

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 90.

Last time, the magnate Lu Junyi was falsely accused by his own steward of joining up with the Liangshan bandits and ended up getting exiled. Said steward wasn't content with usurping his former master's wealth and wife, and bribed Lu Junyi's guards to kill him on the way to the penal colony. Lu Junyi's loyal attendant Yan Qing killed the guards and saved him, only to have him fall right back into the hands of the authorities, this time with the added crime of killing two cops, which would surely mean a death sentence.

With no recourse, Yan Qing decided to go to Liangshan for help since the bandits were the ones who caused all this trouble for Lu Junyi in the first place. He had no travel money, so he tried to rob a couple passers-by. But these two travelers proved to be no ordinary men, and Yan Qing soon found himself at their mercy. But then, they saw the tattoos on his wrist and asked if he was Yan Qing.

Yan Qing figured his life was forfeit one way or another, so he might as well tell the truth. That way, these guys might at least turn him over to the authorities and he would get to die alongside his master. So he said, "I am indeed Yan Qing from Lu Junyi's household. I was on my way to Liangshan to ask Song Jiang to save my master."

The two travelers burst out laughing and said, "We nearly killed you! Turns out you are brother Yan! Do you know us?"

Yan Qing was like, umm, obviously not, but, you know, clue me in on why it's so hilarious.

As it turns out, these two guys were Liangshan chieftains. One was Shi Xiu the Daredevil, and the other was Shi Xiu's hetero life mate Yang Xiong. They introduced themselves and told Yan Qing that they had been sent to find out what's up with Lu Junyi after he left Liangshan, and that the strategist Wu Yong and Dai Zong the Magic Traveler were on their way, too.

Yan Qing quickly brought the two chieftains up to speed on what happened. Yang Xiong said to Shi Xiu, "Given the ways things are, let me take Yan Qing to Liangshan to report to Brother Song. You go on ahead to Daming Prefecture and gather more intel and then report back."

So, they went their separate ways. Yang Xiong and Yan Qing rushed to Liangshan. Song Jiang was shocked by the news and immediately assembled the chieftains to discuss their next steps.

Meanwhile, Shi Xiu the Daredevil went on ahead by himself to Daming Prefecture. By the time he arrived outside the city, it was getting dark and the city gates were already closed. So he stayed at an inn and then went into the city the next morning. As he walked the streets, he noticed that many people were looking very glum and sad. He wandered to the center of the city and saw that all the shops were closed, which was rather odd for the middle of the day.

Shi Xiu asked around, and an old man told him, "Sir, you must not have heard. There is a Mr. Lu in this city. He's a local magnate. He was kidnapped by the bandits of Liangshan but then managed to escape. But he ended up being falsely convicted and was sentenced to exile. But somehow the two guards were killed on the road, and the authorities caught him last night. At noon today, they are going to execute him here in the market. You can see for yourself."

Hearing this, Shi Xiu walked over to the market, which was situated at an intersection at the heart of the city. Perched on a corner of the intersection was a multistory tavern. Shi Xiu went in, went upstairs, and sat down at a table against the railing.

A waiter came over and asked, "Sir, are you dining with guests or by yourself?"

Shi Xiu glowered and barked, "Bring me wine in big bowls and meat in big pieces! Don't ask any damn questions!"

The waiter was taken aback but did as Shi Xiu ordered, bringing him two horns of wine and a big platter of beef. Shi Xiu chowed down as he kept a close eye on the action below. Before long, he started

hearing commotions. He walked over to a window and looked out. All the businesses along the street were shutting their doors.

Just then, the waiter came over and said, "Sir, you must be drunk. They're about to conduct official business down on the street. Hurry up and pay your bill and find somewhere else to stay out of the way."

"What do I have to be afraid of?! Get out of my sight unless you want a beating!" Shi Xiu cursed.

The waiter did not dare to make another peep and just went downstairs. Shi Xiu turned his attention back to the window. A moment later, he heard gongs clanging down below as a procession of 20-some guards and executioners entered the intersection with a bound Lu Junyi in tow. They stopped in front of the tavern and made their prisoner kneel.

