

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 12.

We ended the last episode with Dong Zhuo having been lured back to the capital thinking that the emperor is about to abdicate and give him the throne. And he kept thinking that despite a number of ominous signs along the way telling him otherwise. One of the wheels on his carriage broke. His horse started acting up. And then he heard some rather melancholy words in a children's song. The credit for keeping this pretense going belongs to Li Su (4), the man who was sent to deliver the fake message to lure Dong Zhuo to his doom. At every turn, Li Su explained away what looked like bad omens and turned them into auspicious signs instead, and Dong Zhuo believed him.

But the lyrics of the children's song were not, as Li Su had said, foretelling Dong Zhuo's rise to the throne. Instead, they foretold his downfall. The meaning of the words can't be explained without actually seeing the Chinese characters, so instead of trying to explain it verbally on this podcast, I've posted a visual explanation on the website, so check it out. It's a type of Chinese wordplay that we'll see again later in the novel, and it's pretty neat.

So anyway, the next morning, Dong Zhuo set out for court. Along the way, he saw a Taoist priest, wearing a dark robe and a white headdress, carrying a long staff. Tied to the staff was a 10-foot-long piece of white cloth, and at the either end of the cloth was written the character for "mouth". Dong Zhuo once again turned to Li Su because, I don't know, maybe he's the Wikipedia of Chinese omens. Li Su, perhaps running out of lies, simply dismissed the priest as a loon and told the guards to chase him off. But of course we know that this was a sign of something, and guess what? There is a visual explanation for this as well on the website.

Moving on, Dong Zhuo made his way to court, and all the officials were there in their ceremonial robes, lining the path to welcome him. Li Su, with his hand resting on his sword, escorted Dong Zhuo's carriage forward. When they got to a side gate on the north side of the palace, only the 20-some people surrounding the carriage were allowed through, and most of the soldiers in Dong Zhuo's entourage were

kept out.

As they proceeded toward the palace, Dong Zhuo looked up and saw in the distance Wang Yun and a number of officials standing by the palace entrance with swords drawn. Sensing something wasn't quite right, Dong Zhuo asked Li Su why the swords were out. At this point, Li Su didn't even bother making up an answer. He just remained quiet and kept pushing the carriage forward.

Wang Yun now shouted, "The traitor is here! Where are the guards?!"

At this signal, a hundred some soldiers sprang out of hiding and stabbed at Dong Zhuo with their halberds and lances. However, Dong Zhuo had taken the precaution of wearing a suit of armor, and that protected him from any fatal wounds. But they did manage to stab him in the shoulder and send him tumbling off his carriage.

"Lu Bu, my son! Where are you?!" Dong Zhuo cried out in desperation.

Lu Bu flashed out from behind the carriage, but he was not there to save Dong Zhuo.

"By the decree of the emperor, the traitor must die!" Lu Bu shouted as his halberd pierced Dong Zhuo's throat. Li Su then immediately cut off Dong Zhuo's head and picked it up. Lu Bu now held his halberd in one hand and pulled out the imperial decree with the other and shouted,

"The emperor has decreed that only the traitor Dong Zhuo shall die; no one else will be implicated!"

Upon hearing this, all the officers and soldiers present hailed the emperor, and thus ended the tumultuous reign of Dong Zhuo. And yes, he was a villain deserving of verse, and someone later wrote these lines:

Success would have placed him on the throne itself;

Failing that, he meant to have an easy life of wealth.

Yet who could have known that heaven plays no favors;

His palace just built, and already was heard his death knell.

So Dong Zhuo was dead at last, but the purge was just beginning. Apparently when Lu Bu yelled that no one else shall be implicated, he actually just meant none of the people in the entourage shall be implicated, because that leniency was definitely NOT extended beyond the palace gates.

First, Lu Bu shouted, "Li Ru was always Dong Zhuo's agent of evil! Who will go arrest him?"

