

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 95.

Last time, our bandit heroes made a mess in Daming Prefecture on the night of the Lantern Festival and rescued Lu Junyi. But when they got back to their base, Song Jiang kept insisting on yielding the leadership to Lu Junyi. Not only was Lu Junyi not having any of that, neither were many of the bandit chieftains.

When we left off, Li Kui the Black Whirlwind had just suggested that they should just go sack the capital and overthrow the emperor. Song Jiang flew into a rage and cursed him. The strategist Wu Yong stepped in and made peace, saying, "Let's have Mr. Lu go get some rest in the east quarters. We will treat him as an honored guest. Once he has rendered some service to the base, then we can revisit the matter of yielding the leadership."

Only now did Song Jiang relent, and he arranged for quarters for Lu Junyi and his loyal follower Yan Qing the Prodigy. The Cai brothers, who had kept Lu Junyi safe while he was in jail, also got settled in. Meanwhile, the bandits had also freshly relocated the family of the recent recruit Guan Sheng the Great Saber. All this called for a huge celebration, so the bandits did what they did best and threw a huge party to reward the troops for a job well done. All the lackeys partied within their own units, while all the chieftains made merry in the Hall of Loyal and Honor.

There was, however, one piece of business they had to attend to. Lu Junyi rose and said to Song Jiang, "We have captured that adulterous couple and are awaiting your orders on how to deal with them."

He was referring to his backstabbing steward Li Gu and his less-than-faithful wife Lady Jia, who had conspired to frame him for treason. Song Jiang chuckled and ordered the men to bring those two out of their prisoner carts and into the hall. They tied Li Gu to the column on the left and Lady Jia to the column on the right.

“No need to ask them about their crime,” Song Jiang said. “Mr. Lu, you may deal with them as you see fit.”

Lu Junyi stomped over with dagger in hand and cursed the two before he cut out their hearts and sliced them to bits. The remains were thrown out into the wild. His bloody revenge thus concluded, Lu Junyi thanked all the chieftains, and they all sang his praises.

While Liangshan was busy celebrating, let's go check back in at the smoldering ruins of Daming Prefecture. Governor Liang, having fled and survived the night, got word that the bandits had left. So he returned to the city with his commanders Li Cheng and Wen Da, along with some tattered troops. Most of the people in the city had been killed or injured, and the survivors were weeping nonstop. As for the relief forces from neighboring cities, they had all gone back home when they got word that the bandits had already departed.

Miraculously, the governor's wife survived the slaughter by hiding in their rear garden. She now told her husband to send word of the debacle to her father, Premier Cai, so that he could mobilize imperial forces to attack the bandits. So Governor Liang wrote up a report, saying that 5,000-some civilians had been killed, and countless more injured. As for the troops, some 30,000 had been killed.

The messenger arrived in the capital within a day and went to see Premier Cai. He presented the premier with the letter and relayed that the bandits were now out of control. Now, Premier Cai had originally been harboring thoughts of granting the bandits clemency, thinking that his son-in-law could get the credit for bringing the bandits to heel and he himself would look good, too. But with things as they were, he could no longer keep the bandits' deeds covered up, so now he wholeheartedly advocated for military action instead.

The next morning at 5 a.m., the imperial court assembled, and Premier Cai led all the officials into court. There, he informed the emperor of the situation, and the emperor was shocked.

One high-level official stepped forth and said, “When we previously sent troops to attack these bandits, they met with disaster, likely due to the bandits’ geographical advantage. In my foolish opinion, why don’t we offer them clemency. That way they can serve the court and help defend our borders.”

But Premier Cai flew into a rage. “You are a high official, and yet you dare to flaunt imperial rule! A reckless wretch like you deserve to die!”

The emperor was also nonplussed by this guy’s suggestion, and so that guy got stripped of his position and was busted down to civilian. That ensured no one else at court would dare to speak of peace with the bandits.

The emperor now asked Premier Cai, “These bandits are running wild; who can apprehend them?”

“Such two-bit thieves do not warrant mobilizing a huge army,” Premier Cai said. “I would like to recommend two commandants from Lingzhou (2,1) Prefecture. One is named Shan (4) Tinggui (2,4), and the other is named Wei (4) Dingguo (4,2). Please dispatch an envoy to deliver an urgent imperial decree to mobilize them and their forces to cleanse the marsh right away.”