Standing next to Lu Junyi were the two Cai (4) brothers. Cai (4) Fu (2), the superintendent and executioner, was holding the executioner's blade, preparing to do his duty. His brother Cai (4) Qing (4) was holding Lu Junyi's cangue and whispered to Lu Junyi, "Mr. Lu, you can see for yourself. It's not that we didn't try to save you, but the whole thing went sideways. I have set up an altar for you in the temple up the road. Your spirit can go there to receive sacrifices."

Just then, a shout rang out from the procession: "It's noon!"

At that, the Cai brothers removed Lu Junyi's cangue and prepared him for the execution. Cai Qing grabbed a hold of his hair to hold his head and neck steady, while Cai Fu gripped the knife. The magisterial clerk read the crime and sentence aloud, and all the guards shouted in unison that it was time.

Just then, someone roared from the tavern behind them.: "All the Liangshan heroes are here!"

In the next second, Shi Xiu came bounding down from the second floor of the tavern, wielding his short broadsword. The Cai brothers, not all that keen to execute Lu Junyi to begin with, immediately let go of him and ran away, and they even conveniently removed the rope that was binding him. Meanwhile,

Shi Xiu started cutting down guards left and right, and in a matter of minutes, a dozen or so had fallen to his blade. He now grabbed Lu Junyi and ran toward the south.

But there was just one problem. Shi Xiu had never been to Daming and did not know the layout of the city. Lu Junyi knew the roads, but he was so stunned by everything that was happening that not only could he not speak, he could barely even run. By now, Governor Liang, who was in charge of the city, had gotten word and immediately sent out his troops to close off all the city gates. Then, the cops closed in on Shi Xiu and Lu Junyi from all sides. Shi Xiu was a good fighter, but he was only one man, and the cops had long hooks and ropes and such. Before long, both Shi Xiu and Lu Junyi had been tripped up and captured. The cops tied them up and took them over to see Governor Liang.

As he was forced onto his knees in the governor's courthouse, Shi Xiu glowered and cursed aloud. "You damn corrupt crook! I was acting on my brother's orders, and he will soon be here with our army to flatten your city and cut you to pieces! He sent me on ahead to give you a warning!"

As he kept cursing and showed no sign of fear, everyone just looked on stunned and half-scared. Governor Liang thought about it for a while, and then ordered his men to put the two prisoners in big cangues and lock them up in the dungeon for now. He also ordered Cai Fu, the superintendent of the prison, to make sure nothing happened to the prisoners. Cai Fu, of course, was eager to get on the good side of the Liangshan bandits, so he kept Shi Xiu and Lu Junyi in the same cell and treated them to good wine and food everyday. So, not only did the two not suffer, but Lu Junyi actually started recovering from his wounds.

Meanwhile, Governor Liang did a quick headcount and found that about 80 people had been killed in Shi Xiu's little escapade, and countless more were injured. He gathered all their names and handed out compensations for the families of the dead and covered the medical expenses of the injured.

The next day, word came that dozens of notices from the Liangshan bandits had been posted all around the city, all bearing the same warning. Governor Liang took one look at one of the posters and immediately broke out into a cold sweat. The notice said:

“Song Jiang, a man of valor from Liangshan, respectfully announces to Daming Prefecture and to all the land: Right now corrupt officials control the imperial court, killing and harming innocent civilians. Lu Junyi of Daming is a man of honor, and we invited him to join us in carrying out justice on heaven’s behalf. And yet, the wicked dare to scheme to kill an innocent man. So, we sent Shi Xiu to come put you on notice, and yet he has been arrested. If you keep the two of them unharmed and hand over the adulterous couple who framed Lu Junyi, then we will not cause you any trouble. But if you injure these men who are our brethren, we shall mobilize all our forces to avenge them. When our great army arrives, all shall be destroyed, no exceptions. Heaven and Earth will support us, and the spirits will assist us. We shall wipe out the treacherous and exterminate the stubborn. Easily we shall enter the city, but not lightly will our wrath be appeased. Virtuous husbands and chaste wives, filial sons and obedient grandsons, righteous citizens and conscientious officials need not worry. Just go about your business. Let all be thus advised.”

After he read this warning, Governor Liang summoned the prefect of Daming, Prefect Wang, and asked him, “Umm ... so what do we do?”

