

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 20.

Last time, we saw Lü Bu and Liu Bei switch roles in Xu Province, with Lu Bu seizing control of the province while Liu Bei was occupied, and then putting Liu Bei in the hamlet of Xiaopei (3,4). And then we switched gears and checked in on Sun Ce (4), the eldest son of the late Sun Jian. When we left off, Sun Ce (4) had just used the imperial hereditary seal that his father left to him as collateral to borrow 3,000 troops from Yuan Shu so as to conquer himself an empire.

As Sun Ce's army was traveling, they saw another army approaching. At the head of this army was a gallant and striking man. When he saw Sun Ce, he dismounted and kneeled. Sun Ce recognized him. His name was Zhou (1) Yu (2). When Sun Jian joined the coalition against Dong Zhuo, he had moved his family to Zhou Yu's hometown. Zhou Yu was the same age as Sun Ce, and the two struck up a close friendship and became sworn brothers, with Sun Ce being the older brother by two months. Zhou Yu's uncle was the governor of Danyang (1,2), and Zhou Yu was on his way to visit him when he ran into Sun Ce. Sun Ce was delighted to see his old friend and brought him up to date on what's going.

"I am willing to do my part and help you achieve great deeds," Zhou Yu told him.

"Now that I have your help, success is guaranteed!" a joyous Sun Ce replied, and he introduced Zhou Yu to Zhu Zhi (4) and Lü (3) Fan (4), the two advisers who had helped Sun Ce extract himself from Yuan Shu.

"Brother, if you want to achieve great things, you should seek out the two Zhangs of the Southlands," Zhou Yu said.

"Who are they?"

"One is named Zhang Zhao (1), and the other is named Zhang Hong (2). They both have the talent to chart the course of heaven and earth. They have been living in obscurity to dodge the chaos in the realm. You should obtain their services."

Sun Ce immediately dispatched messengers to go invite the two Zhangs to come meet him, but they both declined. To court men of such talent requires a little more effort, so Sun Ce went to see them in person and made a big recruiting pitch that convinced the two to join him. Sun Ce made Zhang Zhao (1) a senior adviser and an imperial corps commander, while naming Zhang Hong (2) a counselor and a commandant. They then started planning their attack on Liu (2) Yao (2), who had been at odds with Sun Ce's uncle, which made for a convenient excuse for Sun Ce to borrow Yuan Shu's troops.

So this Liu (2) Yao (2) was a distant relative of the royal house. He used to be the imperial protector of Yang (2) Province and was based in Shochun (4,1). But when Yuan Shu went to Shochun (4,1) to build his own little empire, he kicked Liu Yao out and forced him to the other side of the Yangzi River, and that's why Liu Yao (2) was encroaching on Qu (1) A (2), where Sun Ce's family resided. When Liu Yao heard that Sun Ce was approaching with an army, he quickly assembled his officers to discuss their response.

One of his officers, Zhang (1) Ying (1), volunteered to lead an army and defend the key city of Niuzhu (2,3) to keep the approaching enemy at arm's length. Another officer now spoke up and volunteered to be the vanguard. It was Taishi (4,3) Ci (2).

Just to refresh your memory, Taishi Ci was a gallant warrior who made his entrance back in episode 14, when he helped break a Yellow Turban siege on the prefecture of Beihai (2,3). After that, he had entered service of Liu Yao, but Liu Yao obviously did not realize the kind of warrior he had at his disposal.

"You are too young to handle such an important command," Liu Yao said to Taishi Ci. "You need to stay by my side and carry out my orders."

Snubbed, Taishi Ci went away grumbling, while Zhang Ying (1) led troops to Niuzhu (2,3), where 100,000 bushels of grain were stored. When Sun Ce arrived, the two sides faced off by the water's edge, and Zhang Ying (1) cursed Sun Ce aloud. Huang (2) Gai (4), one of Sun Ce's ol' reliable officers,

rode out and fought with Zhang Ying (1). After just a few bouts, Zhang Ying's army suddenly fell into chaos, and word came that someone had set fire to his camp. Zhang Ying hurriedly retreated, and Sun Ce led his army in pursuit until they chased Zhang Ying away from Niuzhu (2,3) and into a mountain.

