

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 21.

Last time, Sun Ce had chased Yan (2) Baihu (2,3), a local warlord in the Southlands, to the city of Kuaiji (4,1), where the governor Wang (2) Lang (2) mounted a stiff defense to prevent Sun Ce from taking the city. After laying siege to the city for days without success, Sun Ce assembled his officers to find another way. His uncle Sun Jing (4) said,

“Wang Lang has the city too well-defended for a quick victory. But most of the city’s grain and money are stored in Chadu (2,2), which is not far from here. We should occupy that location first. As the maxim goes, ‘Attack where they are least prepared; do what is least expected.’ ”

Sun Ce was delighted by this suggestion and left a token army to keep the fire burning and keep marching out the standards to make it look like the main army was still camped outside the city. Meanwhile, he himself led his forces and headed south. Zhou Yu then suggested that Wang Lang would no doubt pursue them when he heard that they were leaving, so Sun Ce should leave a little surprise for him.

“I’ve already prepared for that,” Sun Ce said. “Tonight is the night we take the city.”

And so Sun Ce ordered his army to move out as planned. When Wang Lang got word of this, he personally went to the top of the city walls to check it out. But he saw that at the foot of the walls the fires in Sun Ce’s camp still burned like before, and the banners were just as numerous. This made him question whether Sun Ce was really gone. But his comrades were much more certain. Zhou Ting and Yan Baihu both advocated for pursuing Sun Ce, especially since he might be on his way to Chadu (2,2). Since Chadu (2,2) was such a key storehouse for him, Wang Lang relented and sent Zhou Ting and Yan Baihu on their way with 5,000 troops, while he himself followed.

Well, you can guess what happened next. Not long after they left the city, they rode right into the trap Sun Ce set for them. As they passed near some thick woods, drums suddenly started rolling and

torches lit up the night. As Yan Baihu turned to retreat, his path was already cut off by none other than Sun Ce himself. Zhou Ting rode forward to fight Sun Ce, but Sun Ce dispatched him with one thrust of his spear. All the other troops surrendered, and Yan Baihu alone fought his way out and fled toward Yuhang (2,2). In the rear, Wang Lang got word that things had gotten really bad, so he didn't even dare to go back to the city. Instead, he just fled with his entourage to the coast.

So the city of Kuaiji (4,1) now belonged to Sun Ce, and he went in to restore order and assure the residents that everything is fine. Within a day, a man came to see him with a present in tow -- Yan Baihu's head. This man was named Dong (3) Xi (2). He stood six foot tall, with a square jaw and a wide mouth. Sun Ce rewarded him by appointing him auxiliary commanding officer.

With this victory, the region now belonged to Sun Ce, and he put his uncle Sun Jing (4) in charge and made Zhu Zhi (4) the governor of Wu (2) County while he himself led his troops back to the Southlands. But not all was well in his realm. Before he set out on the campaign against Yan Baihu, Sun Ce had left his younger brother Sun Quan and the general Zhou Tai (4) in charge of the key city of Xuancheng (1,2). One night, the city suddenly came under siege from all sides by bandits. As the night dragged on, the tide turned against the forces defending the city, so Zhou Tai helped Sun Quan onto a horse. As they tried to flee, dozens of bandits came upon them and made for Sun Quan with knives in hand. Zhou Tai, however, accompanied Sun Quan on foot, stark naked. Wielding his knife, he killed more than a dozen people. Another bandit on horseback tried to spear Zhou Tai from behind, he grabbed the spear, dragged the guy off the horse, took his weapon and his ride, and then cut a bloody path through which he and Sun Quan escaped. The remaining bandits fled after seeing the number that Zhou Tai did on their brethren.

But Zhou Tai paid for this act of bravery. He was stabbed 12 times, and soon the wounds began to fester and his life hung by a thread. Sun Ce panicked upon hearing the news, but the newly acquired

Dong (3) Xi (2) had a suggestion.

“Once, I fought with pirates and was stabbed a bunch of times,” he said. “But a capable official from Kuaiji (4,1) named Yu (2) Fan (1) recommended a doctor who healed me within two weeks.”

