Yong told Li Kui, “Mission accomplished! Let’s hurry back to Liangshan and lay our trap to welcome Lu Junyi. He will be coming sooner or later.”

While the two of them head back to Liangshan, let's jump back to Daming Prefecture, where we presently find Lu Junyi being all fidgety at home. He's been restless since his little fortune-telling session. One day, he finally had it, and told his attendant to summon all the stewards. Soon, the stewards had gathered, led by the chief steward, who was in charge of the household property. This guy's name was Li (3) Gu (4). This Li Gu (4) originally came from the capital and had arrived in Daming to stay with an acquaintance. But he couldn't find his acquaintance and was drifting around the city. One day, he passed out in the freezing cold outside Lu Junyi's house, and Lu Junyi saved him and took him in. Finding Li Gu to be diligent and capable in both writing and math, Lu Junyi put him in charge of household matters. Within five years, he promoted Li Gu all the way to chief steward. Currently, he was overseeing all the household property, and had 40-some clerks reporting to him.

After all the stewards had gathered, Lu Junyi took a look and asked, "Where is my man?"

Before he finished the question, a man stepped forth. He was about medium height, around 25 years of age. He sported a thin mustache and goatee and had a slim waist and broad shoulders. His headscarf was twisted into the shape of a papaya, and his hair came up through a hole in the middle. He wore a white gown with a round silk collar of silver thread. Around his waist was a girdle woven from fine spotted crimson thread. He wore brown oiled leather boots, and from the back of his head hung a pair of golden rings shaped like animals. His neckerchief was made of fragrant silk, and tucked into his waist sash was a paper fan bearing inscriptions from a famous calligrapher. And over one ear, he wore a flower.

This guy's name was Yan (4) Qing (1). He was a native of Daming. Yan Qing was orphaned as a child, and he grew up in Lu Junyi's household. Because he had snow white skin, Lu Junyi hired a skilled tattoo artist to cover Yan Qing's body with an elaborate set of tattoos.

Whether on TV shows, in movies, or comics based on the novel, Yan Qing was always portrayed as quite the heartthrob. No one could match this young man in terms of physique. He not only had the gorgeous tattoos, but also was very skilled in musical instruments, singing, dancing, and word games.

There was nothing he didn't know and nothing he couldn't do. He spoke a bunch of dialects and knew the jargons of all the trades. He also had unrivaled fighting skills. He was particularly handy with a crossbow. When he went hunting in the outskirts of the city, he only needed three short bolts. His shots never missed, and when he came back in the evening, he seldom returned with less than 100 birds, because sustainability is what now? Anyway, folks in the city gave Yan Qing the nickname "Langzi" (4,3), which has several different meanings, including a drifter or a person who's fond of merrymaking, neither meaning being a positive. However, in this case, Yan Qing's nickname was meant as a compliment, and the best translation I have seen is the Prodigy, so we'll go with that.

So Yan Qing was Lu Junyi's confidant, and now he stepped forth as he was summoned, and he and Li Gu stood to both sides of their master.

"I met with a fortune-teller recently," Lu Junyi said to everyone. "He predicted that within 100 days I would suffer a blood tragedy, and that I must travel more than 300 miles to the southeast to avoid this calamity. I thought of a place in that direction -- Tai'an (4,1) Prefecture. There's a temple to the great sage god of Mount Tai (4), who oversees people's births, deaths, and fortunes. I can go there to offer incense to atone for my sins and avoid this calamity. It will also be an opportunity to do some business and take in some sights. Li Gu, prepare 10 carts of merchandise for me. Also, you shall accompany me on this trip. Yan Qing, you will stay home to watch over the household. You can get the storehouse keys from Li Gu today. I will depart in three days."

Well, everybody present who wasn't Lu Junyi was apparently getting a bad feeling about this. Li Gu the chief steward was the first to object.

"Master, you are mistaken," he said to Lu Junyi. "As the old saying goes, 'Fortune tellers are slick talkers.' Don't listen to that guy's nonsense. Just stay home. There's nothing to be afraid of."

“But this calamity was preordained,” Lu Junyi said. “Don’t argue with me. When disaster strikes, it will be too late for regrets.”

Yan Qing now chimed in. “Master, please listen to my foolish opinion: The road to Tai’an (4,1) Prefecture goes right by Liangshan Marsh. In recent years, bandits led by Song Jiang have been looting and pillaging there. The authorities can’t even get close to them. If you want to go offer incense, wait until it’s peaceful. Don’t believe that fortune-teller’s nonsense. Heck, he might be one of the bandits from Liangshan, coming here in disguise to trick you. It’s just too bad I wasn’t home when he was here, or I would’ve exposed him with just a few words. Now, THAT would’ve been funny.”

