

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 94.

Last time, the Liangshan bandits, trying one more time to rescue Lu Junyi from Daming Prefecture, had laid out an elaborate plan to infiltrate and sack the city during the Lantern Festival on the 15th day of the first month of the new year. While our heroes were busy plotting, inside Daming Prefecture, Governor Liang had summoned his commanders Li (3) Cheng (2) and Wen (2) Da (2), along with the prefect of Daming and his other officials to discuss a pressing matter — the giant celebration that usually took place on the night of the Lantern Festival.

“We usually have a huge lantern festival and celebrate with the civilians; it’s on par with what they do in the capital,” Governor Liang said. “But this year, we have been attacked twice by the Liangshan bandits. I’m worried that if we hold a festival, there could be trouble. I am thinking about foregoing the celebration this year. What do you all think?”

The commander Wen Da said, “The bandits quietly retreated and only left a bunch of anonymous flyers. They must be out of ideas. My lord, there’s no need to worry. If we don’t hold the celebration this year, those knaves will laugh at us when they hear about it. You should send out a decree and tell the civilians that we will put on an even bigger show than in years past. In the center of the city, we should erect two hills of lanterns like they do in the capital. We should celebrate for five straight nights, from the 13th through the 17th, all night long, like they do in the capital. Tell the prefect to ensure that all the civilians participate, and your lordship should take part as well to celebrate with the people. I will personally lead an army outside the city and set up camp at Flying Tiger Ravine to guard against any enemy schemes. Also, have Commander Li Cheng lead the armored cavalry and patrol the outskirts of the city so as to ensure the people are not disturbed.”

For reasons beyond me, Governor Liang decided that this was a great plan, and so he put out a notice and told the whole city that the party will go on like usual, bigger and better in fact!

Now, Daming Prefecture, as we mentioned before, was the largest city in Hebei Province and a huge hub of commerce. So people of every trade flooded into the city as soon as they heard that the party was on.

On the streets and in the lanes, local officials inspected the festival preparations every day. The wealthy families competed with each other to put on the most extravagant lantern displays, going as far as 100 miles away to buy beautiful lanterns. A bunch of vendors also came into the city to sell lanterns. Families built special sheds in front of their doors, where they hung up their best lanterns and set off fireworks. Inside the courtyards, other sheds were erected, decorated with beautiful screens, revolving lights, paintings by famous artists, rare antiques, and intricate toys. Along major streets and narrow lanes, every household lit lanterns, partly because they were required to.

By the prefectural offices, a hill was erected, topped by two dragons made of red and gold paper. Every piece of scale on these dragons was a lantern, and the dragons even sprayed water from their mouths. And the bridge leading to and from the prefectural offices was surrounded by countless lanterns. Another hill was erected in front of the Bronze Buddha Monastery. At the top of this hill coiled a green dragon, decorated with thousands of flower lanterns.

Yet another hill was erected in front of the Jade Cloud Mansion, and this one had a white dragon perched atop it, surrounded by countless lanterns as well. Now, this Jade Cloud Mansion was renowned as the finest tavern in the whole province. It was three stories high, with carved beams and decorated pillars. This gorgeous structure boasted more than 100 rooms and resounded with music and song day and night.

Throughout the city, even the monasteries and temples joined in the fun, as they were all festooned with lanterns in celebration of a prosperous new year. And the author ends this long description of the festival preparations with the observation that it goes without saying that the displays in the red light district were even more lavish.

When scouts reported this back to Liangshan, the strategist Wu Yong was ecstatic because, hey, can you guys make this any easier for us? He rushed off to tell Song Jiang the details, and Song Jiang wanted to personally lead the attack on the city. But his doctor, the healer An (1) Daochuan (4,2), said, “Your wound hasn’t fully healed yet; you must not move lightly. If you get too worked up, it will be hard to achieve a complete recovery.”

Wu Yong told Song Jiang that he would take care of it, and then he mobilized eight battalions, half of them cavalry and the other half infantry. Each cavalry unit was led by four chieftains, while each infantry unit was led by three chieftains. Each unit would set out for Daming along a different route and converge on the city on the 15th day of the first month. The rest of the chieftains, including Song Jiang, would stay on Liangshan.

