

Welcome to the Water Margin Podcast. This is episode 109.

Last time, the Liangshan bandits dealt Marshal Gao Qiu two resounding defeats, incinerating his navy and sending his army fleeing back into Jizhou Prefecture. As he was sitting around mired in worries, the imperial envoy Wen (2) Huanzhang (4,1) arrived, carrying a second decree of amnesty for the bandits.

Gao Qiu met with the envoy and asked to see the copy of the decree. Now, this put him in a real pickle. He didn't really want the court to send another offer of amnesty, but at the same time, he's been getting his butt whupped. The amnesty meant he didn't have to keep getting his butt whupped, but he was also too embarrassed to go back to the capital after two beatdowns. So he was going back and forth for the next few days, unable to make up his mind about how to proceed.

But then, a seasoned local clerk named Wang offered him a way out. This clerk was really wicked, so much so that everyone called him Heart-gouger Wang. He had been assigned by the prefect to serve Gao Qiu while the latter was using the prefectural seat as his headquarters. Through that work, this clerk got to see the copy of the decree, and he had gotten word that Gao Qiu was struggling to make a decision, so he went to see Gao Qiu at once.

"Sir, no need to worry," Clerk Wang told Gao Qiu. "I saw a way out in the decree. Whoever drafted the language must be on good terms with your excellency, because he left a backdoor open for you."

Gao Qiu was surprised and asked what this backdoor was. Clerk Wang said, "The most critical sentence in the decree is this: 'Purge Song Jiang, Lu Junyi, and others' past offenses; they shall be forgiven.' That's a sentence with a double meaning. If you pause after 'Purge Song Jiang,' then that becomes a separate sentence from 'Lu Junyi and others' past offenses, they shall be forgiven.' So you can just use this to trick them into the city and arrest and execute Song Jiang. And then you can break apart his men and assign them to different places. As the old saying goes, 'A headless snake cannot move, and a wingless bird cannot fly.' Without Song Jiang, what can the rest do? What does your excellency think?"

Gao Qiu was thrilled and immediately promoted this clerk. He then invited the imperial envoy, the renowned scholar Wen (2) Huanzhang (4,1), to discuss this plan. But Scholar Wen was nonplussed.

“An imperial envoy should deal honorably and cannot use such deception,” he said. “Besides, if some smart person in Song Jiang’s ranks sees through this plot, they will stir up trouble, and then it would be most inconvenient.”

“Not so!” Gao Qiu disagreed. “As ancient military texts say, ‘Deception is ok in war.’ There’s no need to be so above board.”

“The texts may say that, but this is an imperial edict from the emperor, used to earn the trust of all under heaven,” Scholar Wen retorted. “Since ancient times, the words of the emperor are as precious as jade and cannot be altered. If we do this, how will anyone be able to trust his majesty again?”

“We have to just worry about what’s in front of us right now,” Gao Qiu said. “We’ll deal with the future later.”

So Gao Qiu ignored Scholar Wen’s advice and sent a messenger to Liangshan to tell the bandits that they should all show up outside the prefectural seat to receive a new offer of amnesty from the emperor.

On Liangshan, Song Jiang was mopping up after another big victory. All the burnt ships were gathered up for firewood. The undamaged ships were added to the bandits’ own fleet. All the captured prisoners were released back to Jizhou Prefecture. One day, Song Jiang and his chieftains were holding discussions in the Hall of Loyalty and Honor when Gao Qiu’s messenger arrived, bearing news of another offer of amnesty. Song Jiang was so delighted that his face broke out into a huge smile, and he immediately summoned the messenger.

“The court has issued an edict to offer you amnesty,” the messenger said. “Marshal Gao sent me here to invite all the chieftains to the foot of the prefectural seat for the ceremony, where the decree will be read aloud. There is no ulterior motive, so please do not harbor any suspicions.”

Song Jiang tipped the messenger and sent him away. And then he ordered all the chieftains to prepare to accompany him to the prefectural seat to receive the decree. But Liangshan's No. 2, Lu Junyi the Jade Qilin, said, "Brother, don't be too impatient. This might be a trick by Marshal Gao. You shouldn't go."

"If you all are so suspicious, when will we ever be able to return to the proper path?" Song Jiang said. "We have to go, no matter what."

Uhh, dude, did the whole "There's no ulterior motive" line not strike you as a little obvious?