Li Su immediately volunteered, but before he could even get going, they heard a ruckus outside the palace, and a messenger reported that Li Ru's own servant had already tied him up and brought him to court. Wang Yun didn't waste any time and immediately ordered that he be taken to the marketplace and beheaded. Wang Yun then ordered Lu Bu, Li Su, and Huangfu (2,3) Song (1), one of the heroes of the battles against the Yellow Turban rebels, to lead 50,000 soldiers, march to Mei (2) Wu (4), and arrest Dong Zhuo's family and confiscate his property.

Then, they put Dong Zhuo's body on public display in the streets. Seeing how fat Dong Zhuo was, the soldiers who stood guard lit a fire in his navel, and his melted fat flowed all over the ground. So yeah, some pretty gruesome stuff there. But the people of the city certainly did not mind. Everyone who passed by punched his severed head and stomped on his corpse.

Meanwhile, at Mei (2) Wu (4), the four generals that Dong Zhuo had left in charge -- Li (3) Jue (2), Guo (1) Si (4), Zhang (1) Ji (4), and Fan (2) Chou (2) -- got word that their master had been killed and that Lu Bu was on his way here. So the four of them fled overnight with their men to Liang Province. Remember that this was where Dong Zhuo was stationed before his rise, so these guys were running back to their base of power.

When Lu Bu got to Mei (2) Wu (4), he went and picked up Diao Chan. And sadly, this is pretty much where Diao Chan's relevance in our story ends. We'll hear her mentioned a couple more times in passing, but that's it. No big love scene to go out on. No grand exits. I always thought this was a bit of a letdown,

given her vital role in the last couple episodes.

In any case, after Lu Bu picked up Diao Chan, Huangfu Song ordered that all the innocent young boys and girls in the city are to be released, but anyone related to Dong Zhuo, no matter old or young, were all executed. Dong Zhuo's brother and nephew were both beheaded and put on public display. Even his 90-some-year-old mother was put to death, a victim of the leave-no-one-alive approach to political purges in ancient China.

Lu Bu and company then broke into Dong Zhuo's stash of valuables. They carted back several hundred thousand taels of gold, millions of silver coins, and countless fine silks, pearls, precious wares, and grain. When they reported back to Wang Yun, he rewarded the soldiers handsomely and held a giant feast at the office of the secretariat, where all the officials gathered to celebrate.

In the midst of this feast, however, a messenger suddenly interrupted and reported that someone is draped over Dong Zhuo's body on the streets and crying loudly.

"Everyone is overjoyed at Dong Zhuo's being brought to justice," Wang Yun said angrily. "Who is this man who dares to mourn him?"

He then ordered the guards to arrest the offender and bring him to the hall. When they returned, all the officials were stunned to see that it was none other than Privy Counselor Cai (4) Yong (1). If you've forgotten about him, Cai (4) Yong (1) was a renowned court official who lost his position because he had offended the eunuchs. When Dong Zhuo came to power and wanted to curry favor with the people, he offered the popular Cai (4) Yong (1) a job at court. When Cai Yong refused, Dong Zhuo threatened to exterminate his whole clan, so Cai Yong had no choice but to accept the job offer, which made Dong Zhuo so happy that he promoted Cai Yong three times in the span of a month.

Wang Yun now scolded Cai Yong:

"Dong Zhuo was a traitor. It is a boon for the empire that he was brought to justice today. You are an official of the Han court. Why are you not rejoicing for the country and instead weep for the traitor?"

Cai Yong made no attempt to deny his offense.

“Though I’m untalented, I still know right from wrong. How can I ever turn my back on the country for Dong Zhuo?” he said. “I shed a tear for him only for the favor he showed me. I know I have committed a great offense. I pray that you will show some leniency and only brand my face or cut off my foot, so that I may continue my work on recording the history of the Han to atone for my crime.”

All the officials present knew Cai Yong was a true talent, and they all begged for mercy on his behalf. The imperial guardian, Ma (3) Ridi (4,1), also tried to convince Wang Yun in private.

“Cai Yong is a rare talent,” Ma (3) Ridi (4,1) said. “It would be a great thing if he can continue to write the history of the Han. He is also widely respected for his filial piety. If you kill him, you might lose the confidence of the people.”

However, Wang Yun would not be moved.