It turns out the arsonists were two stout warriors named Jiang (3) Qin (1) and Zhou (1) Tai (4). The two of them had fallen on hard times in these chaotic years, and they had assembled a bunch of men and made a living as pirates on the river. They had long heard that Sun Ce was a great man who was always recruiting talent, so they led their band of 300-some pirates to join him. Sun Ce was delighted and made them vanguard commanders. He then gathered up the grain and weapons at Niuzhu (2,3), as well as the 4,000-some soldiers who had surrendered, and advanced on Shenting (2,2).

Meanwhile, Zhang Ying (1) and his defeated army limped back to see Liu Yao (2), and Liu Yao (2) was not amused. He wanted to execute Zhang Ying, but his advisers talked him out of it. Instead, he ordered Zhang Ying to go garrison the city of Lingling (2,2), while Liu Yao himself led an army and set up camp to the south of the Shenting (2,2) Hills.

Sun Ce set up camp to the north of the hills and asked a local whether there was a temple to Emperor Guangwu (1,3), the founder of the Eastern Han dynasty, in the hills. When the local answered affirmative, Sun Ce said, "Last night I dreamed that Emperor Guangwu had summoned me to a meeting. I want to go pray to him."

"You cannot," his adviser Zhang Zhao (1) said. "Liu Yao is camped on the south side of the hills. What if there is an ambush?"

"I am under the protection of a god; I have nothing to fear," Sun Ce said.

So he donned his armor, grabbed his spear, and rode out with 12 officers. They went to the top of the hills, burned incense at the temple, dismounted and bowed to the shrine of Emperor Guangwu. After that, Sun Ce knelt in front of the shrine and said, "If I can establish myself in the Southlands and build

on the foundation my father had left, I shall restore this temple and offer sacrifices here every season.”

The prayers concluded, Sun Ce left the temple, got back on his horse, and told his entourage that he wanted to go over to the other side of the hills and take a look at Liu Yao’s camp. They were all against it, but he was the boss. So they rode up to the top of the hills and looked down on the south side.

Liu Yao’s scouts quickly reported this to their master, but Liu Yao said, “Sun Ce must be trying to lure us out. We must not pursue him.”

At this, Taishi Ci jumped up and said, “If we don’t capture Sun Ce now, then when?!”

Taishi Ci didn’t even wait for Liu Yao’s order. He simply threw on his armor, hopped on his horse, grabbed his spear, and left the camp. As he was leaving, he did his best Jerry Maguire impression and shouted, “Who has the guts to come with me?!”

None of the top officers so much as budged. Only one low-ranked officer said, “Taishi Ci has real courage! I will help him!” And so he galloped after Taishi Ci, while everyone else in camp just laughed at them.

Back on the hills, Sun Ce had just started to head back down his side of the hill when he suddenly heard someone shouting for him to stop. He turned and saw two riders flying down from the top. Sun Ce spread his entourage out in a line and stood ready with his spear in hand and waited. Taishi Ci approached and shouted, “Which one of you is Sun Ce?”

“Who are you?” Sun Ce asked.

“My name is Taishi Ci. I have come to capture Sun Ce!”

“[Laugh] You’re looking at him,” Sun Ce said. “The two of you can come attack me at the same time. If I show any fear, then my name isn’t Sun Ce.”

“[Scoff] Even if all of your men came to attack me at the same time, I would not be afraid,” Taishi Ci retorted.

And so the two of them crossed spears and fought for 50-some bouts without a winner. Sun Ce's officers all looked on with quiet amazement at Taishi Ci's prowess. Seeing that Sun Ce was not giving him any opening, Taishi Ci turned and fled. But instead of retracing his steps back up the hills, Taishi Ci fled to the back of the hills. Sun Ce followed in hot pursuit and shouted, "A real man would not run!"

Taishi Ci, however, had a plan. He was thinking that since Sun Ce had 12 guys with him, even if Taishi Ci were to capture him, he would probably be rescued by his entourage. So Taishi Ci pretended to flee so as to lure Sun Ce away from his men and then make his move. After the chase had gone on for a while, the two of them reached a flat area, and Taishi Ci turned around and they tangled again.