Now, if you remember, we introduced Yu (2) Fan (1) briefly in the last episode. He tried to convince the governor of Kuaiji (4,1) to not help Yan Baihu, but was ignored. But Sun Ce had heard of his name as well, so he summoned Yu (2) Fan (1), treated him well, and appointed him to the Bureau of Merit. Then he asked Yu Fan for the doctor’s name.

“This man is named Hua (4) Tuo (2),” Yu Fan said. “He is truly a miracle worker. I will bring him.”

And Yu Fan delivered. Within a day, he returned with Hua Tuo. This Hua Tuo had a youthful face and hair like the feathers of a crane. He moved with other-worldly lightness and ease. Sun Ce treated him as an honored guest and asked him to tend to Zhou Tai. Hua Tuo worked his magic, and within a month, Zhou Tai was good as new, and Sun Ce rewarded Hua Tuo handsomely.

Sun Ce then avenged Zhou Tai by wiping out the bandits. With this, the Southlands were all pacified. Sun Ce assigned troops to defend the key locations. He then wrote to the court to report on his accomplishments because, you know, just like Cao Cao a few episodes back, all the work he’s been doing lately has been for the honor and glory of the empire and so on and so forth. He also made sure to make nice with Cao Cao.

Sun Ce also sent a messenger to ask Yuan Shu to return the hereditary imperial seal, which Sun Ce had used as collateral to borrow Yuan Shu’s troops. But, to everyone’s shock I’m sure, Yuan Shu didn’t want to part with the seal. You see, Yuan Shu was entertaining thoughts of declaring himself emperor, and an ascension ceremony just won’t be complete without a sacred seal in your possession to show everyone that you have heaven’s favor. So Yuan Shu wrote back and made up some excuse, probably something like, “I know it’s around here somewhere. I’ll ship it to you as soon as it turns up.” In the meantime, he gathered his advisers to discuss their next move.

“Sun Ce borrowed my troops as his foundation,” Yuan Shu said. “And now he has control of all the Southlands. But instead of repaying my kindness, he’s asking for his seal back. How should we make him pay for this outrageous behavior?”

Yuan Shu’s senior adviser, Yang (2) Dajiang (4,4), spoke up.

“Sun Ce has the strategic advantage of the Yangzi River, not to mention crack troops and ample grain. We can’t attack him just yet. Right now, we should first attack Liu Bei as payback for him attacking us without cause. And then we can set our sights on Sun Ce. I have a plan that will defeat Liu Bei immediately.”

“What is your plan?” Yuan Shu asked.

“Liu Bei is stationed at Xiaopei (3,4). He may be easy picking, but Lu Bu reigns over Xu Province. We had previously promised him lots of gifts but we haven’t delivered. He might hold a grudge against us and help Liu Bei. We should send him provisions to win him over to our side so that he won’t lift a finger to help Liu Bei. At that point, Liu Bei is ours. Once we’ve captured Liu Bei, we can then move on Lu Bu, and Xu Province will fall into our hands.”

Yuan Shu took this suggestion and ordered one of his officials, Han (2) Yin (4), to deliver 200,000 bushels of grain to Lu Bu, along with a secret letter. This, as you can imagine, made Lu Bu very happy, and he treated Han (2) Yin (4) like an honored guest. Han (2) Yin (4) then reported back to Yuan Shu that everything on Lu Bu’s side is taken care of, so Yuan Shu immediately sent an army numbering in the tens of thousands to attack Xiaopei (2,4). At the head of this army was the general Ji (4) Ling (2), who had crossed paths with Liu Bei and company the last time the two sides clashed. Yuan Shu also appointed two other officers -- Lei (2) Bao (2) and Chen (2) Lan (2) -- to serve as his deputies.

Word of this soon reached Liu Bei, and he assembled his staff to talk things over. Zhang Fei, not surprisingly, wanted to go out and fight, but Sun (1) Qian (2), one of the civil advisers, was against it.

“Xiaopei has few provisions and troops,” Sun Qian said. “How can we hope to stand up to this enemy? The thing to do now is to ask Lu Bu for help.”

“That bastard would never come!” Zhang Fei said.

Well, that may be, but Liu Bei had to try nonetheless. So he wrote to Lu Bu and said,

“Thank you, general, for your kind concern and boundless generosity in granting us refuge in Xiaopei (2,4). Presently Yuan Shu is trying to settle a private grudge and has sent Ji (4) Ling (2) at the head of an army to attack us. Our lives hang in the balance, and you are the only one who can save us. I pray you will send an army relieve our plight. I would be eternally grateful.”