“Centuries ago, the emperor Wu spared Sima (1,3) Qian (1). Later, he wrote a slanderous history book that spread and survived to this day. Right now the country’s destiny is uncertain and the court is in chaos. We cannot allow such a man to hang around a young emperor and wield the pen. Otherwise he would defame us.”

Alright, so a little background is in order here. The man that Wang Yun mentions, Sima Qian, is widely considered today to be one of the great Chinese historians. He lived from about 145 to 86 BC, so a good 300-some years before our time in the novel. He got on the wrong side of a political battle and was sentenced to death by the emperor. However, the sentence was later commuted to castration and imprisonment. So yeah, ouch!

After he was released from prison, Sima Qian, being a gentleman scholar, was expected to commit suicide in keeping with the customs of the day. But he chose to live on as a eunuch instead so that he could finish his histories. His defining work, *The Records of the Grand Historian*, covers a 2,500-year period that stretches from the time of the legendary ancient sage ruler, the Yellow Emperor, to the Han

dynasty in the second century BC. It is one of the most influential works in Chinese and world history.

But during his own time, namely the Han dynasty, Sima Qian's work was criticized for not being sufficiently complimentary of the house of Han. And that's why Wang Yun cited him as a precedent in why he could not allow Cai Yong to live. So he refused to take Ma (3) Ridi's (4,1) advice.

Ma (3) Ridi (4,1) had no recourse and left. He later told the other officials in secret, "May Wang Yun have no posterity. Able men of character are the mainstay of the country, and laws are its basis. When you destroy the mainstay and the basis, how can the country long endure?"

So despite everyone's pleading, Wang Yun ordered that Cai Yong be put in prison and then strangled. Scholars of the time all wept at hearing this news. In later times, many concluded that while Cai Yong was wrong to weep for Dong Zhuo, Wang Yun overreacted in killing him.

So Dong Zhuo is dead. His top adviser Li Ru is dead. His whole family is dead. Even the guy who dared to shed a tear for him is dead. But there are still those four generals of his who are hanging around in the west. Li (3) Jue (2), Guo (1) Si (4), Zhang (1) Ji (4), and Fan (2) Chou (2) had fled to Shanxi (3,1). They then sent a messenger to Changan begging for amnesty, but Wang Yun was in no mood to grant this request.

"These four all contributed to Dong Zhuo's tyranny," he said. "Even though we have issued a general pardon, it will not extend to these four."

When the courier returned with this message, Li Jue said, "Well, since we can't get amnesty, we should split up and let each man fend for himself."

However, his adviser Jia (3) Xu (3) disagreed.

"If you guys abandon your army and flee alone, a single constable can arrest you. Why not recruit an army from the locals and lay siege to Changan to avenge Dong Zhuo instead? If you succeed, then you can bring order back to the empire in the name of the court. And if you fail, you can still flee then."

Li Jue and company took Jia (3) Xu's (3) suggestion. They spread a rumor around the area that Wang

Yun was planning to massacre the whole population in the region. This put the whole region on edge. Li Jue then sent around another message saying, "Why die for nothing? Follow me and rebel instead." This ploy got him more than 100,000 recruits. He split these men into four armies and set out for Changan. Along the way, they ran into Niu (2) Fu (3), a commander in the imperial corps and Dong Zhuo's son-in-law. He was leading 5,000 men and on his way to avenge his father-in-law. So they combined their forces, with Niu (2) Fu (3) serving as the vanguard.

When Wang Yun heard about the invasion, he met with Lu Bu.

"Minister, have no fear," Lu Bu said. "Such scoundrels are no concern."

He then ordered Li Su to lead a force out to meet the enemy. Li Su's forces ran into Niu (2) Fu's (3) vanguard and they engaged in battle. Niu (2) Fu (3) could not hold his ground and fell back. However, that very night, around 9 o'clock, Niu (2) Fu (3) led a surprise attack on Li Su's camp. Li Su's men were unprepared. They fled in every direction and more than half were killed.

When Li Su fled back to see Lu Bu, the latter was not amused.

"How dare you blunt our fighting spirit?!" Lu Bu said. He then had Li Su executed and his head hanged at the camp entrance as a warning.