Wu Yong the strategist laughed and said, "We have shattered that knave Gao Qiu's courage. Even if he has a foolproof plan, it will fail. And we have all these heroes here, so there's no need to worry. Let's all just follow Brother Song down the mountain."

Of course, Wu Yong was also not dumb. Before they departed, he handed out a couple orders. Then, the chieftains all followed Song Jiang down the mountain, except for the naval chieftains, who stayed behind to mind the shop.

Back in Jizhou prefectural seat, Gao Qiu told his commandants to bring their armies inside the city and lie in wait. He then ordered that all the banners be removed from the top of the city walls, except for one big yellow banner over the north gate, bearing the characters "Heavenly Decree." He then waited atop the wall with other officials and the party of envoys bearing the imperial decree.

Later that day, the chieftain Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow led 500 riders past the city on a scouting mission. They rode around the city once and then rode off to the north. Soon thereafter, Dai Zong the Magic Traveler came on foot and took another look around. The guards on the wall notified Gao Qiu of these developments, and Gao Qiu personally headed to the wall, flanked by 100-some people. Under the shade of a large canopy, they waited behind an incense table.

In the distance, Song Jiang and his chieftains appeared from the north, with trumpeters, drummers, and flagbearers leading the way. All the chieftains followed in formation. At their head were Song Jiang, Lu Junyi, Wu Yong, and Gongsun Sheng, the top four leaders of Liangshan. Remaining seated atop their horses, they now bowed to Marshal Gao from their saddles.

Marshal Gao now ordered one of his men to shout down to the bandits, "The imperial court is pardoning your crimes and has sent an offer of amnesty. Why have you come dressed in armor?!"

Song Jiang told Dai Zong the Magic Traveler to go to the foot of the city and reply, "We have not yet tasted the court's kindness and do not know the content of the decree. That is why we did not dare to shed our armor yet. We hope the marshal will oblige us. Please, call the city's civilians to the top of the wall and listen to the decree with us. Then, we shall remove our armor and thank his majesty's kindness."

Gao Qiu decided to play along, so he summoned the civilians of the city and rushed them all to the top of the wall. Momentarily, Song Jiang and company could see that the top of the wall was indeed brimming with civilians. Only now did they ride forward, and at the sound of a drum, everyone dismounted. At the sound of another drum, all the chieftains walked to the foot of the city, while their lackeys kept a watch on their horses. When they were about an arrow's flight away from the city, they stopped and stood at attention. As another drum sounded, they all bowed and awaited the reading of the decree.

From atop the wall, an envoy unrolled the decree and started reading aloud:

Edict: Each man's character is unique, and a state has only one essential morality. People who behave well are proper citizens, and those who do evil are rebels. For the latter, no good fate lies in store. We can only pity them. We have heard that a band has congregated on Liangshan for a long time, unresponsive to kindly exhortations to restore goodness to their hearts. We dispatch our emissary with this decree: Purge Song Jiang. Lu Junyi and others' past offenses — they shall be forgiven. Let the leaders

report to the capital to give thanks. Let their followers return home. Reject not the imperial decision. Let the emperor's benevolence expunge wickedness and restore righteousness to your hearts. Oppose not Heaven's will to replace the old with the new. Let this decree be proclaimed for all to know."

At the foot of the wall, as soon as the strategist Wu Yong heard the words "Purge Song Jiang," he looked at Hua Rong the Archer and said, "General, did you catch that?"

Hua Rong indeed heard it, and he caught Wu Yong's meaning. As soon as the envoy finished reading the decree, Hua Rong shouted, "If you won't pardon my brother Song Jiang, why should we submit?!"

As he spoke, he let fly an arrow, and it struck the envoy in the face. While the people on the wall rushed to the envoy's aid, the bandits at the foot of the wall shouted, "Attack!" and showered the wall with arrows.

Seeing things go south, Marshal Gao quickly took cover and gave the order to spring the trap. His troops now poured out of all four gates. But just then, drums starting beating from Song Jiang's ranks, and all the chieftains got on their horses and rode away. The imperial troops gave chase, but they had only gone a couple miles when suddenly, they heard the sound of cannons behind them.

