

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 99.

Last time, the Liangshan bandits set out to besiege two nearby towns as a way to settle the question of whether their leader should be Song Jiang or Lu Junyi. We first followed Song Jiang and watched him sack his target without too much trouble, and he even picked up a new chieftain along the way in Dong (3) Ping (2) the General of Double Spears.

Just as Song Jiang was celebrating his victory, he got word from the other army, led by Lu Junyi. The chieftain Bai Sheng the Daylight Rat came to Song Jiang and reported that Lu Junyi had lost two battles in a row while trying to sack Dongchang (1, 1) Prefecture. The problem? Dongchang had a skilled warrior named Zhang (1) Qing (1), and he was giving the bandits all sorts of problems.

So, the first problem Zhang Qing presents is an identity problem. His name sounds exactly like that of the chieftain Zhang Qing the Gardener, the former black tavern operator and husband of the female chieftain Sun Erniang. So from now on, whenever I mention one Zhang Qing or the other, I will have to attach their nickname so you know for sure which one I'm talking about. The Zhang Qing who's giving the bandits fits at the moment had the nickname the Featherless Arrow because not only was he a skilled fighter, but he was also extremely adept at hitting people with small stones, hence his nickname.

Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow also had two lieutenants. One was named Gong (1) Wang (4), with the nickname The Flowery-Necked Tiger because he was tattooed with tiger stripes all over his body and a tiger's head on his neck. He was handy with a throwing javelin on horseback. The other lieutenant was named Ding (1) Desun (2,1). He had scars covering his face and his neck, which earned him the nickname the Arrow-Struck Tiger. And he was skilled at throwing a trident.

When Lu Junyi's army first approached the town of Dongchang (1,1), nobody came out to face them for 10 straight days. But then, Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow came out, and from Liangshan's side, the chieftain Hao (3) Siwen (1,2) the Wood Dog of Well went to face him. They squared off for just a few bouts before Zhang Qing turned and rode away. Hao Siwen gave chase, but rode right into Zhang Qing's

trap, as Zhang Qing hit him in the temple with a stone, sending him tumbling off his horse. Fortunately, Yan Qing the Prodigy struck Zhang Qing's horse with a shot from his crossbow, and the bandits were able to save Hao Siwen.

The next day, three chieftains went out on foot. These were Fan (2) Rui (4), the Daoist priest who called himself the Demon King of Chaos, and his two shield-bearer buddies, Xiang (4) Chong (1) and Li (2) Gun (3). But just as they were getting ready to face Zhang Qing, Zhang Qing's lieutenant Ding Desun the Arrow-Struck Tiger, charged out and flung his trident, wounding Xiang Chong. So the bandits lost another round. Having lost two fights in a row, Lu Junyi had no choice but to call Song Jiang for help.

Hearing this, Song Jiang sighed and said, "Lu Junyi has such rotten luck. I intentionally sent Wu Yong and Gongsun Sheng to help him so that he can succeed quickly and gain face in our base. Yet, who knew he would run into such stiff opposition. In that case, I will lead my brothers and troops to go help him."

So he ordered his army to follow him to Dongchang (1,1) Prefecture, where Lu Junyi greeted them and they sat down to discuss the situation.

Just as they were talking, word came that Zhang Qing the Featheress Arrow was once again challenging for combat. So Song Jiang led his troops out to a flat plain and lined up. Across the way, he saw Zhang Qing seated atop his horse, looking quite the valiant warrior. He donned a red bandana and colorful battle robes and armor, with a deep blue shirt peeking out from under his robes. He had the slender waist of a wolf and the long arms of an ape.

Song Jian could not help but be impressed by Zhang Qing's appearance. And Zhang Qing rode out from his lines, flanked by his two lieutenants. He pointed at Song Jiang and cursed, "Damn swamp rats! Let's settle this once and for all!"

Song Jiang asked which of his chieftains would go out to fight Zhang Qing, and one disgruntled chieftain, Xu Ning the Golden Lancer, galloped out right away. Hosting his barbed spear, he took on

Zhang Qing, who countered with his own spear. They had not fought for five bouts when Zhang Qing turned and rode away. Xu Ning gave chase, but Zhang Qing carried his spear in his left hand and with his right hand took out a small stone from the satchel around his waist. He suddenly turned around in his saddle and flung the stone at Xu Ning. It struck Xu Ning right between the eyes, and Xu Ning fell off his horse. Zhang Qing's two lieutenants charged forward to capture him, but the bandits' halberd Twins, Lü Fang and Guo Sheng, rushed out and saved him, helping him back to his own lines.

