

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 93.

Last time, on his second attempt to sack the city of Daming to rescue Lu Junyi, Song Jiang suddenly came down with a mysterious, life-threatening ailment. One of his chieftains, Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves, volunteered to go fetch a doctor that he once knew who could work miracles. But on his way, Zhang Shun ran into, irony of ironies given Zhang Shun's own résumé, a shady boatman who killed passengers and took their stuff. Exhausted from his travels, Zhang Shun let his guard down for a minute, and the next thing he knew, the boatman had tied him up, tossed him into the Yangzi River, and made off with his stuff. The boatman even killed his own accomplice so he didn't have to share the spoils.

While the shady boatman rows away, let's go under the water, where we find Zhang Shun all tied up. Of course, he wasn't called White Streak in the Waves for nothing. Being tossed into the water was perhaps the best thing that could've happened to him. Soon, he had used his teeth to loosen the knot of the rope that bound him, and then he swam over to the south bank. In the distance, he saw some faint light in a patch of woods, so he climbed out of the water and walked into the forest dripping wet.

After a few turns, he came upon a country tavern, and light was coming out through the cracks in the wall. Zhang Shun knocked, and an old man opened the door. Zhang Shun bowed to offer his greetings.

Sizing him up, the old man asked, "Did you get robbed on the river and swim to safety?"

"To tell you the truth, sir," Zhang Shun answered, "I was on my way to Jiankang (4,1) District. It was getting late, so I hired a boat on the other side of the river. But they turned out to be two wicked men. They took all my money and clothing and tossed me into the river. But I knew how to swim, so I got away with my life. Please help me."

The old man now led Zhang Shun into a room in the back, gave him a quilted coat, and hung his wet clothes near the fire to dry. The old man then warmed up some wine for Zhang Shun and asked him who he was and what business brought him here.

“My name is Zhang. I am friends with Doctor An (1) in Jiankang (4,1) District, and I am going to visit him.”

“You were coming from Shandong Province,” the old man said. “Did you go past Liangshan Marsh?”

“I did indeed.”

“That Chieftain Song of Liangshan never robs travelers or harms people,” the old man said. “He only carries out justice on heaven’s behalf.”

So, wow, the marketing campaign was obviously going well in these parts. Zhang Shun now said, “Chieftain Song acts with honor and loyalty. He does not harm innocent civilians, only greedy and corrupt officials.”

“That’s what I’ve heard,” the old man said. “Song Jiang’s group values honor and compassion and helps the poor and old. They are nothing like the thugs around here. If he could come here, then all the civilians would rejoice and would no longer endure abuse from our crooked overlords.”

Hearing this, Zhang Shun decided to come clean. “Grandpa, do not be alarmed,” he said. “I am none other than Zhang Shun, White Streak in the Waves. My brother Song Jiang has an ulcer on his back. I’ve been sent with 100 taels of gold to hire the doctor An (1) Daochuan (4,2). But I let my guard down and fell asleep in a boat, and two crooks tied me up and pushed me into the river. I undid the rope and swam here.”

Impressed that he had a VIP in his humble abode, the old man said hey let me introduce you to my son. Momentarily, a young man came out from the back and bowed to Zhang Shun, saying, “I have long heard of your great name, brother, but had not had the good fortune to pay my respects to you. My name is Wang (2) Dingliu (4,4). Because I am very agile and quick, people call me the Living Goddess of Lightning. I love to swim and play with weapons. I have sought out many teachers, but none would accept me, so I spend my days selling wine by the river. I know the two men who just robbed you. One is named Zhang Wang (4) the River Blocking Demon. The young thin guy is called Sun (1) the Fifth, the Oily

Mudfish. Those two scoundrels are always robbing people on the river. Don't worry, brother. Stay here for a few days. When those knaves come here to drink, I will help you get revenge."

But Zhang Shun said, "Brother, thank you for your offer, but my brother Song Jiang is pressed for time. As soon as it gets light out, I must go into town and get Doctor An. Then, I can meet you back here."

Wang Dingliu (4,4) now gave Zhang Shun some of his own clothes and welcomed him with wine. The next morning, he gave a dozen or so taels of silver to Zhang Shun and saw him off.

Zhang Shun rushed into town. He went to the foot of Elm Tree Bridge and found the healer An Daochuan (4,2) selling medicine in his doorway. Zhang Shun went over and kowtowed to him.