The next thing you know, two bandit armies appeared. From the east came Li Kui the Black Whirlwind, leading a battalion of infantrymen. From the west came Hu Sanniang the Ten Feet of Steel, leading a squad of cavalry. The two forces converged on the imperial troops. The imperial soldiers quickly retreated, fearing further ambushes. Song Jiang and company now turned and joined the three-prong attack. The imperial army fell into disarray and rushed back inside the city, but not before losing a good number of soldiers. Song Jiang and the bandits then fell back and returned to Liangshan.

Inside the city, Marshal Gao and company were once again picking up the pieces. He sent a report to the court, saying that Song Jiang and the bandits killed an envoy and refused to submit. At the same

time, he sent secret letters to other members of his little gang of four at court — Premier Cai, Marshal Yang, and Tong Guan (4), the Chancellor of the Bureau of Military Affairs who led the first unsuccessful attack on Liangshan. He asked the premier to inform the emperor and send along provisions and reinforcements to help apprehend the bandits.

When this version of the story got to court, Premier Cai informed the emperor, and the emperor was very displeased at being snubbed yet again by these upstarts. So he ordered more troops to be mobilized to help Gao Qiu. Marshal Yang also called up two generals from the Imperial Divisions and put them in command of stout troops to go help Gao Qiu. These two guys were drill instructors in the imperial guard. They had rendered significant service to the court and were renowned throughout the land for their skills. On top of that, they were also Gao Qiu's confidants.

Upon receiving their orders, these two drill instructors went to take their leave of Premier Cai, and he told them, "Be careful and may you succeed quickly. Then you will no doubt be given important posts."

The two generals now called up some crack troops who were seasoned in fighting on land and water. They then went to take their leave of Marshal Yang, who gave them five good horses to be used in battle. The next day, the two generals headed out with 3,000 men each, along with a rearguard of another 1,000 troops. As they marched out of the city, the two generals were looking quite the magnificent warriors, drawing cheers from all the civilian onlookers. Once they said goodbye to all the officials, this army headed straight for Jizhou Prefecture.

Back in Jizhou Prefecture, Gao Qiu and his new adviser, the scholar Wen (2) Huanzhang (4,1), were discussing how to proceed. While they waited for reinforcements to arrive, they sent out soldiers to collect lumber from the nearby woods and conscript ship-builders from the region. The lumber and the

builders were all brought to Jizhou, as Gao Qiu began to build himself yet another fleet. At the same time, he put out recruitment posters to enlist men for another navy.

Now, inside the prefectural seat, there was a traveler staying at an inn whose name was Ye (4) Chun (1) and who was well-versed in ship-building. He's not from this area. He was traveling to Shandong Province but got robbed by some Liangshan lackeys when he was passing through, so he became stranded here without enough money to get home.

When this Ye Chun heard that Gao Qiu was building another navy with the intention of attacking Liangshan, he drew up some ship diagrams and went to see Gao Qiu. After they exchanged greetings, Ye Chun said, "Your lordship's last attack did not succeed because your ships were commandeered from all over. They used wind and oar power, neither of which is reliable. They were also small, low-lying, and narrow, so it was difficult for their crew to fight onboard.

"I would like to offer an idea: If you wish to bring these outlaws to heel, you must first build hundreds of large ships. The largest should be the Big Paddle-Wheelers. It has 12 paddle wheels on each side and holds several hundred men. Each wheel is turned by 12 men using foot peddles. A bamboo screen along the gunwales protects against arrows. There are towers on deck for archers, with winches and pulleys attached. Just give the signal, and all 24 paddle-wheels will begin to turn, and the ship will move as if it were flying. Other ships cannot stand in its way. And if you encounter enemies, then fire your arrows from the deck. Where will your foe be able to hide?

"The second-tier ships are small wheel-paddlers. Each has 12 paddle wheels and can hold more than 100 people. The front and back of the ships have long spikes, and both sides are equipped with towers for archers and protected by bamboo screens. These ships can traverse the narrow channels of the marsh and fend off enemy ambushes. If you use this plan, you will capture the outlaws easily."

After hearing this sales pitch and examining the diagram, Gao Qiu was delighted and rewarded this Ye Chun, appointing him to oversee the construction of the ships. The imperial forces and their

conscripted ship-builders got to work immediately. The lumber had to be delivered to Jizhou on a tight deadline, while all the nearby prefectures and counties had to send along the requested materials quickly. A two-day delay would earn you a caning of 40 strokes, to be doubled with each additional day of delay. If you were late by more than 5 days, you would be executed.