The next day, Lu Bu went out to take on Niu (2) Fu (3) himself. Considering that Niu (2) Fu (3) couldn't beat Li Su, how in the world could he hold up against Lu Bu? So once again he fell back in defeat. That night, Niu (2) Fu (3) summoned his confidant, Hu (2) Chier (3,2), and said to him, "Lu Bu is extremely valiant and unbeatable. Let's just secretly take a bunch of valuables and flee with a few bodyguards before Li Jue and the others find out."

Hu (2) Chier (3,2) agreed, and the two gathered up some gold and pearls and abandoned camp that night, accompanied only by three or four guards. But when they came upon a river, Hu (2) Chier (3,2) started getting ideas. In his greed for the valuables they were carrying, he killed Niu (2) Fu (3) and

brought his head to Lu Bu. But instead of getting a reward, he got his comeuppance. Lu Bu asked the bodyguards how this came about, and they told him that Hu (2) Chier (3,2) killed his master to steal his valuables. Lu Bu did not take kindly to such a dishonorable act, and he ordered that Hu (2) Chier (3,2) be executed.

With that little bit of justice done, Lu Bu and his army marched forward to meet Li Jue's main force. Before Li Jue could even get his men to line up in battle formation, Lu Bu led his army swept in. Li Jue's army could not withstand the attack and fell back some 15 miles before they could regroup and set up camp by the foot of a mountain. Li Jue then met with his three comrades to discuss how to proceed.

"Lu Bu is all brawn and no brains, so there's no need to worry," Li Jue said. "I will lead my men to guard the entrance to the valley. Each day I will goad him into combat. General Guo (1) can harass the rear of his army. When you hear the gong, attack. When you hear drums, fall back. Meanwhile, General Zhang and General Fan (2) will each lead an army and make straight for Changan. That way, the enemy will be under siege on both ends and will lose for sure."

Everyone agreed with Li Jue's plan. So when Lu Bu's army arrived at the foot of the mountain, Li Jue led his men out to challenge for combat. Lu Bu was angered to see this show of defiance and charged forward. As soon as he charged, though, Li Jue ordered a retreat onto the mountain, and soldiers stationed on the slopes rained down rocks like rain to prevent Lu Bu's men from making their way up. While this was happening, Lu Bu got word that Guo (1) Si (4) was attacking the rear of his formation, so he quickly turned around to put out that fire. As soon as he did this, though, drums rolled and Guo Si's forces retreated before Lu Bu could engage them. Just as Lu Bu was about to call it a day, the sound of gongs rang across the hills, and Li Jue's forces came down from the hills again. Before Lu Bu could engage THEM, Guo Si was back at his rear again. And when Lu Bu turned to face Guo Si, he quickly fell back.

This little back-and-forth really got Lu Bu steamed, and Li Jue and Guo Si kept this up for several days. Lu Bu was stuck. He couldn't get the enemy to engage in combat, and he couldn't fall back, and it

irritated him to no end. And now, to make things worse, he got an urgent report that Zhang (1) Ji (4) and Fan (2) Chou (2) were laying siege to Changan and that the capital was in danger.

This news forced Lu Bu to retreat at once. As soon as his army moved out, though, Li Jue and Guo Si went after them. Lu Bu was in no mood to fight and just kept pressing his army toward Changan. As a result, he suffered heavy casualties. When he got back to the outskirts of the capital, he saw an ocean of rebel soldiers surrounding the city. With the string of defeats, as well as Lu Bu's tyrannical handling of the army, many of his soldiers began to surrender to the enemy, which made Lu Bu sink into despair.

This went on for several days, and then things really hit the fan. Two of Dong Zhuo's former followers who had remained in the capital -- Li (3) Meng (2) and Wang (2) Fang (1) -- secretly opened the city gates, and all four rebel armies stormed in. Lu Bu rode here and there to try to stem the tide, but he could do nothing in the face of this torrent of enemy soldiers. Sensing that all is lost, he led a few hundred riders to the palace gate and yelled out to Wang Yun,

"The situation is dire! Minister, get on your horse now and let us flee beyond the pass! We will figure something out after that!"

However, Wang Yun was not going to run.