After another 50 bouts, Taishi Ci dodged a thrust from Sun Ce and quickly grabbed his spear with one hand. Then, with his other hand, Taishi Ci thrust his spear toward Sun Ce, but Sun Ce returned the favor and grabbed it as well. The two gave each other a good pull, and they both rolled off their horses. While their horses ran off to god knows where, the two of them threw their spears aside and engaged in some good ol' fashion fisticuffs until both of their cloaks were torn to shreds. At one point, Sun Ce grabbed the small halberd that Taishi Ci was wearing on his back, but Taishi Ci pulled off Sun Ce's helmet. While Sun Ce tried to stab Taishi Ci with the halberd, Taishi Ci blocked him with the helmet.

As the two of them were going on like this, they suddenly heard loud roars behind them. It was Liu Yao arriving with about a thousand men to back up Taishi Ci. Sun Ce was just about to panic when his 12 officers arrived on the scene. At this point, Sun Ce and Taishi Ci both let go of each other. Taishi Ci went to get another horse from Liu Yao's troops, while Sun Ce's horse had been recovered by his officers. They both retrieved their spears, and then Liu Yao's 1,000-some men fought with Sun Ce and his 12 officers. Those 12 officers must've been really good, because they were fighting the thousand men to a draw at the foot of the hills. After a while, Zhou Yu arrived with an army to relieve Sun Ce, while Liu Yao had summoned a bigger force and was charging down the hill. But by now it was near dusk, and strong

winds and pouring rain suddenly broke out, forcing both sides to retreat.

The next day, Sun Ce led his army to outside Liu Yao's camp, and Liu Yao came out to meet them. After they lined up, Sun Ce hanged Taishi Ci's halberd from the tip of his spear and had his soldiers shout, "If Taishi Ci had not run away so quickly, he would have died by this halberd!" Taishi Ci returned the favor by parading Sun Ce's helmet around and having his men shout, "This is Sun Ce's head!"

After this mutual boasting went on for a little while, Taishi Ci rode out and challenged Sun Ce again. Sun Ce was just about to answer the challenge, but one of his generals, Cheng Pu, said, "My lord, there is no need for you to dirty your hands. I will go capture him."

When Cheng Pu rode out to the front of the lines, Taishi Ci said, "You are no match for me. Go tell Sun Ce to come out."

Cheng Pu did not appreciate this slight, and he hoisted his spear and rode toward Taishi Ci. The two had fought for 30 bouts when Liu Yao suddenly signaled retreat. Taishi Ci returned to his lines and asked, "I was just about to capture him. Why are we retreating?"

"I've gotten word that Zhou Yu launched a surprise attack on Qu (1) A (2), and a man named Chen (2) Wu (3) let him into the city," Liu Yao said. "My home base is lost. We cannot stay here for long. We must make quickly for Lingling (2,2) to rendezvous with my other forces.

So Taishi Ci had no choice but to return to camp with Liu Yao, and Sun Ce did not give chase. His adviser Zhang Zhao (1) said, "Liu Yao's army has lost its fighting spirit after Zhou Yu's surprise capture of Qu (1) A (2). Tonight is the perfect time to raid his camp."

Sun Ce did just that, sending in five groups. Sure enough, Liu Yao's army was routed and scattered. Taishi Ci, accompanied by a dozen or so riders, fled to Jing (1) County.

Fresh off his victory, Sun Ce rewarded Chen (2) Wu (3), the guy who had let Zhou Yu's army into Qu

(1) A (2), by making him a commandant. This Chen Wu was about 5 foot 3, with a yellow complexion, reddish eyes, and a generally peculiar appearance. Sun Ce appointed him to lead the vanguard and attack Liu Yao's forces at Lingling. Chen Wu led about a dozen riders and stormed into the enemy formation, and they returned with some 50 heads of slain enemies. After this, the enemy would not come out. While Sun Ce was laying siege to the city, he suddenly got a report that Liu Yao was on his way to try to reclaim Niuzhu (2,3), so Sun Ce personally led the bulk of his army there.