Song Jiang and company were stunned after seeing Zhang Qing's specialty up close. Song Jiang asked who else would go out to fight him, and before he finished talking, another chieftain, Yan (1) Shun (4) the Multicolored Tiger, dashed out. Song Jiang tried to stop him, thinking he was no match for Zhang Qing, but it was too late.

After trading a few blows, Yan Shun discovered that he was indeed no match for Zhang Qing, so he turned and rode back toward his own lines. But Zhang Qing gave chase and flung a stone right at Yan Shun's back. It struck his protector plate with a loud clang, and Yan Shun was reduced to riding away while lying on his saddle.

"Scoundrel, I'm not afraid of you!" another chieftain roared from Song Jiang's lines. This was Han (2) Tao (1) the Undefeated General, who now galloped out. Zhang Qing rode forth to face him, and the two men tangled as both sides roared. Han Tao wanted to show off his skills in front of Song Jiang, so he fought vigorously. After less than 10 bouts, Zhang Qing rode away again. Han Tao was worried about his flying rocks, so he did not give chase. But then, Zhang Qing turned around and rode back toward Han Tao. Seeing this, Han Tao raised his lance and prepared to tangle again. But while he was expecting Zhang Qing to trade blows again, Zhang Qing had other ideas. Before you could blink, a stone flew out from Zhang Qing's hand. Han Tao wasn't guarding against a flying stone at that moment, and the stone struck him right in the nose, sending him back to his own lines with a literal bloody nose.

Han Tao's friend Peng (2) Qi (3) was enraged by this, and he rode out with his triple-pointed saber before Song Jiang even gave him any orders. But before he even reached Zhang Qing, a rock reached his face, and the next thing you know, Peng Qi had tossed away his weapon and fled back into his own lines.

Song Jiang was quite worried after seeing several of his chieftains get beamed. Just as he was about to order his army to fall back, a chieftain from Lu Junyi's army shouted, "If we lose our prowess today, how can we fight tomorrow?!"

This was Xuan (1) Zan (4) the Ugly Prince Consort, who now rode toward Zhang Qing while twirling his saber. Zhang Qing scoffed, "I have turned away one after another. Don't you know my skills with hurling stones?"

Xuan Zan yelled, "You may be able to hit others, but you can't get near ..." and that was when a stone smacked him on the side of his mouth, shut him up, and knocked him off his horse. Thankfully, his bandit friends saved him before the enemy could reach him. So you know, next time, do some fighting before you start trash-talking.

Song Jiang was furious. He pulled out his sword and cut off a corner of his robe, declaring, "If I do not capture that knave, I swear I will not retreat!"

Hearing this, the chieftain Huyan Zhuo the Twin Staffs said, "What use are any of us if our brother has to make that vow?!" He galloped out and cursed Zhang Qing, "You little punk! What have you aside from a little strength and courage? Do you recognize the general Huyan Zhuo?!"

Zhang Qing did indeed recognize him, and cursed back, saying, "You brought shame upon the state with your defeat! Here, you have a taste of my skills too!"

Before he finished talking, a stone was already zipping toward Huyan Zhuo. Huyan Zhuo saw it and raised his staffs to deflect it, but the stone was too fast and had already hit him on his wrist. Huyan Zhuo could not wield his weapons with a swollen wrist, so he had to ride back to his own lines. So not only has

Zhang Qing beaten up on some of the middling chieftains, he had also now turned away one of Liangshan's top warriors.

Song Jiang said to his troops, "A bunch of cavalry chieftains have been wounded. Which infantry chieftains dare to go capture that Zhang Qing?"

From the infantry lines strode out Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil, wielding a long-handle broadsword. But this drew a raucous laughter from Zhang Qing, who cursed, "You losers! All your cavalry officers have been beaten, and now you are sending your foot soldiers?!"

Liu Tang was irate when he heard that slight, and he sprinted toward Zhang Qing. Zhang Qing didn't even bother exchanging blows with him and just rode away toward his own lines. Liu Tang pursued, and as he got near, he raised his broadsword and sliced at Zhang Qing. He didn't hit Zhang Qing, but caught the back of his horse. That horse reared up on its hind legs, and as it did so, its tail brushed against Liu Tang's face. In that moment of distraction, a stone struck him in the face, sending him to the ground. Before Liu Tang could get up, Zhang Qing's soldiers had stormed out and dragged him into their lines.