“Enough from you guys,” Lu Junyi said. “Who would dare to come trick me? And what’s the big deal with those two-bit crooks on Liangshan? In my eyes, they are like young grass. In fact, I’m going to go apprehend them, so I can show off all the fighting skills that I’ve learned. Now, THAT would be a deed befitting a true man!”

Before he finished speaking, more objections arose. From behind a screen came Lu Junyi’s wife, Lady Jia (3). She was 25 years old and had been married to Lu Junyi for 5 years. She said to him, “Husband, I’ve heard everything. As the old saying goes, ‘Staying in is better than going out.’ Don’t listen to that fortune-teller’s nonsense. Why leave behind your huge enterprise and go do business in some treacherous place? Just stay home, clear your mind, rest comfortably, and everything will be fine.”

“What do you womenfolk know?” Lu Junyi scoffed. “It’s better to be safe than sorry. My mind is made up; no more objections from you!”

Seeing that his master was determined to take this trip, Yan Qing offered a suggestion: “Master, thanks to your blessings, I have learned some fighting skills. I’m not bragging, but if I accompany you on this trip and we run into bandits, I can take on at least 30 or 50 of them. So why not let Steward Li stay home to oversee the household while I go with you?”

“But Li Gu has business knowledge that I don’t,” Lu Junyi said. “He’ll save me a lot of trouble, so I need to take him with me and keep you at home. Other folks will take care of the accounts here. You just need to take charge of the house.”

But now, Li Gu, who REALLY didn’t want to go on this trip, tried to beg off, saying, “My feet have been really bothering me lately. I can’t walk much.”

That was the wrong thing to say, as Lu Junyi flew into a rage and scowled, “You keep an army for a thousand days for the one time that you will need it. I want you to go with me, so how dare you try to give me excuses?! Whoever tries to stop me will get a taste of my fist!”

Li Gu’s face turned ashen at this threat, and everybody else hushed as well and scattered. So Li Gu had no choice but to begrudgingly pack his things and prepare the 10 carts of merchandise, and he rounded up 10 drivers and about 50 animals to pull the carts.

While the luggage was being prepared, Lu Junyi went to tie up loose ends. Then, on the third day, he burned sacrificial offerings to the gods for good luck, left instructions for all members of the household, and told Li Gu and two other men to go on ahead and leave the city that evening. As Li Gu and the carts went off, Lady Jia watched them go with tears in her eyes.

The next morning at 5 a.m., Lu Junyi got up and took a bath, changed into a new set of clothes, had breakfast, and prepared his weapons. He then went to his family altar to bid goodbye to his ancestors’ spirits. As he walked out the front door, he told his wife to take good care of the house and that he would be back in three months at most. She in turn told him to take care on the road and to send letters home.

Then, Yan Qing came over and bowed to bid his master goodbye. Lu Junyi told him, “Be diligent in all things at home; don’t go chasing after pleasure.”

“Master, how would I dare to be negligent while you are away?” Yan Qing said.

And with that, Lu Junyi grabbed a wooden staff and left. Outside the city, he met up with the steward Li Gu and the rest of his entourage. He told Li Gu and the two servants to go on ahead and prepare a meal at the first clean tavern that they came across, so that the cart drivers could eat as soon as they arrived there and keep making good time. So Li Gu and the two servants went off, and Lu Junyi and a few other servants traveled with the carts.

All along the way, Lu Junyi feasted his eyes on the gorgeous scenery as they traveled down wide, flat roads. The beautiful sights made him very happy as he thought to himself, "How could I see scenery like this if I had stayed home?"

After traveling for about 15 miles, he caught up with Li Gu at a tavern, and food was waiting as he had ordered. Once they ate, Li Gu again went on ahead. After another 15 miles or so, they once again met up at an inn, with food already waiting. Lu Junyi ate and turned in for the night. The next morning, they got up at dawn to have breakfast, and then resumed their journey.

In this way, they traveled for several days. One evening, they stopped for the day at an inn and made plans for next morning's travel. The clerk at the inn told Lu Junyi, "Sir, there's something you should know: About five or six miles from here, the road takes you past an entrance to Liangshan Marsh. Even though the bandit leader Song Jiang does not harm passing merchants, you should still keep a low profile when you pass through."

"Ah, so that's how it is," Lu Junyi said, and then he did the exact opposite of keeping a low profile. He told his servants to open up a trunk and take out a bundle. Inside the bundle were four white flags. He asked the clerk for four wooden poles. On each pole, he tied a flag. As soon as the steward Li Gu and the rest of the traveling party saw what was written on the flags, they groaned. The flags read:

From the Northern Capital comes Lu Junyi the Bold,
Transporting merchandise far, far away.

Catching outlaws is his sole intent

So that he may his manliness display.

“Sir, are you related to Song Jiang?” the clerk asked when he saw the flags.