Prefect Wang was the timid sort, and when he heard what the notice said, he replied, “The imperial court has tried several times to apprehend the Liangshan bandits with no success, so what can the meager force of my one prefecture do? If those desperados lead their armies here and the relief force from the court doesn’t arrive in time, then it would be too late for regrets. In my foolish opinion, let’s keep those two alive for now and inform the court. At the same time, you should write to your honorable father-in-law, Premiere Cai. Also, we should instruct our troops to set up camp outside the city

to guard against surprise attacks. Those moves will ensure the safety of the city, the army, and the civilians. If we kill these two, and the outlaws besiege the city, then one, we would not have any reinforcements. Two, the court would blame us. And three, the civilians will be scared and the city could erupt in chaos. That would spell deep trouble.”

Governor Liang agreed, so he summoned the superintendent Cai Fu and told him, “These two men are no ordinary prisoners. If you go too hard on them, they might die. But if you get too lax, they might escape. You and brother must watch them day and night. Be flexible, but keep them under constant guard. Do not relax for even a moment.”

That order suited Cai Fu just fine, because it meant he would be able to keep taking care of the two men as he had intended. After accepting his orders, he went to the dungeon to let the two prisoners know that they were safe for the moment.

Next, Governor Liang summoned his two commanders, Wen (2) Da (2) and Li (3) Cheng (2), and told them about the notice from Liangshan and what Prefect Wang had suggested. But Li Cheng scoffed and said, “How would those two-bit bandits dare to leave their den? Benefactor, there’s no need to worry. I may be untalented, but I have received many kindnesses from you and have yet to repay you. I will do my utmost and lead my troops to pitch camp outside the city. If the bandits do not come, then we can make other plans. But if they are destined to meet their doom and dare to leave their lair and come here, then I will wipe them all out. And that’s no idle boast!”

Governor Liang was delighted by his confidence and rewarded the two commanders. They took their leave and went back to their own camps. The next day, Li Cheng assembled his officers to discuss the situation. A stout general stepped forth. This was Suo (3) Chao (1) the Impatient Vanguard, the guy who fought Yang Zhi the Bluefaced Beast to a standstill when the latter was trying to earn a promotion here.

Li Cheng ordered Suo Chao to lead his unit and pitch camp about 10 miles outside the city, and then Li Cheng would be along shortly with the rest of the army.

Suo Chao moved out as he was ordered, and set up camp against some hills at a place called Flying Tiger Ravine. The next day, Li Cheng and the rest of the officers and soldiers left the city and set up camp about seven miles away, at a place called the Locust Tree Ridge. They dug deep trenches and set up many sharp stakes. All the soldiers were ready and itching for a fight. The only thing missing were the enemies from Liangshan.

So, what were the Liangshan bandits up to? As it turns out, the notice that was posted all over the city had not come from Song Jiang at all. It was the brainchild of Wu Yong the strategist. He and Dai Zong the Magic Traveler were on their way to Daming when Yan Qing and Yang Xiong told them what happened to Lu Junyi. Then, Dai Zong rushed on ahead to Daming and came back to Wu Yong with news that both Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu had been captured. So Wu Yong wrote that notice and had it posted all over the city as a bluff to save the two men's lives for now. And it worked.

Meanwhile, Dai Zong and Wu Yong rushed back to Liangshan with the latest news. Song Jiang was quite alarmed and immediately assembled all the chieftains. Song Jiang then asked Wu Yong, "Professor, it was your original intent to invite Mr. Lu here to join us. But now he is suffering because of us, and brother Shi Xiu has also been arrested. How should we save them?"

"Don't worry, brother," Wu Yong assured him. "I have an idea, and we can even use the opportunity to loot Daming Prefecture's wealth and grain. Tomorrow is an auspicious date. Please leave half of the chieftains here to defend the base. The rest will follow us to Daming to attack the city."

Song Jiang immediately began mobilizing their forces. And of course, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind couldn't be more excited.

“My axes haven’t seen any action for a while; even they are rejoicing at the news that we are going to attack a city,” he said to Song Jiang. “Brother, give me 500 men and I will storm into Daming, turn Governor Liang into minced meat, catch that adulterous couple and cut them to pieces, and rescue Mr. Lu and brother Shi Xiu. That’s all I ask.”

But Song Jiang said, “Brother, you are indeed brave, but Daming is not like other cities. And that Governor Liang is Premiere Cai’s son-in-law. He also has the commanders Li Cheng and Wen Da, both of whom possess uncommon valor. You must not underestimate them.”