"Who will go rescue Liu Tang?!" Song Jiang shouted to his men. Yang Zhi the Blue-Faced Beast answered the call, waving his saber and riding out to take on Zhang Qing. Zhang Qing pretended to counter with his spear. As Yang Zhi hacked at him, Zhang Qing dodged the blow and in the same split second let fly a stone, shouting, "Strike!"

Yang Zhi quickly leaned, and the stone flew past him under his armpit. But just then, another stone came flying at him, and this one struck his helmet. That was enough to make Yang Zhi give up the fight and slink back to his lines, leaning on his saddle.

As he watched yet another chieftain return in defeat, Song Jiang lamented, "We've lost our momentum. How can we return to Liangshan? Who can help us get even?"

Hearing that, Zhu Tong the Lord of the Beautiful Beard said to his tag-team buddy, Lei Heng the Winged Tiger, "If we can't take him one-on-one, then let's double-team him."

So they charged out, with Zhu Tong on the left and Lei Heng on the right, both on foot and wielding long-handle broadswords. Zhang Qing laughed and said, "Oh, one won't do, so now you've added another. Even if you add 10 more, what good would that do?"

Showing no sign of fear, he discreetly pulled out two stones and held them both in one hand. Lei Heng was the first to approach, and as he did so, Zhang Qing flicked his wrist, and a stone came screaming at Lei Heng. Just as Lei Heng looked up, the stone had beamed him on the forehead, sending him to the ground. Zhu Tong now rushed to save his friend, but as he did so, the second stone from Zhang Qing came flying out and hit him on the neck.

Seeing both of them get hurt, Guan Sheng the Great Saber now galloped out, wielding his Green Dragon Saber to save them. As Zhu Tong and Lei Heng ran back to their own lines, Zhang Qing sent another stone in Guan Sheng's direction. Guan Sheng quickly raised his saber, and the stone clanged off the edge of his blade, sending sparks flying. Guan Sheng had no desire to press his luck further, so he, too, rode back to his lines.

On Liangshan's side, the newest recruit, Dong Ping the General of Double Spears, thought to himself, "I just surrendered to Song Jiang. If I don't show off some skills, I'll get no respect when I get to Liangshan."

So he hoisted his twin spears and rode out. Zhang Qing recognized him and cursed aloud, "Our towns are near neighbors and dependent on each other. We should be working together to exterminate the bandits. Why did you betray the court? Have you no shame?!"

That ticked off Dong Ping, and he traded blows with Zhang Qing. After seven bouts, Zhang Qing again rode away. Dong Ping scoffed, "You can hit others, but not me!"

Zhang Qing decided to test that, and he slinged a stone right at Dong Ping. But Dong Ping saw it and quickly deflected the stone with his spears. Zhang Qing now sent another stone at him, and Dong Ping dodged this one. Seeing his first two shots miss, Zhang Qing was starting to panic a little bit. Just then,

Dong Ping's horse had caught up to his near the left flank of Zhang Qing's lines. Dong Ping thrust one of his spears at Zhang Qing's back. Zhang Qing dodged the thrust, tossed away his own spear, and grabbed hold of Dong Ping's arms with his hands. The two were now tangled up.

Seeing this, Suo Chao the Impatient Vanguard raised his battleaxe and rode out to help Dong Ping. But Zhang Qing's two lieutenants came out to keep him busy, while Zhang Qing and Dong Ping remained in their stalemate. Meanwhile, from Liangshan's side, four chieftains charged out. These were Lin Chong the Panther Head, Hua Rong the archer, and the halberd twins Lü Fang and Guo Sheng.

Seeing that he was about to be severely outnumbered, Zhang Qing quickly let go of Dong Ping and rode into his own lines. Dong Ping refused to let him flee and crashed into the enemy lines in pursuit. But as he did so, he forgot to watch out for Zhang Qing's flying projectiles. And just as he got close to Zhang Qing, the latter shouted, "Strike!" as a stone flew right at Dong Ping. Dong Ping quickly ducked, and the stone scraped past his ear. That was enough to send Dong Ping going in the other direction.

But now it was Suo Chao the Impatient Vanguard's turn to give chase, as he quit the fight with Zhang Qing's lieutenants and came after Zhang Qing himself. But Zhang Qing did to him what he did to so many others before him, and soon Suo Chao was slinking back to his own lines with a bloody face.