When he got there, Liu Yao lined up to face him in battle. Sun Ce rode out himself, and one of Liu Yao's officers, let's just call him Redshirt 1 because he's not going to stick around that long, went out to fight him. After just three bouts, Sun Ce captured Redshirt 1 alive, tucked him under his arm, and started to head back to his own lines.

Another of Liu Yao's officers, Redshirt 2, galloped out to try to rescue his comrade. As he drew near Sun Ce and prepared to strike him from behind with a spear, Sun Ce's own soldiers shouted for him to turn around. Sun Ce turned and saw that Redshirt 2 had caught up to him. Sun Ce let out a loud roar that sounded like thunder, and this startled Redshirt 2 so much that he fell off his horse, broke his head, and died. Sun Ce then rode back to his own lines and threw Redshirt 1, whom he had kept tucked under his arm this whole time, to the ground. But as it turns out, Sun Ce had such a tight grip on him that he had squeezed this poor guy to death.

So yes, Sun Ce just literally squeezed the life out of one guy and yelled another guy to death. These badass feats soon earned him the nickname "Young Hegemon." More importantly, after that show of strength, Sun Ce easily routed Liu Yao's forces that day, killing more than 10,000 and getting the majority of the rest to surrender. Liu Yao and his subordinates fled to seek refuge with Liu Biao, the imperial protector of Jing (1) Province.

So that takes care of Liu Yao, but there were still two major detachments of his forces left at Lingling

and Jing (1) County. Sun Ce first resumed the siege on Lingling. He led his troops back to the city and personally rode to the walls of the city to demand their surrender now that their leader had been defeated. But the soldiers defending the city shot him in the left leg with an arrow, and Sun Ce fell off his horse. His officers hurriedly helped him up and returned to camp, where they pulled out the arrow and patched up his wound.

While the injury turned out to be no big deal, Sun Ce used it to devise a ruse. He had his men send out word that their commander had died from the arrow wound, and the army went into mourning and pulled out from their camp. When the enemy inside Lingling heard this, they immediately mobilized all their forces and came out to give chase. This, of course, led them right into the trap that Sun Ce had set, and they were soon surrounded. The enemy commanders, such as Zhang Ying (1), were all killed, while the rank-and-file soldiers all surrendered. Sun Ce spared all their lives and he entered the city to restore order. After that, he led his army to Jing (1) County to take on Taishi Ci.

After he fled to Jing (1) County after being defeated by Sun Ce's night raid on his camp, Taishi Ci had recruited about 2,000 soldiers into his army and was just about to go avenge Liu Yao when Sun Ce showed up on his doorstep. Sun Ce wanted to capture Taishi Ci alive, and he asked Zhou Yu for an idea. Zhou Yu ordered the army to lay siege on the city from three sides, leaving the east gate unattended. But a little ways outside the east gate, he set up ambushes on all three possible routes that Taishi Ci might take when he fled that way.

On Taishi Ci's end, things were looking pretty dire. His new recruits were all just hills people who showed little order, and the walls of the city he was defending were not that high. That night, Sun Ce ordered Chen (2) Wu (3) to scale the walls and start a fire at the top. When Taishi Ci saw that the city was on fire, he quickly mounted his horse and rode out through the east gate. Sun Ce and his army gave chase, but only for long enough to drive Taishi Ci toward the trap they had laid for him.



Sure enough, Taishi Ci rode right into the ambush. He had ridden for about 15 to 20 miles, and both he and his horse were near exhaustion. Suddenly, shouts rang out from amid the reeds. As he was just about to ride on again, he fell for the old rope-across-the-road trick and his horse tumbled to the ground. The soldiers in ambush jumped out, tied him up, and took him to Sun Ce's camp.

When Sun Ce heard that Taishi Ci had been brought to the camp, he went out, waved off the soldiers escorting the prisoner, and personally untied Taishi Ci and gave his foe the fancy coat off his own back. He then invited Taishi Ci into his tent and said, "I know you are a real man. Liu Yao is a fool to not take full advantage of your talents. That's why he lost."

Sun Ce's actions and words moved Taishi Ci, and he surrendered. Delighted, Sun Ce held his hand and asked with a laugh, "Back when you and I were duking it out on the hills, if you had captured me, would you have harmed me?"