Now, let’s follow the guy who was to literally light the match that would ignite Liangshan’s party-crashing plans. Shi (2) Qian (1) the Flea on a Drum had set out for Daming Prefecture ahead of everyone else. Being a master thief, he did not take the road into the city. Instead, he waited till it was dark and scaled the walls. But the inns inside the city would not take in single travelers. So Shi Qian just roamed the streets by day and slept under the altar table in a temple by night.

On the 13th day of the month, Shi Qian was walking around the streets and watching the civilians hang up their lanterns when out of the corner of his eye he spotted two hunters walking down the road with fresh game. These were none other than the brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, sent into the city as part of the plan. He also saw two other chieftains, Du (4) Qian (1) the Skyscraper and Song (4) Wan (4) the Giant in the Clouds, walk out from one of the entertainment houses.

Shi Qian now walked over to the Jade Cloud Mansion and took a spin. Around there, he saw one of the Kong brothers, Kong Ming, disguised as a beggar, wearing a tattered goat skin, holding a stick in one hand and a bowl in the other, asking passers-by for money.

Shi Qian walked behind Kong Ming and whispered, "Brother, you don't look like a beggar at all, what with your white skin and fair complexion. There are lots of cops around. If they see through your disguise, it will ruin our plan. You should stay out of sight."

Just then, another beggar appeared from behind a wall. This was the other Kong brother, Kong Liang.

"Brother, you are showing your white face around here, too," Shi Qian said. "You also don't look like someone who has gone hungry. You would get busted for sure."

In that very second, two men grabbed hold of them from behind and said, "What the hell are you up to?!"

Shi Qian turned around and saw that it was two of their own, the chieftains Yang Xiong the Sick Guan Suo and Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil, disguised as cops.

"You scared me half to death!" Shi Qian told them.

"Come with us," Yang Xiong said.

The group now made their way over to a quiet corner, and Yang Xiong immediately lectured Shi Qian and the Kong brothers, "Don't you guys know any better? How could you stand there and talk? Good thing it was the two of us who saw you. If it were some smart cops, that would've ruined our brother's grand scheme. Now that we've seen you, there's no need for you guys to appear on the streets anymore."

Kong Ming said, "Zou (1) Yuan (1) and Zou Run (4) are selling lanterns on the street. Lu Zhishen and Wu Song are staying at a temple outside the city. There's no need to say much more; let's all tend to our own tasks."

Their conversation thus concluded, they walked back out onto the street. As they approached a temple, they saw a priest coming out. This was none other than Gongsun Sheng the Dragon in the Clouds, and behind him was Ling Zhen the Heaven-shaking Thunder, disguised as an acolyte. The seven men gave each other a nod as they passed, and then they dispersed.

The next day, the commander Wen Da led an army out to Flying Tiger Ravine as planned, and his comrade Li Cheng led 500 armored cavalry to patrol the outskirts of the city. The day after that, it was the 15th, the day of the Lantern Festival. As dusk fell, all the streets began to light up with lanterns.

As darkness began to creep in, at the city prison, the superintendent Cai (4) Fu (2) the Iron Arm told his younger brother Cai (4) Qing (4) to watch over the prison while he ran home for an errand. No sooner had Cai Fu walked into his house did two men follow him in, one dressed as an officer and the other as a servant. Under the flickering lanterns, Cai Fu could see that the officer was actually the Liangshan chieftain Chai Jin the Little Whirlwind. The servant was the chieftain Yue (4) He (2) the Iron Whistle.

Cai Fu invited them inside and offered them wine, but Chai Jin said, "Thank you, but no need for wine. We are here on urgent business. We cannot thank you enough for watching after Mr. Lu and our brother Shi Xiu. Tonight, I would like to pay them a visit in prison while everyone is celebrating. I hope you can take us there. Please do not refuse."

Cai Fu was smart enough to guess what the deal was and that this really wasn't a request he could refuse if he wanted to still be alive come morning. So he said ah the heck with it and fetched some old guard outfits for the two chieftains to change into and then took them to the prison.