When the letter reached Lu Bu, he went to talk to Chen (2) Gong (1) and said to him,

“Yuan Shu sent me grain and a letter asking me to not help Liu Bei, and now Liu Bei has come to beg for assistance. In my opinion, Liu Bei, being stuck in Xiaopei, is not a threat to me yet. On the other hand, if Yuan Shu eliminates Liu Bei and then joins forces with the commanders around Mount Tai (4) to the north to attack me, that would be trouble. So I think the best thing to do is to help Liu Bei.”

And so Lu Bu mobilized an army and set out.

Meanwhile, Ji (4) Ling (2) and his army had already marched to the southeast of Xiaopei and set up camp. By day, their banners dotted the hillside. By night, the fires in his camp lit up the sky while drums shook the earth. On the other side, Liu Bei had only a scant 5,000 men, but since the enemy was on his doorstep, he had no choice but to lead his cute little army out and set up camp as well.

Suddenly, scouts reported that Lu Bu had led an army to the southwest of Xiaopei and set up camp there. When Ji Ling heard this, he immediately sent a letter to Lu Bu lecturing him on his apparent bad faith. But Lu Bu laughed.

“I have an idea that would make it impossible for either side to blame me.”

He then sent messengers to invite both Ji Ling and Liu Bei to his camp for a banquet. Liu Bei wanted to go, but Guan Yu and Zhang Fei were against it.

“You can’t go! Lu Bu must be up to no good,” they said.

“I have not mistreated him, so he would not harm me,” Liu Bei said as he got on his horse. His brothers of course followed.

When they entered Lu Bu’s camp, Lu Bu said to Liu Bei, “Today I’m going to save you from this crisis. When you accomplish great things someday, don’t forget about this.”

Liu Bei thanked him, and then Lu Bu offered him a seat, while Guan Yu and Zhang Fei stood behind him with their hands resting on their swords. Just then, a messenger came to report that Ji Ling had arrived. Liu Bei was shocked and was about to get the heck out of dodge, but Lu Bu stopped him.

“I’ve invited the two of you to come together and talk things out. Please do not be suspicious.”

Well, Liu Bei sat back down, but he was understandably on edge, not knowing what Lu Bu had in mind.

For his part, Ji Ling was just as surprised when he walked in and saw Liu Bei sitting in the tent. So surprised, in fact, that he turned and tried to leave. The guards couldn’t stop him, but Lu Bu stepped forward and, with one hand, grabbed him and yanked him back as if he were a child.

“General, do you intend to kill me?” Ji Ling asked Lu Bu.

“No.”

“Then you intend to kill Big Ears?” And yes, Big Ears is a reference to Liu Bei, who, if you would remember, supposedly had some ears so big that his lobes touched his shoulders.

“Nope,” Lu Bu answered.

“Then what are we doing here?”

“Liu Bei is my brother,” Lu Bu said. “Since he’s under attack from you, I have come to help him.”

“So you ARE going to kill me?”

“That would be uncalled for. I’ve never been one to pick a fight; I prefer to help people resolve their conflicts without fighting, and that’s what I’m going to do for you guys.”

Well, it’s a good thing that they hadn’t started serving wine yet, because everyone present probably would’ve spat out their wine and laughed when they heard Lu Bu describe himself as never one to pick a fight. But since Liu Bei was hopelessly outnumbered, and Ji Ling was mortally afraid of Lu Bu, they let him go on.

“How do you intend to resolve our conflict?” Ji Ling asked Lu Bu.

“I will let heaven settle it,” Lu Bu said as he dragged Ji Ling into the tent to meet Liu Bei, which, yeah, was pretty awkward for everyone involved. Lu Bu then took the center seat, with Ji Ling to his left and Liu Bei to his right, and the banquet commenced.

After a few rounds of wine, Lu Bu said, “Why don’t you guys both do me a favor and call off this battle?”

Liu Bei was silent, but Ji Ling was more vocal.

“I have been ordered by my lord to lead 100,000 men here specifically to capture Liu Bei. How can I just leave?”

Zhang Fei had something to say about that, though.