With that kind of draconian deadline hanging over their heads, all the authorities in the region promptly cracked the whip on their civilians, often quite literally. As a result, there were lots of civilian casualties from being overworked, while many others fled, and everybody was pissed and grumbling.

While Gao Qiu was doing his darndest to further damage military-civilian relations, the newly enlisted soldiers for his rebuilt navy trickled in, and the reinforcements led by the two generals from the capital also arrived. Gao Qiu and his commandants went out of the city to welcome the generals, and after the requisite welcome banquet, they immediately asked permission to go challenge the bandits to battle.

“Sirs, please rest for a few days while we finish building the ships,” Gao Qiu said. “Then we can advance on land and water and pacify the bandits in one fell swoop.”

The two generals said, “We view these Liangshan thugs as child’s play. Marshal, have no worries. You will surely return to the capital victorious.”

So, that kind of trash talk was sure to set you for trouble soon enough, but I guess these two newbies haven’t learned that lesson yet. In any case, Gao Qiu thanked them for their confidence and promised them important posts once the job was done. After the banquet, the two generals returned to their camps to await orders.

Meanwhile on Liangshan, after our heroes made a mess of things at the second failed attempt at amnesty, Song Jiang and the strategist Wu Yong figured that the imperial court would not look too kindly

on what they had done, and that they could expect another attack soon. So they sent lackeys to conduct recon, and within a few days, they reported back that Gao Qiu had entrusted Ye Chun to oversee the construction of some big ships, and had received reinforcements led by two renowned generals.

“Those big ships can fly across the water; how can we defeat them?” Song Jiang asked Wu Yong.

Wu Yong smiled and replied, “What’s the big deal? Just a few naval chieftains will take care of it. And if we fight on land, we have fierce warriors to counter them. But even so, I expect it will take them several weeks to finish building such big ships. We probably still have another 40 or 50 days to go. We can send a few brothers to their shipyard and pester them a bit, and then take our time dealing with them.”

Song Jiang agreed, and so they tapped the chieftains Shi (2) Qian (1) the Flea on a Drum and Duan (4) Jingzhu (3,4) the Golden-Haired Hound for this job. To provide backup, they also told the chieftains Zhang Qing the Gardener and Sun Xin (1) the Little Yuchi (4,2) to disguise themselves as villagers and mix in with the workers at the shipyard. Their wives, Gu Dasao the Female Tiger and Sun Erniang the Female Yaksha, would pretend to be delivering food to their husbands working in the shipyard. Finally, Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow would lead an army to provide reinforcements. Once all the assignments were doled out, everyone eagerly snapped to.

Back in Jizhou Prefecture, Marshal Gao had conscripted thousands of civilians to build 100 large ships, and they were put to work in shipyards that dotted the eastern half of the prefecture. The soldiers keeping watch over the workers would threaten them with their blades at all hours, forcing them to work day and night to make their deadline.

When the chieftains Shi Qian the Flea on a Drum and Duan (4) Jingzhu (3,4) the Golden-Haired Hound slipped into the shipyard, Shi Qian said to Duan Jingzhu, “The other four chieftains on this mission are going to set the shipyards on fire. If we do the same, it won’t make us look superior. Let’s just lie in

wait here. As soon as the shipyards catch fire, I will go wait by the city gate. Relief forces will no doubt rush out, and I will take that opportunity to slip into the city and start a fire atop the watch tower. You can go to the feed depot on the west side of the city and start a fire there. That way, they will be under siege from both ends, and that'll give them a good scare."

And so they stashed some fire-starting material and went to find some good hiding spots.

Meanwhile, Zhang Qing the Gardener and Sun Xin (1) the Little Yuchi arrived outside the city and saw about 500 men transporting lumber. They fell in with this group and helped move the lumber, and themselves, into the shipyard. At the entrance of the shipyard were about 200 soldiers, all carrying short broadswords and wooden staffs, and used the staffs to beat the laborers. Inside the shipyard was a hive of activity. The whole area was fenced off by wooden palisades, and there were about 300 thatched work sheds. A few thousand workers were busy tending to various stages of the ship-building process, and countless folks were going to and fro. Zhang Qing and Sun Xin found a quiet spot and stayed out of sight. Soon, their wives, Sun Erniang the Female Yaksha and Gu Dasao the Female Tiger, showed up in some dirty clothes, each carrying a jug of rice. They fell in with other women who were delivering food to their husbands laboring in the shipyard, and made it past the guards with no problem at all.