But Li Kui shouted, “Brother! Stop talking up others and putting ourselves down! Just let me go and see how I do. If I lose, I swear I will not return to Liangshan!”

Hearing this, Wu Yong said, “If you insist, then you can be the vanguard. Take 500 men with you and lead the way. Depart tomorrow.”

The next day, the bandits set out. Four detachments went out first, one after the other, each consisting of 1,000 men and led by a few chieftains. In the main army, Song Jiang and Wu Yong led the center column, assisted by four chieftains. The front column was led by Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt. The rear column was led by Lin Chong the Panther Head. Huyan Zhuo the Twin Staffs led the left flank, while Hua Rong the archer led the right. There were 31 chieftains in all going on this campaign. The base was left in the care of the priest Gongsun Sheng, Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil, Zhu Tong the Lord of the Beautiful Beard, and Mu Hong the Unrestrained, as well as the naval chieftains led by Li Jun the River Dragon. It was late autumn. The troops were rested and the horses had been well-fed. And everyone was ready for a fight.

At Flying Tiger Ravine, Suo (3) Chao (1) the Impatient Vanguard was camped out in defense of Daming Prefecture. One day, his scouts reported that Song Jiang was about 10 miles away with a large army. Suo Chao quickly sent word to his commander Li Cheng, who was camped out closer to the city at



Locust Tree Ridge. Li Cheng relayed the intel back to the city and personally rode up to Suo Chao's camp to oversee the coming battle. The next morning, their 15,000-strong army had breakfast at 5 a.m., struck their tents at dawn, and marched forward. They picked a good spot outside a hamlet and lined up. Li Cheng and Suo Chao sat atop their horses under the main banner and waited.

From the east, they saw a cloud of dust rising to the sky. Soon, about 500 men approached and charged toward their lines. This was the vanguard led by Li Kui the Black Whirlwind. They all donned red headscarves and were clad in red battle robes. Momentarily, Li Kui stomped out to the front lines. With eyes round and teeth gnashing, he roared at the enemy, "Do you recognize the Black Whirlwind of Liangshan?!"

On the other side of the field, that self-introduction did not quite have the intended effect. Li Cheng just laughed out loud and said to Suo Chao, "We always hear about the heroes of Liangshan; turns out they are such second-rate thieves. What's the big deal?! General, who do you think? Do you want to go and catch that crook?"

Suo Chao chuckled and said, "No need for overkill. One of our officers will do the job; no need to trouble ourselves."

Before Suo Chao finished speaking, one of his officers had already galloped out with spear in hand and 100 riders from his cavalry unit. They made straight for Li Kui's lines. Now, Li Kui was obviously crazy brave, but he and his men were all on foot, so it did not take much for the enemy cavalry to scatter their lines. As the bandits fell into disarray, Suo Chao ordered his troops to charge and give chase. But no sooner had they gone around a hill were they greeted with the sound of war drums and gongs and the sight of more bandits coming at them from both flanks. This was the second detachment from Liangshan, led by four chieftains: the hunter brothers Xie (4) Zhen (1) and Xie (4) Bao (2), and the two Kong (3) brothers, Kong Ming and Kong Liang.

Suo Chao was taken aback by the bandits' reinforcements and fell back. His commander Li Cheng asked him why he stopped pursuing the enemy, and Suo Chao told him, "We chased them over a hill and were just about to capture them, but they had backup lying in wait. So we couldn't catch them."

"What's there to be afraid of with two-bit crooks like these?" Li Cheng scoffed. He then personally led the front column of his army and gave chase. But as soon as he crossed over the hill, he was greeted with more bandit reinforcements. This was the third Liangshan detachment, led by the three female warriors: Hu (4) Sanniang the Ten Feet of Steel, Gu (4) Dasao the Female Tiger, and Sun Erniang the Female Yaksha. They rode forth with a mishmash army of about 1,000 men from all corners of the land.

"What good are these sorts of soldiers?" Li Cheng scoffed again. He then turned to Suo Chao and said, "General, go meet the enemy leaders, while I take some of our troops and go apprehend their men."