While Zhang Qing was taking on all comers and sending them back bruised and bloodied, his lieutenants were running into trouble on the battlefield. Gong (1) Wang (4) the Flowery-Necked Tiger was entangled with Lin Chong and Hua Rong, and he was no match for them. So he tried to skewer them by throwing his javelin. But they dodged his throw, and now he had no weapon on him, so they easily captured him.

Meanwhile, the other lieutenant, Ding (1) Desun (2,1) the Arrow-Struck Tiger, was putting up a dogged fight against the halberd twins. Watching this battle from Liangshan's lines, Yan Qing the Prodigy

thought to himself, “Zhang Qing has wounded 15 of our chieftains in a row. If we can’t capture even one of his men, what respect would we have left?”

So he put down his wooden staff and took out his crossbow, took aim, and fired. The bolt struck Ding Desun’s horse and sent it and its rider to the ground. Lü Fang and Guo Sheng then mopped up and captured Ding Desun alive. Zhang Qing tried to come rescue his lieutenants, but he was outnumbered, so he turned back and went into the town with his own prisoner, Liu Tang the Red-Haired Devil. The prefect of the town ordered that Liu Tang be locked up in jail for now.

On the bandits’ side, Song Jiang had the two prisoners, Gong Wang and Ding Desun, sent back to Liangshan. He then met with Lu Junyi and Wu Yong.

“I heard that back in the Five Dynasties period, the general Wang (2) Yanzhang (4,1) of the Liang kingdom defeated 36 generals from the Tang kingdom before the shadow of the sun shifted,” Song Jiang said, making a reference to a renowned warrior who lived about two centuries earlier. “Today, in the blink of an eye, Zhang Qing wounded 15 of our generals. He may not be the equal to Wang Yanzhang, but he is nonetheless a fierce fighter.”

To that, no one said a thing, probably because they were all nursing either dented pride or dented foreheads.

Song Jiang now continued, “In my view, Zhang Qing depends on his lieutenants to be his support. Now that we’ve captured them, we can use a scheme to capture him.”

At that, Wu Yong spoke up, “ Brother, don’t worry. After seeing Zhang Qing, I have already made arrangements.”

Later that day, Zhang Qing was talking with the prefect and said, “Even though we won today, the bandits are still strong. We should dispatch scouts to go conduct recon and then make plans.”

Soon, the scouts came back and reported, "Behind their camp to the northwest, 100-some carts of grain are heading this way. There are also about 500 grain boats sailing this way. They are advancing on land and water, and that force is being led by several bandit chieftains."

"Could this be a trap?" the prefect said. "Don't fall for their tricks. Send more people to check it out to see whether it's really grain."

The next day, a scout reported back and said, "The carts are indeed loaded with grain. I even saw rice spilling out. As for the boats, even though their content was covered, I could see grain sacks poking out."

Zhang Qing now said, "Then I will go out tonight. First I will stop the carts on land, and then I'll go take the grain boats on the river. Prefect, you can lead the reinforcement, and we will succeed in one fell swoop."

"That's a great plan; proceed as you see fit," the prefect said.

So they told their troops to eat a full meal and prepare to head out. As darkness descended, Zhang Qing led 1,000 men and snuck out of the town.

The moon's light was faint that night, and the night sky was covered with stars. After just a few miles, Zhang Qing and his troops spotted a convoy of carts, bearing banners that said, "Grain for the loyal and honorable from Liangshan." As he looked closer, Zhang Qing could see a big monk carrying a Buddhist staff, walking at the front of the convoy.

"Hmm, I'll introduce that baldy's scalp to my stone," Zhang Qing thought to himself.

Now, that baldy was obviously Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk. As he was walking, he had already spotted Zhang Qing and his troops, but he just kept on going like he didn't notice, since this was all part of the plan. What wasn't part of the plan, though, was getting beamed in the head. He just forgot to guard against Zhang Qing's bread and butter.

Suddenly, out of nowhere came a shout of "Strike," and a stone struck Lu Zhishen on the head, drawing blood and making him stumble backward. Zhang Qing and his men now charged out to seize the carts. From the back of the column, Wu Song the Pilgrim charged forward and put up a dogged fight to rescue Lu Zhishen, and they and their men ran away, leaving the grain carts.

Having captured the carts, Zhang Qing inspected their content and found that it was indeed grain. Delighted, he didn't bother chasing the bandits, and instead just took the carts back to town. The prefect was very happy as he received this bounty, and Zhang Qing now headed out again to capture the grain boats.