The emperor immediately sent the envoy with his decree. But after court adjourned for the day, all the other officials went away snickering under their breaths.

Meanwhile on Liangshan, Song Jiang and company were in the midst of a multi-day feast to welcome Lu Junyi and to celebrate the hefty loot they hauled back from Daming Prefecture. In describing the scale of this feast, the novel said “even though they were not cooking dragons or phoenixes, there were nonetheless mountains of meat and seas of wine.”

Once everyone was half drunk, the strategist Wu Yong said, “To save Mr. Lu, we sacked Daming Prefecture, killed and injured its residents, raided its storehouses, and sent Governor Liang fleeing the city. How can he not report this to the court? And his father-in-law is the premier, so there’s no way he would let this go. They will surely mobilize an army and come attack us.”

“You’re quite right,” Song Jiang said. “Why don’t we send people to the capital to see what’s going on, so we can be prepared?”

Wu Yong smiled and said, “I already sent someone. They’ll be back soon.”

A little later during the feast, Wu Yong’s spy came back and reported, “Governor Liang indeed sent a report to the court, and they are going to send an army to attack our ase. A high minister suggested that the court grant us amnesty, but he was scolded by Cai Jing and stripped of his position. Cai Jing has asked the emperor to dispatch a decree to Lingzhou (2,1) Prefecture and order the commandants Shan (4) Tinggui (2,4) and Wei (4) Dingguo (4,2) to lead their troops here.”

“How should we counter?” Song Jiang asked.

Wu Yong simply said, “We’ll just catch them both once they get here.”

At that, Guan Sheng the Great Saber rose and said, “I have received so much kindness since I came here and have yet to render any service. I was well acquainted with these two commandants. Shan Tinggui is skilled at drowning armies with water, so people call him the General of Sacred Water. Wei Dingguo is well-versed in attacking with fire and employs flamethrowers on the battlefield, and he’s called the General of Holy Fire. I may be untalented, but I am willing to lead 5,000 men and cut them off in their home prefecture before they set out. If they are willing to surrender, then I will bring them here. If they refuse, then I will bring them here as prisoners and present them to you. There’s no need for everyone else to exert themselves. What do you think?”

Song Jiang was delighted and immediately told Xuan (1) Zan (4) and Hao (3) Siwen (1,2), the two chieftains who used to be Guan Sheng’s lieutenants, to go with him. Guan Sheng took 5,000 troops and set out the next day, and Song Jiang and company saw them off at Golden Sand Beach.

Once Guan Sheng left, everyone else returned to the Hall of Loyalty and Honor. Now, Wu Yong said to Song Jiang, “We cannot be absolutely certain of Guan Sheng’s intentions on this campaign. We should send another top general to go serve as backup and to keep an eye on him.”

But Song Jiang said, "In my view, Guan Sheng is brimming with unwavering honor. There's no need to be so paranoid."

"I just worry he might not be how you imagine him," Wu Yong pressed. "We can have Lin Chong and Yang Zhi lead another army, with Sun Li and Huang Xin as their lieutenants, and take another 5,000 men to follow Guan Sheng."

Li Kui the Black Whirlwind now popped to his feet and said, "I want to go too!"

"We don't need you on this mission; there are other good generals for the task," Song Jiang said.

"If I get bored, I get sick," Li Kui retorted. "Even if you won't let me go on this mission, I'll still go for a stroll by myself."

"If you don't obey my orders, I will have your head!" Song Jiang barked. That shut Li Kui up, and he walked out of the hall pouting. Meanwhile, Lin Chong the Panther Head and Yang Zhi the Blue-faced Beast set out with the reinforcements.

The next day, a lackey rushed to see Song Jiang and said, "Li Kui left last night around 9 p.m. with his twin axes, and no one knows where he ran off to!"

Song Jiang lamented, "My words rubbed him the wrong way last night. He must have left to find another place to call home."

Wu Yong consoled him, "Brother, it's not so. He may be a brute, but he is very honorable. He's not going anywhere else. He'll be back in a couple days. Don't worry."

Still, Song Jiang couldn't help but fret, so he first sent Dai Zong to go chase after Li Kui. Then, he dispatched four other chieftains to go and search for him in every direction.