"Brother! We haven't seen each other in years! What wind blew you here?" An Daochuan said with surprise.

Zhang Shun recounted how he had joined the gang on Liangshan, how Song Jiang came down with a back ulcer, and how he almost lost his life coming here to find An Daochuan.

"Song Jiang is known throughout the land for his honor, so I should make a trip to help him," An Daochuan said after hearing Zhang Shun's story. "But my wife recently died, and I have no one else at home, so I can't just leave everything and go on a long trip."

Zhang Shun pleaded time and again, but all An Daochuan would say was a noncommittal "Let me think about it." That prompted more pleading from Zhang Shun, and finally, An Daochuan relented and agreed to go, but not right away. They'd set off in the morning. That left plenty of time for An Daochuan to treat Zhang Shun to dinner, and for the novel to engage in some good ol' misogyny.

As it so happened, An Daochuan was currently involved with a local prostitute with the last name Li (3), and her first name meant something like Clever Pet. She was very pretty, and An Daochuan was putty

in her hands. That night, An Daochuan brought Zhang Shun to this woman's home and asked her to prepare a meal, and Clever Pet paid her respects to Zhang Shun.

After a few rounds of wine, An Daochuan told Clever Pet, "I'm going to sleep here tonight. Tomorrow morning, I'm going to accompany this brother of mine to Shandong Province. I'll be back in 20 to 30 days, and then I'll come see you immediately."

But the woman said, "I don't want you to go. If you won't listen to me, then don't come visit me anymore!"

"But I've already packed my medicine bag and am all ready to leave tomorrow," An Daochuan said. "Don't you worry. I won't be gone long."

But Clever Pet now turned on her feminine wiles and threw herself in An Daochuan's lap, pouting, "If you leave against my wishes, then I will curse you until the flesh flies from your bones."

Sitting there and watching this in annoyance, Zhang Shun secretly wished he could swallow that woman in one gulp. As night descended, An Daochuan got drunk, and Clever Pet helped him to her room and into her bed. She then came back and said to Zhang Shun, "I have no room for you to stay here, so you'll have to go somewhere else."

But Zhang Shun insisted on staying and waiting for An Daochuan to sober up. Unable to get rid of him, Clever Pet told him to sleep in a tiny room near the front door.

That night, Zhang Shun's mind was consumed with worry, so he could not sleep. Around 7 p.m., he suddenly heard a knock at the front door. He peeked out through a crack in his room door just in time to see a man slip in and start talking to the old woman who handled Clever Pet's ... umm ... business transactions.

"You haven't been here in forever; where have you been?" Zhang Shun could hear the old woman ask. "Dr. An is passed out drunk in her room, so what can I do?"

The man replied, "I have 10 taels of gold that she can use to buy some jewelry. Please help me out and let me see her."

"Alright, go wait in my room, and I'll go fetch her," the old woman said.

As she walked off, Zhang Shun looked at the man amid the flickering candle light and realized who he was. This was none other than Zhang Wang (4) the River Blocking Demon, the shady boatman who had robbed him and tried to kill him. Well well, ain't this a coincidence.

As it so happened, An Daochuan was not the only regular that this prostitute was entertaining. Whenever this Zhang Wang (4) did some transactions on the river, he would spend the profits here. The old woman now set up some food and wine in her room and called out Clever Pet to entertain Zhang Wang there. As he watched, Zhang Shun was tempted to storm out and kill the whole lot of them with his bare hands right then and there, but he was afraid his nemesis would get away, so he waited.

A few hours passed, and it was now around midnight. The old woman, along with her two attendants, were passed out in the kitchen, while Zhang Wang and Clever Pet were still drinking in the old woman's room. Zhang Shun now quietly slipped out of his room and sneaked into the kitchen. A cleaver on the stove caught his eye, and he picked it up and glanced around the room.

In one corner, he saw the old woman passed out on a bench. He walked over and killed her with one hack of the cleaver. The commotion made the two attendants startle awake. Zhang Shun was just about to take care of them when he noticed that the cleaver's dull edge had already curled after killing JUST one person. He tossed the knife aside and picked up the wood-cutting axe that was sitting next to him. Before the two attendants could yell for help, they were dead on the floor.

Hearing noise coming from the kitchen, Clever Pet opened the door of the room she was in to see what's going on. But she ran smack dab into Zhang Shun, and before she could even speak, he had lodged his axe in her chest.