Now, you would figure that someone in Taishi Ci's position -- having just been defeated and captured and having just surrendered to his former enemy -- would say something like, "Oh of course not. You're a true hero and I would not have been able to bring myself to harm you" and so on and so forth. But instead, Taishi Ci laughed and answered,

"It's hard to say."

Sun Ce admired this straightforward honesty and they shared a hearty laugh. He then invited Taishi Ci to take the seat of honor and put on a banquet to welcome him. During the banquet, Taishi Ci said,

"With Liu Yao's recent defeat, his soldiers' loyalty is shaken. I want to go recruit them into your service, if you could trust me enough to let me go."

Sun Ce rose up and thanked him. "That is my wish as well," he said. "Let's plan on meeting back here at noon tomorrow."

Taishi Ci then took his leave. After he rode off, Sun Ce's officers all figured that he was gone for good, but Sun Ce disagreed.

“Taishi Ci is a man of his word. He would not betray me.”

All the officers, though, remained skeptical. The next day, Sun Ce set up a pole by the entrance to the camp to serve as a sundial. Just as noon approached, so did Taishi Ci with about a thousand men in tow. This made Sun Ce very happy and made believers out of the skeptics.

After his complete victory over Liu Yao, Sun Ce now led tens of thousands. As he made his way through the Southland, he made sure to set the general population’s minds at ease, and countless people flocked to his banner. The people of the region all called him “Young Master Sun”. When enemies got word of his imminent arrival, they all lost heart and fled. But when his army arrived in a location, his soldiers were forbidden to disturb the locals in the slightest. The act of not slaughtering the locals made him very popular with them, and they always showed appreciation by offering food and wine, and he always thanked them with gold and silk. Among Liu Yao’s former soldiers, those who wanted to join Sun Ce’s army were welcomed, while those who didn’t were given a reward and allowed to return to their farms. All these actions earned Sun Ce great acclaim in the region and his military strength grew as well.

But Sun Ce wasn’t done campaigning just yet. He moved his family back to Qu (1) A (2), left his younger brother Sun Quan (2) and the general Zhou (1) Tai (4) in charge of the key city Xuancheng (1,2). Then, he set out to take the county of Wu (2), where a man named Yan (2) Baihu (2,3) had declared himself king. Yan Baihu was occupying Wu (2) County, while his lieutenants occupied the cities of Wucheng (1,2) and Jiaxing (1,4).

When he heard that Sun Ce was heading this way, Yan Baihu ordered his younger brother Yan Yu (2) to lead an army out to meet them. The two sides faced off at Maple Bridge, with Yan Yu (2) plopping himself on the bridge with saber in hand. When the scouts reported this to Sun Ce, he wanted to go out and fight Yan Yu himself, but his adviser Zhang Hong (2) stopped him.

“My lord, you are the lifeblood of the army. You should not go out and fight against the enemy’s subordinates so lightly. Please take yourself more seriously.”

“That is a good piece of advice,” Sun Ce said. “But I worry that if I don’t personally brave the dangers, my soldiers would not give it their all.”

That said, though, Sun Ce did relent and ordered one of his generals, Han (2) Dang (1), to go out and fight in his stead. But before Han Dang could make it to the bridge, two other officers, Jiang (3) Qin (1) and Chen (2) Wu (3), had already made their way to the bridge by boat and started raining arrows on the enemies on the opposite bank. The two then leaped onto the bank and started cutting down more enemy soldiers, forcing Yan Yu (2) to retreat. Han Dang then led his forces all the way to the city gates.

Sun Ce advanced both his army and navy to surround the city. When no one from inside the city came out to fight for three straight days, Sun Ce led his forces to one of the gates and called for Yan Baihu to surrender. One of the enemy officers on the city wall started hurling insults at them. This guy had braced himself against a beam with his left hand and was pointing at Sun Ce and company with his right hand while he spewed his bile.

Taishi Ci took out his bow and arrow and said to his men, “Watch me hit this guy’s left hand.”

At the twang of his bowstring, his arrow indeed found its mark. It pierced the enemy officer’s hand and nailed him to the beam. This impressive showing drew cheers from both sides. When he saw his officer being helped off the city wall, Yan Baihu was shocked.