Over by the south gate of the town, Zhang Qing saw countless boats in the river. He told the guards to open the gates, and then he charged toward the river bank with his troops. By now, the sky was covered with dark clouds that blocked out the moon. Zhang Qing's troops could not even see each other. This was all the doing of Liangshan's wizard, Gongsun Sheng.

Just as Zhang Qing was feeling worried about this and preparing to turn back, loud cries rose up from all around. Lin Chong the Panther Head swept in with a squadron of armored cavalry and pushed Zhang Qing into the river, horse and all. Waiting in the river were eight naval chieftains: Li Jun the River Dragon, Zhang Heng the Boat Flame, Zhang Shun the White Streak in the Waves, the three Ruan brothers, and the two Tong (2) brothers. Zhang Qing had no chance at all, and was soon bound up and taken by the Ruan brothers to Liangshan's main camp.

In the bandits' camp, as soon as Song Jiang and Wu Yong got word of their success, they sent their troops to lay siege on the town. The prefect was helpless without his commander, and he was scared stiff when the sound of cannons echoed all around the town and the town gates were breached. The Liangshan forces stormed into the town and rescued Liu Tang.

Now, given precedents, you would think that a night of mayhem, death, and destruction was about to engulf the town. But no. While the bandits did break into the storehouses, they actually divided the loot in half, keeping half for themselves while distributing the other half to the residents. And as for the prefect, he was apparently an actual good official, so they spared his life.

They did, however, borrow his office for their temporary headquarters. As Song Jiang and company assembled, the naval chieftains brought in Zhang Qing. Now, a bunch of the chieftains who had been wounded were present, and they were all gnashing their teeth, ready to kill Zhang Qing. But Song Jiang had other ideas.

As soon as Zhang Qing was brought in, Song Jiang personally came over to untie him and apologize to him for the rough treatment. He then invited Zhang Qing to sit down. But just then, Lu Zhishen the Flowery Monk stomped in, wielding his Buddhist staff with one hand while keeping a handkerchief over his bleeding head with the other. He was gonna get a piece of this little punk.

But Song Jiang stepped in front of him and barked for him to back off. Seeing this, Zhang Qing was moved by Song Jiang's honor, so he kneeled and offered to surrender. To reassure him that everything was cool from now on, Song Jiang poured some wine onto the ground, snapped an arrow, and swore an oath, declaring, "If any of our brothers try to seek revenge, then heaven shall not tolerate them, and they will die by the sword."

That effectively shushed everyone, and then the novel basically just said that, because they were all destined to be together, their honor took care of the rest. Soon, everybody was having a good laugh and acting chummy. They then assembled the troops and prepared to return to Liangshan.

Before they left, though, Zhang Qing recommended someone to Song Jiang. It was a veterinarian named Huangfu (2,3) Duan (1).

“He is adept at diagnosing horses and can recognize all sorts of illnesses. His treatments are always effective. He has talent equal to Bo (2) Le (4),” Zhang Qing said, comparing this guy to a famous judge of horses who lived in the Spring and Autumn period some 1,700 years earlier. “Because he has green eyes and yellow hair, he looks like a foreigner and is known as Purple Beard. Liangshan will have uses for him. We can summon him and ask him to come to Liangshan with his family.”

Song Jiang was delighted, so Zhang Qing summoned Huangfu Duan, whose logical first reaction to this probably should’ve been, “Wait, you recommended me to whom?! Thanks a lot, man.” But instead, the novel said that he was quite impressed by Song Jiang’s honor and was willing to join them. We’ve basically reached the point in the novel where Song Jiang just goes around uttering, “HONOR!” and guys just fall over themselves jumping on the bandwagon, logic be damned.

So anyway, having gained a few more new recruits, not to mention a lot more loot, Song Jiang and company headed back to Liangshan without incident. Once they got back, they assembled in the Hall of Loyalty and Honor. Song Jiang then released Zhang Qing’s lieutenant who had been captured earlier, Gong Wang (4) and Ding Desun. He uttered honor, and they promptly got on board and surrendered.

Victories on two campaigns and the arrival of several new chieftains meant that it was time to party again. As the chieftains all sat down in their proper order in the hall, Song Jiang looked out and saw that they now had a total of 108 chieftains, including himself.

Song Jiang now said to everyone, “Since we began gathering here at Liangshan, wherever we’ve gone, we have never suffered a real defeat. This is not the doing of mortals, but the blessing of heaven. Today, I am the leader only thanks to your courage. As we gather here in righteous assembly, I have something to say. I hope you all will hear me.”

To see what Song Jiang wants to say, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, our story comes full circle. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!