“I’m a magnate from Daming. How would I be related to those bandits? I have come here specifically to capture that Song Jiang!”

“Sir, not so loud, or you will bring trouble down on me,” the clerk begged. “This is not a game! Even if you have 10,000 men, you would not be able to get close to the bandits!”

“Bullcrap!” Lu Junyi barked. “You must be in cahoots with those bandits!”

The clerk just kept moaning and groaning, and all the cart drivers looked on in disbelief. The steward Li Gu kneeled and begged Lu Junyi, “Master, please take pity on us and let us get home alive. That would trump holding a huge service for departed souls!”

“What the hell do you know?!” Lu Junyi shot back. “How would sparrows dare to contend with a swan?! I haven’t had a chance to use all the fighting skills that I’ve spent my life learning. But today, opportunity knocks, so how can I not answer?! There’s a sack of ropes on the cart. If those damn bandits are unlucky enough to run into me, then I’m going to cut them down, and you guys just tie up whoever I knock down and put them on the carts. We can throw away all the merchandise. Just use the carts to transport the prisoners to the capital for a reward. That will fulfill my lifelong ambition. If anyone among you doesn’t want to go, then I’ll kill you right here right now!”

And with that, he ordered his men to mount the flags to the four carts at the front. Li Gu and company, all bemoaning their rotten lot, had no choice but to do as he commanded. Lu Junyi then took out his broadsword and mounted it on his wooden staff. The party then set out toward Liangshan Marsh early the next morning.

So Lu Junyi was basically asking for trouble, and he would get his wish soon enough. Around 10 a.m., they were approaching a large forest filled with huge trees when suddenly, they heard a shrill whistle. Li Gu and the other two attendants were scared out of their wits and looked for a hole in the ground to hide in, and all the cart drivers crawled under their carts and went oh crap, oh crap. Lu Junyi, however, was thrilled.

“Tie up whichever bandits I knock down!” he shouted to his men as he strode toward the woods.

Before he even finished speaking, the sound of gongs blared out from behind them, and about 500 bandit lackeys rushed out and cut off their path of retreat. A cannon shot then rang out from the woods, and a bandit chieftain leaped out from among the trees, wielding a pair of axes. This was none other than Li Kui the Black Whirlwind.

“Mr. Lu (2), do you recognize me, the acolyte?!” Li Kui shouted.

Lu Junyi did in fact remember Li Kui, and it all made sense to him now. Still, he had come this far, so he was not going to back down.

“I have long wanted to come apprehend you bandits!” he shouted back at Li Kui. “Now that I’m here, go tell that Song Jiang to come down and surrender. If you continue on your misguided path, then I will kill every last one of you soon enough!”

Li Kui roared with laughter.

“Mr. Lu, you’ve fallen for our military strategist’s trick. Hurry up and join us!”

Lu Junyi became enraged, so he hoisted his broadsword and rushed forward to fight Li Kui. They traded a few blows, but then Li Kui broke off the fight and ran into the woods. Lu Junyi followed him in, but amid the trees, Li Kui darted to and fro, staying elusively out of reach. And soon, he had vanished.

Lu Junyi looked around for a bit and saw no sign of Li Kui. He was just about to turn around and head back out onto the road, when suddenly another group of bandits appeared from the trees. The man at their head shouted, “Mr. Lu, don’t you go anywhere! Do you recognize me?!”

Lu Junyi looked and saw that it was a big fat monk wielding a steel Buddhist staff.

“Monk, who the hell are you?!” he asked.

“I am Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk. Our strategist has ordered me to come welcome you to our base.”

“Bald donkey! How dare you tease me?!” Lu Junyi barked angrily as he charged at Lu Zhishen. Lu Zhishen raised his staff to counter, and they fought for just a few bouts before Lu Zhishen parried a blow and then turned and ran.

Once again, Lu Junyi gave chase, but before he had gone far, his path was cut off by another chieftain. This time, it was Wu Song the Pilgrim, wielding his twin sabers. They fought for three bouts, and just like the other two chieftains, Wu Song turned and ran. This time, Lu Junyi just stood still and said, “I’m not going to chase you. You guys are nothing!”

Just then, though, another man from a nearby hill called out, “Mr. Lu, don’t you know that men fear the swamp, and steel fears the furnace? How can you escape my brother’s trap?!”

“And who the hell are you?!” Lu Junyi shouted in the man’s direction.

“I am Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil!”

“Stay where you are, you two-bit thief!” Lu Junyi cursed as he rushed toward Liu Tang. They had barely reached three bouts when suddenly, another man charged out, shouting, “Here comes Mu (4) Hong (2) the Unrestrained!”