"If the spirits within the sacred shrines of the Han favor me, then I will restore stability to the country," he said. "If I fail, then I would rather die. I refuse to flee when the going gets tough. Please express my thanks to the lords stationed outside the pass and dedicate yourself to serving the country!"

Lu Bu tried time and again to convince Wang Yun to change his mind, but Wang Yun was nothing if not stubborn. Soon, fire was raging at all the city gates. Seeing the enemy closing in, Lu Bu led about a hundred riders and fled the city, leaving everything, including his family. He fled beyond the pass and went to seek refuge with Yuan Shu.

Finding little resistance, Li Jue and Guo Si let their soldiers loose to rampage and plunder the city. A

number of court officials were killed in the fighting that ensued. The rebels now surrounded the palace, and things were not looking good. Seeing the rebels closing in, the courtiers asked the emperor to step up to one of the palace gates and try to put an end to the onslaught.

When Li Jue saw the yellow canopy, which is used only by the emperor, he ordered his men to halt and they all hailed the emperor. The emperor leaned against the railing and asked, "Why have you entered the capital without my summon?"

Li Jue and Guo Si looked up and replied, "Prime Minister Dong was your majesty's loyal servant, but he was murdered by Wang Yun for no reason. We have come to avenge him, not to incite rebellion. If we see Wang Yun, we will call off our soldiers."

Wang Yun was standing next to the emperor during all this, and when he heard what the rebels were demanding, he turned to the emperor and said, "Everything I have done was for the imperial house. With things as they are, your majesty should not place my fate above that of the empire. Please allow me to go meet these two rebels.

The emperor could not bear to let Wang Yun go, but Wang Yun leaped down from the gate and cried, "Here comes Wang Yun!"

Li Jue and Guo Si pulled out their swords and scowled, "What crime did prime minister Dong commit to warrant his death?"

"That traitor's unspeakable crimes filled the heaven and the earth," Wang Yun answered. "When he was killed, everyone in Changan rejoiced. Are you two the only ones who haven't heard?"

"Even if the prime minister was guilty, what crimes have we two committed that you should refuse to grant us amnesty?" Li Jue and Guo Si asked.

But Wang Yun was done talking.

"Enough talk, traitors," he scolded. "I'm prepared to face my death!"

The two rebel leaders obliged and they cut down Wang Yun at the foot of the gate.

A historian later wrote of Wang Yun:

Wang Yun spun an artful scheme
That ended Dong Zhuo's evil dream.
His heart ached for the ruling line,
His brow was knitted for its shrine.
His noble spirit reached the skies,
His heart has joined the guiding stars.
Down below his souls remain
And haunt the Phoenix Pavilion.

So that's the end of Wang Yun, a loyal official who did such a great service to the country but saw it all slip away in the blink of an eye. In retrospect, perhaps he really shouldn't have been so intransigent in his refusal to extend amnesty to Dong Zhuo's lieutenants. In the end, this obstinacy nullified everything he accomplished, and as we will soon see, things will quickly become even worse than they were under Dong Zhuo.

After they killed Wang Yun, the rebel generals sent their soldiers to kill all of Wang Yun's family, an act that made everyone who heard shed a tear. But the rebels weren't done yet. Li Jue and Guo Si figured, "We've gone this far. We might as well kill the emperor and seize power for ourselves." So they pulled out their swords and cried for their men to storm into the palace. But their two accomplices, Zhang Ji and Fan Chou, talked them off the ledge.

"If we kill the emperor now, no one will obey us," they said. "Instead, let's continue to prop him up and use him to lure the various warlords to come under our control. That way, we first eliminate his supporters, and then we can kill him and make a play for control of the empire."

Li Jue and Guo Si went along with this suggestion and put their swords away. Meanwhile, the emperor spoke from the top of the gate.

“You have killed Wang Yun. Why have you not called off your army?”

Li Jue and Guo Si took this opportunity to advance their careers.

“Your humble servants have rendered service to the house of Han, but your highness has not yet conferred titles upon us. Therefore we dare not tell our armies to stand down,” they replied.