Around 7 p.m., three country couples entered the city among the throngs of people flooding in from the east gate. These were Liangshan's three female chieftains and their husbands. Meanwhile, the priest Gongsun Sheng and his fake acolyte Ling (2) Zhen (4) the Heaven-Shaking Thunder made their way to the

temple of the city god, which was next to the prefectural offices, and sat down on the ground. The uncle-and-nephew tandem of Zou (1) Yuan (1) and Zou Run (4), who were disguised as lantern peddlers, walked the streets hawking their wares. The chieftains Du Qian and Song Wan, disguised as merchants, each pushed a cart to outside Governor Liang's residence on a major thoroughfare by the east gate and hid among the crowd. Liu Tang and Yang Xiong, disguised as guards, carrying wooden staffs and hidden daggers, sat down on both sides of the bridge leading to the prefectural offices. Meanwhile, Yan Qing the Prodigy and Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves swam into the city by going under the water gate, and then they found a quiet hiding spot.

Soon, the drums sounded to signal that it was now 9 p.m. And we find Shi Qian the Flea on a Drum walking up the stairs inside the Jade Cloud Mansion, carrying a basket. This basket was filled with fire-starting material, covered up with velvet ornaments for ladies' hair. As he made his way upstairs, he saw that in the tavern's numerous dining rooms, instruments were playing and the young and wealthy were having raucous parties. Pretending to be selling hair ornaments, Shi Qian made his way from one room to the next. Outside one of the rooms, he ran into the hunter brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao, pretending to be selling game.

"It's past 7 p.m. Why is there no movement outside the city?" Shi Qian whispered to them.

"We were standing in front of the tavern just now," Xie Zhen said. "We saw scouts ride by. That probably means our army has arrived. You just go take care of your business."

Just then, a commotion broke out in front of the tavern and they could hear someone shouting, "The Liangshan bandits' forces are outside the west gate!"

"Hurry," Xie Zhen said to Shi Qian. "We will go provide backup outside the government office."

By the time the Xie brothers made their way over to the government offices, they saw a tattered squadron of soldiers fleeing back inside the city, shouting, "Commander Wen Da's camp was raided! The Liangshan bandits are right outside the city!"

At that moment, the other commander, Li Cheng, was patrolling the city walls. When he heard this, he hurried over to the government offices and mobilized his troops. He sent out orders for the city gates to be shut and the city defense to snap to. Around that time, the prefect of the city, Prefect Wang, had also rushed over to the government offices, having heard the news while patrolling the streets.

While all this was happening, Governor Liang was at home, drinking and chilling. When he first heard that Liangshan forces were outside the city, he only half believed it. But within the next hour, one urgent dispatch after another arrived, and by now he was scared out of his mind. Just then, he saw a huge fire roaring atop the Jade Cloud Mansion in the distance, as the flames surged so high toward the heavens that they seemed to threaten the moon.

Governor Liang hurriedly mounted his horse and was just about to go have a closer look when suddenly, two big men pushed two carts out into the street and blocked his path. They then grabbed a lantern and chucked it toward the carts. The carts instantly burst into flames. As Governor Liang tried to make his way out through the east gate of the city, he saw another two guys stomping toward the gate with broadswords in hand. These were the chieftains Li Ying (4) the Striking Hawk and Shi (3) Jin (4) the Nine Tattoo Dragons. The guards at the gate saw how ferociously they were charging and tried to flee, but before they could even budge, a dozen or so guards had already been cut down. The two guys who set the carts ablaze, Du Qian and Song Wan, now joined the killing spree, as the four chieftains took over the east gate.

Seeing this go down, Governor Liang turned and fled with his entourage toward the south gate. But before he could get there, word came from the south gate that a big fat monk wielding a steel Buddhist staff and a fierce-looking pilgrim wielding twin sabers were charging into the city from that direction.

So Governor Liang turned and fled to the government offices, but there, he saw the hunter brothers Xie Zhen and Xie Bao stabbing folks left and right with their tridents, so he turned and fled to the prefectural offices. He arrived just in time to see Prefect Wang step out onto the street and get smacked on his head by the staffs of Liu Tang and Yang Xiong. They hit him so hard that his skull was smashed in and his eyes popped out, and he dropped dead on the spot as all his officers fled.