“My troops may be few in number, but I view the likes of you as child’s play! How do you guys stack up against the hundred million Yellow Turbans?!” he said as he drew his sword.

Guan Yu, though, quickly intervened and kept Zhang Fei from ending the party. “Let’s wait and see what General Lu wants to do before we start the bloodshed,” he said.

“I’m asking you guys to make peace, not bloodshed,” Lu Bu answered.

But this overture for peace was going nowhere. On one side, Ji Ling was grumbling. On the other

side, Zhang Fei was itching for a fight. And now, Lu Bu got mad and called out to his guards:

“Bring me my halberd!”

The sight of Lu Bu standing there with halberd in hand made both Ji Ling and Liu Bei turn pale, but Lu Bu wasn't about to use the halberd to draw blood.

“I will let heaven decide whether you two fight or make peace,” he said.

He then handed his halberd to one of his attendants and ordered him to stick it in the ground by the entrance to the camp. He then said to Ji Ling and Liu Bei:

“The camp entrance is 150 paces away from here. If I can hit the small side blade of the halberd with an arrow, then the two of you must call off your war. If I miss, then you guys can fight it out. If one of you refuses to abide by this, I will join with the other side and attack you.”

Now, 150 paces is pretty far away, so Ji Ling was thinking to himself that there was no way Lu Bu would actually hit his mark, so sure, I'll just play along, wait till he misses, and then I can go fight to my heart's content. So he agreed. On the other side, Liu Bei was only too happy to let Lu Bu try, since what's the alternative? Take his 5,000 men and go up against tens of thousands?

So the stage was set. Lu Bu asked everyone to take a seat and each drink a cup of wine, just to let the suspense build a little bit. He then called for his bow and arrow. As he set up, Liu Bei was silently praying for a miracle.

Lu Bu now pulled up his sleeve, fitted an arrow to the bowstring, and drew the bow full stretch.

“Hit!” he shouted as he released the bow. From a bow drawn as wide as a full moon shot out an arrow that sped away like a shooting star. In the blink of an eye, 150 paces away, the arrow struck the small side blade on the halberd, and all the officers around the camp cheered.

A poet later praised the deed thus:

With an immortal shot rarely seen,

Lu Bu saved the day by the war camp gates.
A marksman to shame Hou (4) Yi (4),
An aim that outclassed You (2) Ji (1).
When the tiger-tendon bowstring sprang,
The hawk-feathered arrow found its mark.
As the leopard tail on the halberd quivered,
A hundred thousand men laid down their arms.

A quick aside here: The poem references two people -- Hou (4) Yi (4) and You (2) Ji (1). All we need to know in this context is that they were both legendary archers.

Anyway, admiring his own feat, Lu Bu let out a hearty laugh, tossed the bow on the ground, and grabbed Ji Ling and Liu Bei by their hands.

“This is heaven decreeing that you two should call off the war,” he said. And then he ordered his men to bring wine and made everyone drink a big goblet.

Liu Bei was feeling pretty darn lucky and a bit sheepish at how he managed to dodge disaster. Ji Ling, meanwhile, could say nothing for a long time. Finally, he spoke to Lu Bu.

“General, I dare not disobey your decree,” he said. “But what am I going to tell my master?”

“Don’t worry. I will write to him and explain,” Lu Bu said.

After a few more cups of wine, Ji Ling asked and got the letter from Lu Bu and then left. Lu Bu then turned to Liu Bei and gloated a bit more about how he saved Liu Bei’s behind. Liu Bei bowed and thanked him and then returned to camp with his brothers. The next day, all three armies went back from where they came.

When Ji Ling got back to Huainan (2,2), told Yuan Shu what happened, and offered up Lu Bu’s letter, Yuan Shu was TICKED OFF.

“How can Lu Bu pull this childish stunt after taking all the grain I sent him? I shall personally lead a huge army to punish Liu Bei and Lu Bu!”

“My lord, you must not act so impetuously,” Ji Ling said. “Lu Bu’s fierceness is unmatched, and he controls Xu Province. If he and Liu Bei join forces, it would be difficult to defeat them. I’ve heard that Lu Bu has a daughter by his wife, Madam Yan (2), who is of marrying age. My lord, you have a son. You can propose a union between them. If Lu Bu agrees to betroth his daughter to your son, then he would certainly kill Liu Bei. After all, relatives always come before strangers.”