“How can we hope to defeat an enemy that has such talent in his army?” he said.

And so he tried to sue for peace. The next day, Yan Baihu sent his brother Yan Yu (2) out to meet Sun Ce. Sun Ce invited him into his tent for wine. After a couple cups, Sun Ce asked Yan Yu (2) what his brother’s terms were.

“My brother would like to divide the Southlands equally with you, general,” Yan Yu (2) answered.

This was the wrong answer, as Sun Ce flew into a rage.

“How dare you vermins put yourselves on equal footing with me?” he said as he ordered the guards to execute Yan Yu. Yan Yu got up and reached for his sword, but Sun Ce was quicker to the draw, and his sword sailed through the air and cut down Yan Yu. Sun Ce then ordered Yan Yu’s head to be chopped off and sent back into the city to show that he meant business.

Yan Baihu got the message, and figuring that he was no match for Sun Ce, he abandoned the city and fled. Sun Ce directed his army to advance and pacify the area. His general Huang Gai led a successful siege to take Jiaxing (1,4), while Taishi Ci sacked Wucheng (1,2). Meanwhile, while he was fleeing, Yan Baihu was also pillaging and looting, but that brought him more trouble than he was bargaining for. A native named Ling (2) Cao (1) led a group of locals and defeated Yan Baihu, forcing him to flee toward Kuaiji (4,1). For their service, Ling Cao (1) and his son were both named commandants in Sun Ce’s army, and they accompanied him as he chased Yan Baihu across the river.

Yan Baihu then regrouped and tried to make a stand at the river crossing at Xijin (1,1), but he was routed again by another of Sun Ce’s generals, Cheng Pu. This time, Sun Ce chased him all the way to Kuaiji (4,1). The governor of Kuaiji (4,1), Wang (2) Lang (2), wanted to go and rescue Yan Baihu, but a district official, Yu (2) Fan (1), tried to convince him otherwise.

“Sun Ce’s army is compassionate and just, while Yan Baihu is cruel,” Yu (2) Fan (1) said. “The thing to do now is to capture Yan Baihu and hand him over to Sun Ce.”

But Wang Lang (2) rejected this advice and scolded Yu (2) Fan (1), who sighed and left. Wang Lang then led his army out to meet up with Yan Baihu and they stationed their forces in the field near Shanyin (1,1). When the two sides lined up, Sun Ce rode out and said to Wang Lang,

“I am leading my army in the name of humanity and justice to restore order to this region. Why do you aid the rebel Yan Baihu?”

“You are too greedy!” Wang Lang countered. “You already have Wu (2) County, yet that’s not enough. Now you are trying to take my territory by force! I am going to avenge Yan Baihu’s clan today!”

Sun Ce was just about to go out and fight Wang Lang, but Taishi Ci had preempted him and galloped out. Wang Lang hoisted his saber and rode to meet Taishi Ci. After just a few bouts, Zhou (1) Ting (1), Wang Lang’s lieutenant, rode out to help, but he was met by Huang Gai. Drums rolled and shook the ground on both sides to cheer their warriors on. Suddenly, the rear of Wang Lang’s lines fell into chaos as an army swept in from the rear. This turned out to be a relief force led by Zhou Yu and Cheng Pu. Outnumbered and sandwiched between two enemy forces, Wang Lang, Yan Baihu, and Zhou Ting could little aside from fight their way out and flee into the city. They pulled up the drawbridge and shut the gates. Sun Ce drove his army to the city walls and began to lay siege on all four gates.

Inside the city, Wang Lang wanted to go out and fight it out, but Yan Baihu advised defense instead.

“Sun Ce has the momentum,” he said, “so right now the best thing to do is to fortify our defenses and not go out. Within a month, his army will run out of provisions and have to retreat. Then we can attack while they are falling back and rout them.”

Wang Lang listened to Yan Baihu and stayed inside the city, and to his credit, he was able to repel siege after siege. After a number of unsuccessful attempts to storm the city, Sun Ce gathered his officers to talk strategy. To see what ideas they came up with, tune in next time on the Romance of the Three Kingdoms podcast. Thanks for listening.