Suo Chao galloped forth with his golden battle axe. When she saw him coming, Hu Sanniang turned and rode toward a valley. Li Cheng now sent some of his men in all directions to attack the retreating enemy. In the middle of their pursuit, however, they were rocked by the sound of earth-shattering cries as a wave of bandits swept toward them. Li Cheng quickly ordered his troops to fall back, and they retreated in disarray, pulling out of the small hamlet where they had set up their lines. The second and third Liangshan detachments now attacked from all flanks, scattering Li Cheng's troops. As those troops fell back, they were hit again by the first Liangshan detachment led by Li Kui.

By the time Li Cheng and Suo Chao managed to fight their way out of the chaos and flee back to their camp, they had lost more than half of the men they had marched out that day. For their part, the Liangshan forces did not give chase and instead set up camp.

Licking their wounds, Li Cheng and Suo Chao hurriedly sent word back into the city to ask for help. Governor Liang quickly sent his other commander, Wen Da, out with reinforcements. Wen Da met his

comrades at their camp on Locust Tree Ridge. When they told him what happened, Wen Da laughed and said, "Such minor irritants are no concern! I may be untalented, but watch me rout them tomorrow!"

So the next morning, their men ate breakfast at 3 a.m., got ready at 5 a.m., and set out at dawn. Once again, they marched to the hamlet, where they saw the main Liangshan army, led by Song Jiang. The two sides lined up, and from Song Jiang's lines rode out Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt. He reined in his horse and shouted toward Wen Da's lines, "Listen up, you corrupt officials of Daming! We've been wanting to attack your city for a long time, but haven't done it because we did not want to harm your innocent civilians. Bring us Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu, and that adulterous couple, and we will leave and promise to never encroach on your city. But if you persist on your misguided path, then you are about to be consumed by a raging fire. If you have something to say, say it now! Don't dawdle!"

Wen Da was enraged by those words and asked which of his officers will go shut this guy up. Suo Chao immediately rode out and cursed Qin Ming, "You were a government officer. When did the state ever mistreat you? Yet you insisted on becoming a bandit! When I catch you today, I'm going to cut you to pieces. Death is too good a fate for you!"

So on one side you had a guy nicknamed the Fiery Thunderbolt, and on the other a guy with the moniker the Impatient Vanguard. So these two were more than ready to dance. They rode at each other and their weapons clanged while both armies shouted to cheer on their warrior. They fought for 20-some bouts without a winner.

While they were focused on their duel, from Song Jiang's lines rode out Han (2) Tao (1) the Undefeated General. He nocked an arrow and took aim at Suo Chao. A split second later, Suo Chao got a nasty surprise in the middle of his fight as an arrow pierced his left arm, forcing him to drop his axe and ride back toward his own lines.

Song Jiang now pointed with his whip, and his whole army swept forward, covering the field with the bodies of their enemies and rivers of blood. The Daming troops turned and ran, and ran, and ran. They

ran past the hamlet, and they even ran past their base on Locust Tree Ridge, which the bandits promptly commandeered. By the time they fled all the way back to their base at Flying Tiger Ravine, it was already dark. Only now were they able to stop and regroup. A quick headcount showed Wen Da that he had lost a third of his troops. The day, once again, belonged to the bandits.

But that respite would not last. As soon as Song Jiang gathered his forces at Locust Tree Ridge, Wu Yong told him, "The enemy is fleeing and must be scared. If we do not pursue them now, they will regroup, and then it will be hard to beat them quickly."

"Quite right," Song Jiang said. So he divided his troops into four battalions and advanced on the city that night.

Back at Flying Tiger Ravine, Wen Da was just talking with his officers about their next step when suddenly, a soldier rushed in and said that the nearby hills were on fire. Wen Da rushed out and saw countless torches lighting up the eastern hills. He quickly led his troops that way to meet the enemy when suddenly, enemy cavalry showed up from the backside of the mountain, led by Hua Rong the archer. Wen Da was caught off guard and had to fall back to Flying Tiger Ravine. But just then, countless torches appeared on the western hills as bandits led by Huyan Zhuo the Twin Staffs attacked. At the same time, Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt led another assault from the rear.

Wen Da's army fell apart and everyone ran for their lives. But as they ran, they were bombarded from a nearby hill with cannon shots unleashed by Ling (2) Zhen (4) the Heaven-Shaking Thunder. And as a final blow, they were ambushed by Lin Chong the Panther Head.

To see if Wen Da will get out of this alive, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, the bandits' victories will trigger an imperial response. So join us next time.

Thanks for listening!