So, where did Li Kui go? Well, he snuck down the mountain in the middle of the night and headed toward Lingzhou Prefecture along the backroads. He was thinking, "There's no need to send so many

troops to deal with two BS generals. Let me storm into that city and cut them both with one swing of my axe. That'll surprise my brother, and it'll make him look good!"

After traveling for half a day, Li Kui was starving. But he left in such a hurry that he forgot to pack any travel money. And it's been a while since he robbed anyone, so he decided to do the slightly less egregious thing.

Soon, he saw a country tavern on the side of the road. He went in, sat down, and ordered three horns of wine and two catties of meat. He gobbled it all down and got up to go, but the waiter was like, uhh, not so fast. Aren't we forgetting something?

"Let me go a little farther down the road and do a little business, and then I'll come back and pay you," Li Kui said as he tried to walk away.

Just then, an imposing big man stomped in from outside and shouted, "You dark knave! You've got some gall! Where do you think you are, to try to eat for free?!"

Li Kui glowered and roared, "I eat for free wherever I go! Who cares what this place is?!"

The man shot back, "Once I tell you what this place is, you'll be so scared that you'll pee your pants and fart! I am Han (2) Bolong (2,2), a hero from Liangshan. The money for this place came from my brother Song Jiang."

Li Kui couldn't help but snicker on the inside, thinking, "I have never heard of this bastard on Liangshan!"

So, as it turns out, Han Bolong wasn't exactly lying, though he WAS exaggerating. He used to be a robber and thief and wanted to join the gang on Liangshan. So he went to see Zhu Gui the Dryland Crocodile, the chieftain who was running recon out of one of Liangshan's taverns. Zhu Gui was going to bring him to Liangshan and introduce him to Song Jiang, but that was right when Song Jiang was bedridden with his back ulcer, and the base was also busy fighting a war against Daming Prefecture, so

nobody had time to onboard a new recruit. So Zhu Gui just told this Han Bolong to run this tavern in a nearby village for the time being.

Anyway, Li Kui now took out one of his axes and said to Han Bolong, "Alright, I'll leave my axe as collateral."

Han Bolong reached out to take the axe, but unfortunately for him, Li Kui was just kidding. While Han Bolong's guard was down, Li Kui suddenly raised the axe and brought it down on his face. In the next second, Han Bolong was dead on the ground with an axe lodged in his head, while his clerks were running for their lives. Li Kui let them go and instead just took the money that Han Bolong had on him. Hey, travel money problem solved. Li Kui then set the thatched tavern on fire and continued on his way to Lingzhou Prefecture.

Later that day, Li Kui was walking along the main road when he crossed paths with a big guy, and as they passed each other, this big guy kept eyeing Li Kui.

"What the hell are you staring at your daddy at?!" Li Kui scoffed.

"Whose daddy are YOU?!" the big man shot back.

That was all the excuse Li Kui needed. He charged right at the man, but he ran face first into the guy's fist and fell flat on his back.

"That guy packs a mean punch!" Li Kui thought to himself. He sat up, looked up at the man, and asked, "Hey, what's your name?!"

"I have no name. If you want a fight, then I'll give you a fight. Do you dare to get up?!"

Li Kui was pissed and tried to get to his feet, but his opponent landed a swift kick to his ribs and sent him down to the ground again."

"Aargh! I can't beat you!" Li Kui shouted as he scrambled to his feet and started to walk off.

"Hey, dark fella! What's your name? Where are you from?" the man now asked.

“Don’t be shocked when I tell you. I am Li Kui, the Black Whirlwind from Liangshan.”

“Wait! Are you for real? Don’t lie to me!” the man pressed.

“Don’t believe me? Then check out these two axes.”

Now, given what just happened earlier in the day, you might be half expecting Li Kui to be pulling another of his “Here check out my axes right before I lodge one of them in your face” tricks. But this time, he was for real. He showed the man his axes, and the guy now asked where he was going.

“I got into an argument with my brother Song Jiang, and now I am on my way to Lingzhou Prefecture to kill those two generals named Shan (4) and Wei (4),” Li Kui said.

“I heard that you guys had already sent an army there,” the man said. “Tell me who was leading those forces?”

“Guan Sheng the Great Saber went first, and then Lin Chong the Panther Head and Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Beast followed,” Li Kui said.

Convinced he was telling the truth, the man now fell to his knees and kowtowed to Li Kui.

“Who are you?” Li Kui asked.