Yuan Shu consented and dispatched Han (2) Yin (4) to go play matchmaker. Han (2) Yin (4) arrived in Xu Province with a bunch of swag in tow and went to see Lu Bu.

“My lord greatly admires you, general, and would like to marry his son to your daughter and form an everlasting union between his house and yours,” Han (2) Yin (4) said to Lu Bu.

With something like this, Lu Bu was smart enough to consult his wife before deciding. So as we mentioned, his wife was Madame Yan (2). And some of you might be wondering where is that supposed love of his life, Diaochan (1,2), in all this. Well, she’s still around, but she is only a concubine, who is not considered an official “wife”. His primary wife was Madame Yan (2), whom he married first. Later, when he was living in Xiaopei, he took the daughter of the officer Cao (2) Pao (4) as his second wife. You would remember that this connection to Cao Pao was what earned Cao Pao a lashing from Zhang Fei and eventually led to Lu Bu sacking Xu Province as revenge. So of the three women, Madame Cao had died without bearing Lu Bu any children, and Diaochan hasn’t bore him any kids either. So the one daughter by Madame Yan (2) was his only child, and he adored her.

When Lu Bu told Madame Yan (2) about the marriage proposal, she was ecstatic. “I’ve heard that Yuan Shu has long been established at Huainan (2,2) with lots of troops and grain, and that it’s only a matter of time before he becomes emperor,” she said. “If that happens, my daughter might be in line

to become empress. Do you know how many sons he has?”

“Just the one,” Lu Bu said.

“Well then, we should accept immediately,” she said. “Even if she doesn’t become empress, our province would still be secure.”

So Lu Bu accepted the proposal and rolled out the red carpet for Han (2) Yin (4). Han (2) Yin (4) then reported back to Yuan Shu that they have a deal, and Yuan Shu sent him back to Xu Province with the dowry. Lu Bu accepted, treated Han (2) Yin (4) to a banquet, and put him up in lodgings for the night.

The next day, Lu Bu’s top adviser, Chen Gong, went to pay Han (2) Yin (4) a visit. After the typical formalities, they sat down and Chen Gong dismissed the attendants and said to Han (2) Yin (4):

“Who suggested this idea of a union by marriage between your lord and Lu Bu? I bet their intent is to kill Liu Bei, right?”

Totally busted, Han (2) Yin (4) stood up and said, “I hope you will not expose my scheme.”

“I won’t expose it,” Chen Gong said. “But if this things gets dragged out, someone else might see through your plan, too, and then there could be complications.”

“What should we do then?” Han (2) Yin (4) asked.

“I will go talk to Lu Bu and convince him to send his daughter to your lord immediately to complete the marriage. How’s that?” Chen Gong said.

Han (2) Yin (4) was delighted and thanked Chen Gong profusely. After they took leave of each other, Chen Gong went to see Lu Bu and said to him:

“General, I heard that you have promised your daughter to Yuan Shu’s son. That’s great news. When is the wedding?”

“We’re still deliberating that,” Lu Bu said.

“Well, there are long-established protocols for how long a waiting period there should be before a

wedding, depending on one's social status," Chen Gong said. "The emperor must wait a year; the nobles should wait half a year; officials should wait a season; and commoners a month."

"Hmm. Yuan Shu has the imperial hereditary seal, and it's only a matter of time before he becomes emperor, so how about if we followed the protocols for emperors?" Lu Bu asked.

"No."

"The protocols for nobles, then?"

"That won't do either."

"Officials?"

"That's no good as well."

"What, you would have me follow the protocols for mere peasants?"

"No."

"Well, what then?"

"General, right now all the lords of the realm are vying for power. When they hear that you and Yuan Shu are going to be joined by marriage, which one among them would not be jealous? If you pick a date in the distant future, then you're giving them an opportunity to ambush the wedding party on the way. If you had not already consented to the marriage, the best thing to do would be to drop the matter. But since you've already consented, the thing to do now is to immediately send your daughter to Shouchun (4,1), before the other lords find out. There, she can remain in seclusion, and then you can take your time picking an auspicious wedding date."