But while Zhang Shun was busy killing everyone in the house who had NOT done him harm, the one person who had wronged him — Zhang Wang — saw what was happening and jumped out a window and scaled the outer wall. Before Zhang Shun could do anything, the target of his vengeance was long gone. So uhh, way to go buddy. Liangshan is gonna have to roll out a few more ad spots to whitewash this little episode.

All was not lost, however, as far as Zhang Shun was concerned. He cut off a piece of clothing, dipped it in the blood from the bodies on the floor, and started writing something on the white walls. Once he was done, he moved over a couple steps and wrote on another spot, and another, and another, and another ....

Around 5 a.m., as the first light of morning was creeping into the house, An Daochuan started to wake up. He yawned and called for Clever Pet, but it was Zhang Shun's voice that answered.

"Brother, don't make a sound. Let me show you something."

Intrigued, An Daochuan got up and walked out of his room, and his curiosity immediately turned to terror as he was greeted by the sight of four corpses, including his booty call. He recoiled and went limp with fear, but he had not even seen all of it yet.

"Brother, look at the walls," Zhang Shun said.

An Daochuan glanced up at the walls and immediately went "Ah crap!!"

All around the house, the walls were covered with bloody writing, repeating again and again, "The killer is An Daochuan!" Really, add some creepy lighting and scary music, and this would've been a scene right out of the most cliché horror movie.

"You have ruined me!" An Daochuan exclaimed, to which Zhang Shun was like, why yes I have.

“You have two options, and it’s your choice,” Zhang Shun said to his ... friend. “Once I leave and word of this gets out, you will pay for my crime with your life. If you want to live, then go home, fetch your medicine bag, follow me to Liangshan immediately and save my brother.”

Presented with this win-win proposition, all An Daochuan could say was, “You are so reckless.” That was true, but he also didn’t really have a choice anymore. So he went home with Zhang Shun, got his medicine bag, and left the town. They headed to the country tavern run by Wang Dingliu (4,4), the young man Zhang Shun had met a couple days ago. Wang Dingliu welcomed them inside, and told them he had news.

“That Zhang Wang came here yesterday; too bad you weren’t here, brother,” he told Zhang Shun.

“I have important business at hand; I can’t worry about trifling vengeance,” replied the man who killed four innocent people last night in pursuit of said trifling vengeance.

Just as they were talking, they heard some noise outside. Wang Dingliu poked his head out and ducked back inside and said, “That knave Zhang Wang has come back!”

“Don’t startle him yet; let’s see where he’s going,” Zhang Shun whispered.

As they watched, they saw Zhang Wang walking over to the beach to inspect his boat. Wang Dingliu now called out to him, “Hey Brother Zhang! Don’t leave yet. Can you ferry a couple of my relatives to the other side?”

“Tell them to hurry!” Zhang Wang shouted back.

Inside the tavern, Zhang Shun now turned to An Daochuan and said, “Brother, trade clothes with me, and then let’s go out to his boat.”

“Why?” An Daochuan asked.

“Don’t ask; just trust me.”

Sure, trusting Zhang Shun has gone splendidly for An Daochuan so far, so why not keep on keeping on? They traded clothes, and Zhang Shun put on a large straw hat that hid his face. Wang Dingliu carried the medicine bag, and the three of them walked out to the beach.

Zhang Wang rowed his boat to shore, and the three men got on. While Zhang Wang was busy helping the other two passengers get settled, Zhang Shun walked over to the back of the boat and lifted up the plank under which Zhang Wang had hidden the knife that he used to do his dirty deeds. The knife was still there, and Zhang Shun quietly stashed it away and returned to the cabin. Zhang Wang now pushed off and started rowing toward the northern bank.

When they were about halfway across, Zhang Shun removed his hat and called out, "Boatman, come quick! Your boat is leaking!"

Zhang Wang poked his head into the cabin to see what's up, and before he knew it, Zhang Shun had grabbed him by the collar and cursed him, "You crook! Do you recognize me from a couple days ago?!"

Zhang Wang indeed recognized him and did not dare to make a peep.

"You rogue! You stole my hundred taels of gold and tried to kill me!" Zhang Shun continued. "Where is that skinny young accomplice of yours?!"