“My family has been making a living as wrestlers for three generations,” the man said. “The moves I just used are passed down from father to son and never taught to outsiders. But I’ve never had any good connections. No one would give me any face, and no one I’ve tried to throw my lot in with would have me. So in Shandong and Hebei Provinces, they call me Jiao (1) Ting (3) the Faceless. Recently, I got word that there is a Dead Wood Mountain in Kouzhou (4,1) Prefecture. There is an outlaw there named Bao (4) Xu (4). He’s so fond of killing that people call him the God of Death. He’s robbing and pillaging around that mountain, so I was just about to go join him.”

Li Kui now said, “With skills like yours, why don’t you come join my brother Song Jiang instead?”

“I have long wanted to do so,” Jiao (1) Ting (3) said. “But I haven’t found any connections. Now that I have met you, I am willing to follow you.”



Li Kui replied, "But I left Liangshan with the intention of making my brother Song Jiang look good. How can I go back empty-handed without killing anyone? Let's go to Dead Wood Mountain and convince that Bao (4) Xu (4) to go with us to Lingzhou Prefecture and kill those two commandants. THEN, we can go back to Liangshan."

"But Lingzhou has tons of troops," Jiao Ting said. "No matter how skilled you and I may be, it won't do any good, and we would just be throwing our lives away. Why don't we just go convince Bao Xu to go with us to Liangshan? That's the best idea."

Just as they were talking, someone rushed onto the scene and shouted, "Brother Song is worried sick about you and wants you home! He's sent people to look for you everywhere!"

This was Shi (2) Qian (1) the Flea on a Drum, one of the chieftains that Song Jiang had dispatched to find Li Kui. After Li Kui introduced him to Jiao Ting, Shi Qian again asked Li Kui to go back to Liangshan. But Li Kui said, "Not so fast. Jiao Ting and I just agreed to go to Dead Wood Mountain and recruit Bao Xu, and then we will go back."

"That won't do," Shi Qian said. "Brother Song is waiting for you. Go back at once."

"If you don't want to follow me, then you go on back first. Tell Brother Song that I'll be back soon."

Well, Shi Qian was afraid of antagonizing Li Kui, so he did not press the issue and just went back to Liangshan alone. Li Kui and Jiao Ting, meanwhile, headed to Dead Wood Mountain.

While Li Kui continues his little rogue misadventure, let's check in on Guan Sheng and the first Liangshan army that was headed to Lingzhou Prefecture. As the bandit forces approached, the prefect of Lingzhou had already gotten orders from Premier Cai about mobilizing his forces to go attack Liangshan. So he discussed the matter with his two commandants, who then immediately set about preparing their army to depart. Just then, they got a report that Guan Sheng was camped out on the outskirts of the city.

Shan Tinggui and Wei Dingguo flew into a rage at this intel and immediately mobilized their forces to go out and meet the enemy. As the two sides lined up, Guan Sheng looked across the field to size up his foes. On the far side, Shan Tinggui the General of Sacred Water rode a black steed and wielded a black lance. His helmet, armor, robe, and boots were all black. In front of him marched a soldier carrying a black banner in the northern style that read, "Shan Tinggui, the General of Sacred Water."

On the near side, the other commandant Wei Dingguo, galloped out all dressed in red, wielding a brass saber and riding a red horse. In front of him was a soldier hoisting a red banner in the southern style that read, "Wei Dingguo the General of Holy Fire."

Once they lined up, Guan Sheng called out from his saddle, "Generals, how have you been?"

But the two commandants laughed mockingly, then pointed at him and said, "You no-talent hack! You treasonous lunatic! You have betrayed the court's benevolence and brought shame to your ancestor's name. Don't you know any better? You have come here with an army, and yet you deign to act with courtesy?"

"Generals, you are mistaken," Guan Sheng said. "Right now the emperor is muddleheaded, and wicked officials wield power. They employ only their friends and punish only their enemies. My brother Song Jiang is compassionate, virtuous, and kind, and he carries out justice on heaven's behalf. He has sent me here to recruit the two of you. If you would not spurn us, then come on over and we can return to Liangshan together."