Governor Liang now turned and rode toward the west gate, but he could hear earth-shattering cannon blasts ringing out from the temple of the city god. Amid the chaos, the uncle-and-nephew team of Zou Yuan and Zou Run started setting the eaves of houses ablaze with torches on long bamboo poles. From the southern brothel district charged Hu Sanniang the Ten Feet of Steel and her husband Wang Ying the Stumpy Tiger, joined by Gu Dasao the Female Tiger and her husband Sun Xin (1). In front of the Bronze Buddha Monastery, Sun Erniang the Female Yaksha and her husband Zhang Qing the Gardener climbed up the hill of lanterns and set the thing on fire. Amid all the mayhem, the civilians ran for their lives, crying like lost souls as a dozen or so fires broke out all over the city and lit up the night sky.

Governor Liang now hurried over to the west gate, where he met the commander Li Cheng and his army. They rushed to the top of the walls by the gate and went to the sentry tower. As they looked down, they saw an army outside the city wall, with banners that said "General Huyan Zhuo". This force charged right at the gate, making it impossible for the governor to leave the city through there. So, Governor Liang and Li Cheng now hid under the north gate, where they saw countless torches and men sprinting toward the gate from outside, led by Lin Chong the Panther Head. So Governor Liang and company moved to the east gate, but they were met there by the infantry unit led by Mu (4) Hong (2) the Unrestrained. That left just the south gate, but when they made it to that gate, they saw that the drawbridge outside was lit up by torches as Li Kui the Black Whirlwind was stomping this way, stripped to the waist and with teeth gnashing.



By now, Governor Liang had nowhere else to go, so the commander Li Cheng led the way and cleared a path for him out of the city. No sooner had they gotten out though did they hear the sounds of battle surging from their left as a huge force led by Guan Sheng the Great Saber appeared. As Guan Sheng raised his Green Dragon Saber and made for the governor, Li Cheng rode forth to take him on while Governor Liang kept running. Li Cheng had no heart for battle, so he soon turned and ran as well. As he rode away, three bandit units were in hot pursuit, and suddenly, Li Cheng's lieutenant dropped dead to the ground, courtesy of an arrow from Hua Rong the archer. That gave Li Cheng even more reason to beat it, but not before he ran into another bandit force, this one led by Qin Ming the Fiery Thunderbolt. By the time Li Cheng and Governor Liang finally got away, they had lost most of their men.

As they continued to flee, they ran into the tattered troops led by the other commander, Wen Da. They combined their forces and kept traveling south. But before long, they were hit again by a few more thousand bandits lying in wait. Li Cheng led the way and Wen Da brought up the rear, protecting Governor Liang in the center as they rammed their way through and fled west.

Meanwhile, back inside the city, the chieftains Du Qian and Song Wan busied themselves with slaughtering Governor Liang's household. Liu Tang and Yang Xiong, meanwhile, went to cleanse Prefect Wang's home.

Inside the prison, Chai Jin the Little Whirlwind and Yue He the Iron Whistle saw the fires raging outside and immediately said to the superintendent Cai Fu and his brother Cai Qing, "Do you not see that? What are you waiting for?"

Before they could even react, the front door of the prison burst open and in stomped the chieftains Zou Yuan and Zou Run, shouting, "The Liangshan heroes are here in full force! Bring out Magnate Lu and Brother Shi Xiu!"

Just then, from the roof in the back, the brothers Kong Ming and Kong Liang jumped down to join the party. By now, it wasn't up to the Cai brothers anymore. Chai Jin removed the cangues from Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu and said to Cai Fu, "You, come with me right now to protect your family."

The whole group left the prison. While Cai Fu and Cai Qing went with Chai Jin to protect their family, Lu Junyi, Shi Xiu, and the other four chieftains went to Lu Junyi's home to catch his backstabbing steward Li Gu (4) and his unfaithful wife, Lady Jia (3).

Li Gu had already heard that the bandits had breached the city and was feeling mighty worried, so he had talked it over with Lady Jia and they packed a bundle of valuables and fled out the backdoor. They rushed over to the city wall, and made their way down to the riverbank to find shelter.

But just then, a roar came from the bank, "Hey you harlot! Where are you running to?!"

This was the chieftain Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves. Panicked, Li Gu jumped into a boat and hid in its cabin. But no sooner had he set foot inside did a man reach out and grab him by the chest, shouting, "Li Gu, do you recognize me?!"