"Hero, I got greedy when I saw your gold and didn't want to share with him. So I killed him and tossed him into the river," Zhang Wang replied.

"Do you know who I am?!" Zhang Shun barked.

"I don't, but please hero, spare me!"

"I was born on the bank of the Sundown River and resided at the foot of Little Melon Hill, making my living selling fish. Who does not know me? After I made a ruckus in Jiangzhou Prefecture, I went to Liangshan to follow Song Jiang as he strides across the land. Who does not fear me? Yet you lured me into your boat, tied me up, and tossed me into the river. If I didn't know how to swim, I would be dead! Now that I've run into you again, I cannot spare you!"



As he spoke, Zhang Shun threw his foe into the cabin and tied his feet and hands together. He then lifted up Zhang Wang and chucked him into the water, saying, "I will spare you the knife, too!"

With a splash, Zhang Wang sank to the bottom of the river. As Wang Dingliu watched him sink, he could only sigh. Maybe he's thinking, "Welp, I guess I'm an accomplice to something now too."

Soon, they had reached the other side of the river. Zhang Shun scoured the cabin and found the gold that had been taken from him, plus some loose silver. He packed all this up and the three men disembarked. Zhang Shun now said to Wang Dingliu, "Brother, I will never forget your kindness. If you would not spurn us, then pack up your things and come with your father to Liangshan and join us. What do you think?"

"Brother, your words match my thoughts exactly," Wang Dingliu replied. They then took leave of each other. While Zhang Shun and An Daochuan headed north, Wang Dingliu got back on the boat and returned home to pack.

On the north bank, Zhang Shun and An Daochuan started rushing toward Liangshan, but that An Daochuan was a refined man not used to traveling. They had not walked but 10 miles or so before he was exhausted. So Zhang Shun brought him to a village tavern for some wine and rest. As they were drinking, a man walked in from outside and called out, "Brother, why are you taking your sweet time?!"

This was none other than Dai Zong the Magic Traveler, disguised as a merchant. Zhang Shun quickly introduced him to An Daochuan and asked about Song Jiang. Dai Zong said, "Brother Song is passing in and out of consciousness and cannot eat or drink anything. He's on the brink of death."

Zhang Shun's tears fell like rain when he heard that. An Daochuan now asked, "How is his complexion?"

“Haggard,” Dai Zong replied. “He groans constantly and the pain never stops. He won’t last much longer.”

“If he can still feel pain, then I can cure him,” An Daochuan said. “But I fear I may not make it there in time.”

Well, I guess it’s a good thing you are talking to the Flash here. Dai Zong immediately took out two charms and strapped them to An Daochuan’s legs. He then picked up An Daochuan’s medicine bag and said to Zhang Shun, “You can follow at your own pace; I’ll go on ahead with the doctor.” He then worked his magic and flew down the road with An Daochuan.

Once they were gone, Zhang Shun stayed at the village tavern for a few days. Then, he saw Wang Dingliu walking past with his father and a bundle. Zhang Shun greeted them, told them that An Daochuan had gone on ahead with Dai Zong, and the three now traveled to Liangshan together.

Meanwhile, Dai Zong had rushed An Daochuan back to Liangshan, where the chieftains welcomed him and rushed him to Song Jiang’s bedside. There, they found Song Jiang barely breathing. An Daochuan checked his pulse and said, “Chieftains, don’t worry. His pulse is fine. His body may seem depressed, but he’ll be ok. He will recover in 10 days, and that’s no boast.”

Everyone bowed to thank the healer. An Daochuan now burned some herbs over the ulcer to draw out the poison and then administered some medicine. Within five days, color returned to Song Jiang’s complexion, and he started to regain his strength and was able to eat and drink again. And within 10 days, although his ulcer was still healing, he was eating and drinking like normal. Oh by the way kids, don’t try this at home.

Anyway, around this time, Zhang Shun returned with Wang Dingliu and his father. They paid their respects to Song Jiang and recounted Zhang Shun’s adventures on the trip, which prompted everyone to sigh at what a close call it was.

Now that he was no longer on death's doorstep, Song Jiang began talking with Wu Yong about resuming the siege on Daming Prefecture, where Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu were still in jail. But An Daochuan said, "General, your wound has not yet healed completely; you must not move around too much, or it will set back your recovery."