As evening descended, the only light in the sky was the bright glow of the moon, and yet most of the laborers were still busy working. As 9 p.m. approached, a fire suddenly broke out on the left side of the shipyard, courtesy of Zhang Qing and Sun Xin, followed by a fire on the right side of the shipyard, courtesy of their wives. Soon, the thatched huts were all ablaze. The laborers started shouting in panic, and they knocked down parts of the palisades and ran for their lives.

Inside the prefectural seat, Marshal Gao was roused from his slumber by urgent reports of a fire at the shipyards. He hurriedly got up and sent troops out to help. The two newly arrived generals led their units and rushed out of the city. But not long after they took off, another fire broke out, this one in the

watch tower atop the city wall. Marshal Gao now personally rode to the scene to direct the firefighting effort, but then he got word that another fire was consuming the feed depot on the west side of the city, lighting up the night bright as day. So he sent his two generals over there instead.

The two generals had barely arrived on the scene when they heard the sound of drums and battle cries, shaking heaven and earth. Amid the chaos, a squad of 500 crack riders sprang out of hiding, led by Zhang Qing the Featherless Arrow.

“All the Liangshan heroes are here!” Zhang Qing shouted as he charged.

One of the generals, whose name was Qiu (1) Yue (4), hoisted his saber and rode toward Zhang Qing. They had not fought but three bouts when Zhang Qing turned and rode away. That Qiu Yue wanted to earn some merit, so he gave chase and shouted, “Rebel, don’t you go anywhere!”

But, we’ve seen this play enough times to know what’s coming, even if Qiu Yue did not. As he got closer to Zhang Qing, he suddenly took a flying stone to the face and fell off his horse. His comrade, who was named Zhou (1) Ang (2), rushed to his rescue, fending off Zhang Qing while his lieutenants helped Qiu Yue back on his horse.

After a few bouts against Zhou Ang (2), Zhang Qing again rode away, but Zhou Ang was not going to fall for that, so he did not give chase. But now, Zhang Qing turned and came back to fight him. Just then, four of Gao Qiu’s commandants showed up with reinforcements, so Zhang Qing gave a quick wave of his hand, and he and his 500 riders quickly departed the scene. The imperial troops were afraid of an ambush, so they did not dare to give chase. Instead, they fell back and tended to the fire.

By the time they put out all the fires, it was already morning. As they tallied up the damage, they saw that the general Qiu Yue had lost four teeth and had a broken nose and busted lip thanks to the stone he took from Zhang Qing. Gao Qiu now despised the bandits even more, but at the moment, all he could do was to have doctors tend to his wounded while he sent word to the shipbuilder overseer Ye

Chun to tell him to be on guard at the shipyard. Gao Qiu then dispatched his commandants to set up camps all around the shipyards to offer extra protection.

As for the six chieftains who started the fires, they returned to Liangshan in victory and told everyone how it went. Song Jiang was ecstatic and threw a feast to celebrate. Then, he dispatched scouts to provide constant updates on the enemy.

By the time the ships were finished, winter was coming, but the weather was still mild. Marshal Gao rejoiced secretly, thinking that this was an assist from heaven. Now that his ships were built, he ordered his new naval forces to board the ships and train. The large and small wheel-paddle ships now entered the water, and the 10,000 or so new naval recruits split into two halves. Half of them went to learn how to peddle the ships, while the other half practiced archery. After 20-some days, their training was complete, and the overseer Ye Chun invited Gao Qiu to come inspect his new navy.

Gao Qiu and his commandants and other officers showed up and saw 300-some ships spread across the surface of the water. A dozen or so of these ships were selected for a demonstration. They were covered with banners. Amid the sound of gongs and drums, the soldiers peddled, the wheels started spinning, and the ships started gliding across the water.

Gao Qiu was delighted, figuring that the bandits would have no answer for such ships and that victory was assured. He was ready to give this another go. To see how his next incursion into the marsh will go, tune in to the next episode of the Water Margin Podcast. Also on the next episode, Gao Qiu gets a tour of the bandits' lair. So join us next time. Thanks for listening!