The two commandants flew into a rage when they heard that and charged Guan Sheng together. One was like a black cloud from the north, while the other was like a raging fire from the south. Guan Sheng was just about to fight them, but his two lieutenants, Xuan Zan the Ugly Prince Consort and Hao Siwen the Wood Dog of Well had already galloped out. Those four generals now squared off and engaged in a tenacious battle. Guan Sheng looked on and saw that the two commandants only grew stronger as the fight went on.

But just then, both commandants turned and rode toward their own lines. Hao Siwen and Xuan Zan gave chase, charging into the enemy formation. As they did so, they saw the commandant Wei Dingguo turn into the left flank of the formation, while Shan Tinggui rode into the right. Xuan Zan followed Wei Dingguo into the left side, and Hao Siwen chased Shan Tinggui into the right.

Just as Xuan Zan was giving chase, he suddenly came across 500 infantry, all dressed in red. They swarmed around him and quickly pulled him off his horse with hooks on ropes, capturing him alive. On the right flank, Hao Siwen met a similar fate, as 500 infantrymen dressed in black swarmed him from behind.

Once they have captured the two chieftains and taken them into the city, the commandants sent 500 crack troops charging at Guan Sheng. Guan Sheng was caught off guard and his army was routed. As they fled, Wei Dingguo and Shan Tinggui gave chase. Just then, two forces appeared from the flanks. These were the Liangshan reinforcements led by Lin Chong the Panther Head and Yang Zhi the Blue-faced Beast. They scattered the pursuing enemy, and Guan Sheng managed to regroup his tattered troops and combine forces with the other chieftains. They then set up camp for the night.

Inside Lingzhou Prefecture, the commandants Wei Dingguo and Shan Tinggui celebrated their victory with the prefect. They also put their two prisoners, Xuan Zan and Hao Siwen into prisoner carts and dispatched a lieutenant to lead 300 infantrymen to take the prisoners to the capital immediately.

So that convoy set out with the prisoners. As they traveled, they came across a hill that was covered with weeds and dead trees. Suddenly, a gong sounded and a group of bandits charged out. The man at their head was tall and dark and wielded a pair of axes. This was none other than Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, and behind him followed Jiao Ting (3) the Faceless and Bao (4) Xu (4) the God of Death. While Li Kui and Jiao Ting blocked the road, Bao Xu charged up to the lieutenant and cut him down with one swing of the sword. The rest of the escort party ditched the prisoners and ran for their lives.

Li Kui now walked up to the prisoner carts, took one look, and was like, “Hey guys. What are you doing here?!” To which they were like, “Uh, yeah, we were about to ask you the same thing.”

“Brother Song won’t let me go join the fight, so I snuck off the mountain by myself. First, I killed a guy named Han (2) Bolong (2,2). Then, I met this Jiao Ting, and he brought me here. Bao Xu treated me like a brother right away. We were just talking about going to attack Lingzhou when the lackeys spotted this convoy coming with prisoner carts. We figured they were government troops coming to arrest bandits; who knew it turned out to be you guys!”

Bao Xu now invited everyone up to his lair and treated them to a feast. Hao Siwen now said to him, “Since you want to join us, then why don’t you bring your men and come help us attack Lingzhou Prefecture?”

“I was just talking about that with Brother Li,” Bao Xu said. “You’re quite right. And I also have about 300 good horses here too.”

So, the five chieftains, along with about 700 lackeys, set out for Lingzhou Prefecture again.

Back at Lingzhou Prefecture, the survivors from the convoy fled back and informed the prefect what had happened. The two commandants blew their lid when they heard that their prisoners had been abducted. But they had no time to stew on that right now, because just then, Guan Sheng was back again, challenging for battle. So the two commandants rode out with 500 men to meet him. After the customary trading of insults, they went at it, with Guan Sheng squaring off against Shan Tinggui, the Water General.

They fought for almost 50 bouts, and then Guan Sheng turned and rode away. Shan Tinggui gave chase. After the pursuit went on for about three or four miles, Guan Sheng suddenly turned around and shouted, “Why haven’t you surrendered yet?!”

Shan Tinggui answered with his lance, taking aim at Guan Sheng's back. But Guan Sheng had been holding back this whole time, and now he finally let loose. Using just the blunt edge of his saber, he smacked Shan Tinggui across his back and shouted, "Get down!"

Just like that, Shan Tinggui fell off his saddle and landed in the dirt. To see what will become of this General of Sacred Water, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, we might actually get to see some fire and water action in a fight involving guys known for their fire and water powers. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!