Wu Yong also said to Song Jiang, "Brother, no need for you to worry. Just rest and rebuild your essence. I may be untalented, but now that spring is here, I will be able to crack that city, rescue Mr. Lu and Brother Shi, and capture the adulterous couple. How does that sound?"

"If you can make that happen, then I would die content," Song Jiang said.

Wu Yong now told him, "It is Liangshan's great fortune that you are ok and we now have Dr. An here to tend to you. While you were sick, I sent many people to Daming Prefecture to gather intel. Governor Liang is on pins and needles worrying about our army attacking his city. I also sent men to post messages throughout the city and the surrounding towns and villages, announcing to the civilians that they need not worry because our beef is not with them. So now Governor Liang is scared out of his mind. In the capital, ever since Guan Sheng surrendered to us, Premiere Cai has not dared to mention the matter to the emperor and is now advocating for granting us amnesty and making peace. So he has been sending Governor Liang one letter after another, instructing him to keep Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu alive so as to keep that option viable."

Hearing this, Song Jiang wanted to mobilize troops right away to attack Daming again. Wu Yong said, "The New Year and the Lantern Festival are approaching. Daming Prefecture traditionally puts on a huge celebration. We can capitalize on that opportunity. First send men into the city to lie in wait, and then attack with our army from the outside. By coordinating from the inside and out, we will sack the city."

"That is a brilliant plan; please give us instructions," Song Jiang said.

"The most important thing is to have someone light a fire inside the city as the signal," Wu Yong said. "Which brother is up to the task?"

One chieftain immediately volunteered, and this was the master thief Shi (2) Qian (1), the Flea on a Drum.

“I had been to Daming in my youth,” he said. “There is a tall tavern in the city called the Jade Cloud Mansion. All told, it has over 100 dining rooms. It will no doubt be hopping on the night of the Lantern Festival. I can slip into the city, and on the night of the festival, I will go light a fire atop that tavern as the signal, and then you can mobilize our forces to raid the prison.”

“That’s what I was thinking, too,” Wu Yong said. “You should depart tomorrow. At 7 p.m. on the night of the festival, start the fire, and you will have rendered great service.”

The next day, Wu Yong dispatched a bunch more chieftains. The hunter brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao were to enter the city disguised as ... umm ... hunters selling game to officials. When they see the signal fire on the night of the festival, they were to camp out in front of the government office and stop any officer or soldier who tried to report it.

The brothers Kong Ming and Kong Liang were to enter the city dressed as beggars and hang out in the busy parts of town, ready to provide backup once the fire gets going. Li Ying (4) the Striking Hawk and Shi (3) Jin (4) the Nine Tattoo Dragons would enter the city as merchants and hole up near the east gate. When the fire is lit, they would cut down the guards by the east gate so as to secure that exit as their escape route.

Next, Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk and Wu Song the Pilgrim would go to Daming as traveling monks and seek residence in a monastery. They were responsible for clearing an exit path through the south gate.

The uncle-and-nephew tandem of Zou (1) Yuan (1) the Forest Dragon and Zou Run (4) the One-Horned Dragon were to enter the city as lantern merchants and stay at an inn. Their job was to provide support at the prison.

Liu Tang the Red-haired Devil and Yang Xiong the Sick Guan Suo would be disguised as cops and stay near the prefectural headquarters, where they were to stop any officers trying to report the news of all hell breaking loose.

The Daoist priest Gongsun Sheng would enter the city disguised as ... a Daoist priest, with Ling Zhen the Heaven-Shaking Thunder disguised as his acolyte. They would bring along a bunch of artillery supplies, find some quiet corner in the city, and then let loose with their cannon shots once they see the signal fire.

Meanwhile, Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves would accompany Yan Qing the Prodigy and enter the city through the water gate. They would make for Lu Junyi's home and apprehend his backstabbing wife and steward.

The three female chieftains, Hu Sanniang the Ten Feet of Steel, Sun Erniang the Female Yaksha, and Gu Dasao the Female Tiger, would enter the city with their husbands, disguised as couples from the countryside attending the festival. Their job was to start a fire in Lu Junyi's home.

Finally, Chai Jin the Little Whirlwind would enter the city with Yue (4) He (2) the Iron Whistle, both dressed as officers. They were to go to the home of the prison superintendent Cai Fu (2) and make sure that he keeps Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu alive in prison.

So the plan was set. To see how it will play out, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, it will be a Lantern Festival for the ages. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!