Li Gu could tell from the voice that it was Yan Qing the Prodigy, and he pleaded, "Brother Yan, there's never been bad blood between you and me. Don't drag me back onto the bank!"

Yeah, good luck with that. Yan Qing dragged Li Gu back onto land, where Zhang Shun had already caught Lady Jia. They now brought their prisoners over toward the east gate.

Meanwhile, Lu Junyi got home and could not find Li Gu or Lady Jia. So he told his entourage to pack up all the valuables and put them on carts to be taken back to Liangshan. At the same time, Chai Jin was helping the Cai brothers pack up their families and relocate to Liangshan as well. Cai Fu said to him, "My lord, please save the civilians. Don't let them be harmed."

So Chai Jin went and found Wu Yong the strategist and relayed the request. Wu Yong then sent out an urgent command, ordering the bandit forces to refrain from harming the innocent civilians. Of course, by then, half the city had been killed or injured. So uh, way to go, guys.

As the light of morning fell on the city, the streets were shrouded in smoke while the buildings were still smoldering. Wu Yong and Chai Jin now sounded the gong to signal an end to the fighting, and all the chieftains converged at the government offices. While Lu Junyi and Shi Xiu told everyone how the Cai brothers kept them alive in prison, Yan Qing and Zhang Shun arrived with Lu Junyi's archenemies in tow. He told Yan Qing to keep them bound, and that he would take care of them later.

Wu Yong now ordered notices to be posted to assure the civilians that no harm would come to them, well, I guess no MORE harm would come to them. He also sent out men to put out the fires. The families of the governor, the prefect, and the two commanders were either dead or had fled, and the bandits just left it at that. Probably because they were busy opening the city's storehouses. They loaded all the money, fabric, and other valuables onto carts to be taken back to Liangshan. They then opened the grain storehouses as well. They handed out some grain to all the civilians and carted off the rest. With everything packed up, they threw the steward Li Gu and Lady Jia into prisoner carts and marched back to Liangshan, singing victory songs the whole way.

When they arrived back at Liangshan, Song Jiang had already gotten word of their victory, so he and the other chieftains were waiting at the foot of the mountain. The entire party went up to the Hall of Loyalty and Honor, where Song Jiang kowtowed to Lu Junyi, prompting Lu Junyi to return the courtesy.

"All we wanted to do was to invite you to join us in the name of honor," Song Jiang said. "But who knew you would encounter such calamity and almost lose your life? I feel as though I have been stabbed

in the heart. But thanks to heaven's blessings, we are able to meet again today, and my lifelong wish is fulfilled."

Now, I could only imagine all the things that Lu Junyi was thinking about saying to this group right now, after everything he endured thanks to them. But he bowed and said, "Thanks to your prestige and all the chieftains' virtues, you saved my unworthy life. Even with my life I cannot repay you enough."

He then introduced the Cai brothers and explained how they kept him alive, and that induced a round of thank-yous and we-are-not-worthies.

After that, Song Jiang asked Lu Junyi to take the command chair, but Lu Junyi bowed and said, "Who am I that I would dare to assume the leadership? It would be my greatest fortune if I can follow you as a mere pawn and repay you for rescuing me."

Song Jiang, however, kept insisting, and Lu Junyi begged off time and again. By now, somebody had had it with all this back-and-forth.

Li Kui the Black Whirlwind shouted to Song Jiang, "Brother, if you put someone else in charge, then I'm going to start some trouble!"

That was followed by Wu Song the Pilgrim, who shouted, "Brother, you keep trying to give the leadership to someone else. It's going to make all of us lose heart."

Song Jiang reproached them both, declaring, "What do you know?! Say no more!"

But Lu Junyi could see which way the wind was blowing, and he immediately bowed and said, "Brother, if you keep insisting on yielding the leadership to me, I will not be able to rest easy."

Li Kui now cut in and said, "What's the big problem? Brother Song can be the emperor, Magnate Lu can be the prime minister, and we can all be high officials. Then let's charge into the capital and take that damn throne! Won't that be much better than messing around here?!"

To see how this leadership dilemma will get resolved, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we'll check back in at Daming Prefecture as the survivors of the Lantern Festival Massacre pick up the pieces. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!