Lu Bu agreed with this assessment and told his wife to get their daughter ready that night. He then arranged for a carriage and ordered two of his officers to accompany her and the matchmaker Han (2) Yin (4). With much fanfare, the entourage left the city and set out for Shouchun (4,1).

All that fanfare, however, caught the attention of an old man, Chen (2) Gui (4). Chen Gui (4) was the father of Chen (2) Deng (1), who was one of the people on Liu Bei's staff when Liu Bei was in

control of the province, and Chen Deng was now serving under Lu Bu. Chen Gui (4), meanwhile, was retired and staying at home. When he heard all the commotion, he asked what was going on. When told of the marriage proposal, he immediately recognized it as a plot to isolate Liu Bei. Like his son, Chen Gui (4) was still loyal to Liu Bei, so he immediately went to see Lu Bu.

When Lu Bu asked why he had come, Chen Gui answered, "General, I heard that your death is imminent, so I have come to mourn you."

"What do you mean?" a surprised Lu Bu asked.

"Previously, Yuan Shu sent you gifts as part of his attempt to kill Liu Bei, but you foiled him with your marksmanship. And now comes this sudden marriage proposal. Their intent must be to hold your daughter hostage and then attack Liu Bei and seize Xiaopei (3,4). If Xiaopei falls, then Xu Province is in danger. And if Yuan Shu asks you for provisions or troops, you would be in a bind. If you agree, then you'd become his servant and make enemies of others. If you refuse, then you would lose your daughter and be at war with Yuan Shu.

"Furthermore, I've heard that Yuan Shu is thinking about declaring himself emperor. That would be treason. If he becomes a traitor, then you would be guilty of treason as well as the relative of a traitor, and there would be no place for you under heaven."

This spiel left Lu Bu in a panic. "Chen Gong has led me astray!" he said. And he immediately ordered one of his top generals, Zhang (1) Liao (2), to lead an army and chase down the wedding party and return his daughter. They even seized Han (2) Yin (4) and detained him. At the same time, though, Lu Bu also sent a message to Yuan Shu, telling him that his daughter's bridal outfit and things were still being prepared, and that he would deliver her as soon as that was ready. This, of course, was a stall tactic while Lu Bu tried to figure out his next move. Chen (2) Gui (4) advised him to send Han (2) Yin (4) as a prisoner to Cao Cao, but Lu Bu could not make up his mind.

At this moment came another twist: Scouts reported that Liu Bei was recruiting soldiers and purchasing horses in Xiaopei and that they didn't know what his intention was. Lu Bu, though, dismissed this at first since, after all, Liu Bei was a military man and recruiting soldiers and buying horses are the kind of things that a military man is supposed to do. But just then, two of his officers, Song (4) Xian (4) and Wei (4) Xu (4), came to see Lu Bu and told him:

"On your orders, we went to the Shandong (1,1) region to buy horses. We had purchased 300-some fine steeds and were on our way back when bandits made off with half of them. We asked around and found out that it was actually Liu Bei's brother Zhang Fei pretending to be bandits and stealing our horses."

Lu Bu was understandably ticked off and immediately led an army to Xiaopei to settle the score. Liu Bei was stunned to hear this development and hurriedly led his own troops out to meet Lu Bu. When the two sides lined up, Liu Bei went out and asked why Lu Bu was there.

"I saved your butt with my marksmanship," Lu Bu cursed as he pointed at Liu Bei. "Why did you steal my horses?!"

"It's true that I was short on horses," Liu Bei said. "I had ordered my men to go purchase more. How would I dare to steal your horses, brother?"

"You ordered Zhang Fei to steal 150 of my fine steeds. How dare you deny it?!"

Zhang Fei now rode out with his spear in hand and shot back, "Yes, I took your horses. What are you going to do about it?"

"You round-eyed rogue!" Lu Bu shouted. "How dare you disrespect me time and again?!"

"So when I take your horses, you get mad. But what about when you took my brother's province?!"

It was clear that the time for talking had passed. Lu Bu rode straight for Zhang Fei, and Zhang Fei came out to greet him. The two fought for 100-some bouts without settling anything. Liu Bei was

worried about Zhang Fei slipping up, so he ordered a retreat into the city, and Lu Bu's army surrounded the hamlet.

So Zhang Fei has gone and done it yet again. To see how Liu Bei is going to get out of this latest pickle, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.