When the emperor asked what titles they wanted, the four rebel generals each wrote down the position they wanted and sent it up to the emperor. At this point, the inmates are obviously running the asylum, so the emperor had no choice but to grant whatever title these guys asked for. All of them got fancy new titles and positions of power, with Li Jue and Guo Si sharing top-level control of the court. Even Li (3) Meng (2) and Wang (2) Fang (1) -- the two collaborators inside the city who opened the gates and let the rebels in -- got their own commands.

Thus satisfied, the rebels thanked his majesty for his great kindness and led their armies out of the city. They then ordered their men to go search for Dong Zhuo’s remains. All they could find, though, were some scraps of skin and bones. They had a sculptor make a statue of Dong Zhuo out of fragrant wood to use as a stand-in. They dressed the statue in royal robes and put it, along with the remains, in a royal coffin. When an auspicious date rolled around, they set out to bury Dong Zhuo at Mei (2) Wu (4).

But before they could get the coffin in the ground, the heavens opened up and a thunderstorm raged. Rain flooded the area, and thunder shook open the coffin, at which point the remains spilled out. Li Jue and company waited till the storm subsided and tried again to bury their dead master, but the storm returned again and again. They tried three times to put Dong Zhuo’s coffin in the ground, and failed all three times. By now, what few scraps remained of Dong Zhuo had been destroyed by lightning. I guess people weren’t kidding when they said that Dong Zhou’s crimes enraged both men and heaven.

Their macabre funereal failure notwithstanding, things were looking pretty good for Li Jue and Guo Si. They called the shots at court, and they used their power for all the wrong things. They oppressed the common people, kept the emperor under a close watch, making him a virtual prisoner, and promoted or demoted officials as they pleased. To garner some good will with the people, they named Zhu (1) Jun (4), one of the commanders who led the pacification of the Yellow Turban Rebellion, to the position of court steward and invited him to take part in affairs of the court.

But you don't just march on the capital, kill the man responsible for eliminating Dong Zhuo, force the emperor to grant you cushy jobs at knife point, and expect everyone else to just go along with it. Indeed, there soon came a report that Ma (3) Teng (2), the governor of Xiliang (1,2) and one of the leaders of the coalition against Dong Zhuo, had joined forces with Han (2) Sui (4), the imperial protector of Bing (1) Province, and that they were on their way to the capital with an army more than 100,000 strong, with the declaration that they were going to bring the rebels to justice. Unbeknownst to the rebel generals, Ma Teng and Han Sui had collaborators inside the capital in the form of three courtiers. These courtiers had secretly asked the emperor to grant titles to Ma Teng and Han Sui, along with the decree to wage war on the rebels, and that's why the two were now on their way to Changan.

Upon hearing the news of Ma Teng and Han Sui marching on the capital, the four rebel generals gathered to discuss how to respond. Their adviser Jia (3) Xu (3) suggested that the best offense is a good defense,

"The enemy is traveling a great distance to get here," he said. We just need to fortify our defenses. Within a hundred days, they will have exhausted their provisions and will have to retreat. If we give chase then, we would be able to capture them both."

But Li (3) Meng (2) and Wang (2) Fang (1), letting their new commands go to their heads, had other ideas. They both came forward and said, "That plan sucks! If you give us 10,000 crack troops, we will present you with the heads of Ma Teng and Han Sui."

“If we fight now, we will surely lose,” Jia (3) Xu (3) said.

“If we lose, we will present you with our heads,” Li (3) Meng (2) and Wang (2) Fang (1) shot back.

“But if we win, then you must present us with your head.”

Seeing that there’s no talking these two out of a fight, Jia (3) Xu (3) turned to Li Jue and Guo Si and said, “Seventy miles to the west of Changan lie the Zhouzhi (1,4) Hills. The terrain there is very difficult. You should order Zhang Ji and Fan Chou to station an army there for defense while Li (3) Meng (2) and Wang (2) Fang (1) go meet the enemy.”

Li Jue and Guo Si took this advice and sent Li Meng and Wang Fang off with 15,000 men. The two happily departed and set up camp 90 miles from Changan. When the Xiliang army arrived, the two led their men out and lined up in battle formation. So yet another battle is looming. To see who will present whose head to whom, tune in next time on the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.