Lu Junyi fought the two chieftains for another three bouts when suddenly, he heard footsteps coming from behind. So, he quickly shouted, “Strike!” That had the intended effect, as Liu Tang and Mu Hong both leaped back, anticipating some kind of special move. That gave Lu Junyi the breathing room to turn around. He did so just in time to see the chieftain Li (3) Ying (4) the Striking Hawk. The three chieftains now surrounded him, but Lu Junyi showed no panic. Instead, he only grew more vigorous with every exchange of blows.

Just as they were getting into the thick of it, a gong rang out from the hilltop, and the three chieftains immediately fell back and disappeared into the hills. By now, Lu Junyi was covered in sweat, so he did not give chase. Instead, he headed back toward the edge of the woods to meet up with his entourage.

There was just one problem though. His entourage was all gone, men and carts alike. He looked around, and in the distance, he saw a group of bandit lackeys driving the carts away into the hills, with his steward Li Gu and the rest of the men all tied up and being led away behind the carts. As they disappeared into the trees, the bandits celebrated by banging their drums and gongs.

Lu Junyi was pissed. He rushed in the direction of the bandits. As he approached the hill, he was met by two chieftains. One was Zhu Tong the Lord of the Beautiful Beard, and the other was his fellow former constable Lei Heng the Winged Tiger.

“Damn bandits! Give me back my men and carts!” Lu Junyi barked.

Zhu Tong, stroking his long beautiful beard, roared with laughter and said, “Mr. Lu, are you still in the dark? You have fallen for our strategist’s trick. Even if you have wings, you would not be able to fly away. Hurry up and come take your seat among us.”

That taunt only added to Lu Junyi’s aggravation, so he raised his broadsword and traded blows with Zhu Tong and Lei Heng. But just like everybody else, both of them ran away after just three bouts.

Lu Junyi thought to himself, “I have to catch at least one of these bandits before I can get my people and carts back.”

So he pressed on, chasing the chieftains with all his might. But when he went around a hill, both Zhu Tong and Lei Heng had vanished. Instead, Lu Junyi was greeted by the sound of instruments blaring from the hilltop. He looked up and saw a yellow banner flapping in the wind, bearing the characters “Delivering Justice on Heaven’s Behalf.” He looked closer, and saw that underneath a canopy stood Song Jiang, flanked by the strategist Wu Yong and the priest Gongsun Sheng, and escorted by about 200 men.

In unison, this whole group now shouted, "Mr. Lu, how are you?"

Lu Junyi was steaming now. He pointed at the hilltop and cursed, but Wu Yong smiled and said, "Mr. Lu, please don't be angry. My brother Song Jiang has long admired you, so he ordered me to pay you a visit and invite you to our base so that we may deliver justice on heaven's behalf together. Please forgive us."

"You absurd crooks! How dare you trick me?!" Lu Junyi shot back.

Ok, I guess we'll try a different tact then. From behind Song Jiang stepped forth Hua Rong the master archer. He nocked an arrow and shouted to Lu Junyi, "Mr. Lu, don't get too full of yourself! Witness my archery skills first!"

Before he finished speaking, the arrow had already struck the red tuft at the top of Lu Junyi's hat. Lu Junyi was alarmed and started to back away. Just then, the hills were filled with the earth-shaking sound of battle drums. From the east came an army of bandits, led by Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt and Lin Chong the Panther Head. From the west came another army, led by Huyan Zhuo, the wielder of twin steel rods, and Xu Ning the Golden Lancer.

Lu Junyi hurriedly turned and ran down whichever path he could find. He ran and ran and ran, until darkness began to descend. By now, the sound of pursuit had faded, but his feet were aching and his stomach was growling. As dusk stretched toward evening, he kept stumbling down the back roads, looking for a way out. Eventually, he came upon a beach. In front of him lay nothing but water-covered reeds.

Looking to the heavens, Lu Junyi sighed and lamented, "I ignored loyal advice, and now look where it's gotten me!"

Just then, he heard a voice call out to him, "Sir, you've got some gall! This is a place frequented by the bandits from Liangshan. What are you doing here at night?"

Lu Junyi looked and saw that it was a fisherman who had rowed out of the thick reeds on a small boat.

“I got lost and couldn’t find a place to stay!” he shouted to the fisherman. “Help me!”

“There is a town in the area,” the fisherman told him. “By land it’s about 10 miles away, but the road is winding and hard to follow. By waterway it’s only a mile or so away. If you can part with 10 strings of coins, I can ferry you there.”

“If you can take me to the town to find lodging, I’ll give you lots of silver,” Lu Junyi promised.

So the fisherman rowed his boat to shore. Lu Junyi hopped on, and they pushed off into the reeds.

So yeah, I think we’ve all seen this play enough times to know that something is afoot here. To witness the fisherman’s sudden but inevitable betrayal, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, Lu Junyi somehow gets back home. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!