

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 22.

Last time, Zhang Fei just couldn't help himself and decided to poke Lü Bu with a stick again by stealing some horses that his men had just purchased. Lü Bu responded by bringing an army to Xiaopei, where Liu Bei was based, to dish out some payback. And imagine Liu Bei's surprise when he rode out to ask why Lü Bu was there and found out for the first time what Zhang Fei had done. Zhang Fei then precluded any possibility of a peaceful settlement by hurling more insults at Lu Bu and dragging up the old grudge of Lu Bu stealing his brother's province. The war of words quickly escalated and Lu Bu ordered his army to surround the hamlet.

Inside the city, after he chewed Zhang Fei out, Liu Bei sent a messenger to Lu Bu's camp to say that he would return all the stolen horses if Lu Bu would call off his attack. Lu Bu was leaning toward accepting this peace offering, but his adviser Chen Gong was against it.

"If you don't kill Liu Bei now, he will definitely do you harm down the road," Chen Gong said.

So Lu Bu changed his mind and rejected the truce. So now what was Liu Bei going to do? He gathered his staff to figure that out, and one of his advisers, Sun Qian (2), offered up an idea out of left field.

"Cao Cao hates Lu Bu more than anyone else," Sun Qian said. "Why don't we abandon the city and go to Xuchang (3,1) to seek refuge with Cao Cao and borrow his troops to defeat Lu Bu?"

Let's pause here and refresh our memory: Cao Cao may hate Lu Bu, but he wasn't exactly a fan of Liu Bei either. Not since Liu Bei interfered with his attempt to raze Xu Province to the ground to avenge his father's death. And remember that Cao Cao also devised a few tricks to try to goad Liu Bei and Lu Bu into fighting each other, and this was partly what led to Lu Bu taking the province from Liu Bei. So it was definitely a risky move for Liu Bei to join his enemy. But then again, it's not like he had a lot of options, given how few troops and provisions he had. So he better hope that Cao Cao agrees with the old sentiment that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

“Who will lead the way and break through the siege?” Liu Bei asked.

Zhang Fei immediately volunteered, and so Liu Bei placed him at the front of his forces. He ordered Guan Yu to bring up the rear, while he himself was in the middle of his army, protecting his family. Around 11 o'clock that night, under the light of the moon, they stormed out of the north gate. Two of Lu Bu's officers -- Song (4) Xian (4) and Wei (4) Xu (4) -- blocked their path, but they were fought off by Zhang Fei. Liu Bei and company managed to fight their way out. Zhang (1) Liao (2), one of Lu Bu's top generals, gave chase, but Guan Yu kept him at bay. Seeing that Liu Bei had made his way out, Lu Bu didn't really bother to pursue, choosing to enter the city instead. He left the general Gao (1) Shun (4) in charge of the city and took his forces back to Xu Province.

After they broke out, Liu Bei and company made straight for Xuchang (3,1). When they got there, they first set up camp outside the city and then sent Sun Qian (2) to go see Cao Cao to tell him that they were on the outs with Lu Bu and have come to seek refuge.

“Liu Bei and I are like brothers,” Cao Cao said, which, umm, ok, if you say so.

In any case, Cao Cao invited Liu Bei to enter the city and meet with him. The next day, Liu Bei left Guan Yu and Zhang Fei outside the city and went to see Cao Cao, accompanied only by Sun Qian and Mi (2) Zhu (2), two civil advisers, which was a pretty gutsy move on his part considering he didn't really know how Cao Cao was going to treat him.

As it turned out, Cao Cao treated him like an honored guest. Liu Bei recounted what happened with Lu Bu, and Cao Cao promised to join forces with “you, my good brother to eliminate that dishonorable dog.” Liu Bei thanked him, and Cao Cao threw a banquet to welcome Liu Bei before sending him back to his camp that night.

After Liu Bei left, two of Cao Cao's advisers came in. First, it was Xun (2) Yu (4), who told Cao Cao,

“Liu Bei is a hero of the times. If you don’t eliminate him now, he will be a thorn in your side later.”

To this, Cao Cao gave no answer. After Xun (2) Yu (4) left, Guo (1) Jia (1) came in.

“Xun Yu advised me to kill Liu Bei. What should I do?” Cao Cao asked Guo Jia.

“You cannot,” Guo Jia replied. “You are raising an honorable army to rid the common people of their oppressors. Your reputation of being a man of honor and good faith has drawn many men of talent to your banner. Liu Bei has the reputation of a hero, and he is coming to you in a time of distress. If you kill him, you would draw the suspicion of capable men throughout the realm, and they would not come to join you. Then who would help you bring peace to the country? Eliminating this one threat would alienate many; you must weigh the pros and cons.”

“Sir, you took the words out of my mouth,” Cao Cao said.

The next day, Cao Cao prepared a memorial to the emperor suggesting that Liu Bei be appointed the imperial protector of Yu (4) Province. Another of his advisers, Cheng (2) Yu (4), suggested that he do away with Liu Bei sooner than later, but Cao Cao rejected this.

“We need capable men right now,” Cao Cao said. “We cannot alienate the country by killing one man. On this point, Guo Jia and I are of one mind.”

So Cao Cao gave 3,000 troops and 10,000 bushels of grain to Liu Bei and sent him to Yu (4) Province, where he was to advance on Xiaopei, gather his former soldiers who had scattered when he fled, and then attack Lu Bu. After taking his post, Liu Bei sent word to Cao Cao to coordinate when they were going to rendezvous and attack Lu Bu. Just as Cao Cao was preparing to mobilize his army, however, something else demanded his attention.

At this moment, Cao Cao received an urgent report that Zhang Ji (4) had died. If you need a refresher, Zhang Ji was one of Dong Zhuo’s lieutenants, and he was pretty much the last one of that bunch still standing after Li Jue and Guo Si’s fall from power. He gained some prestige and power

when he enforced a truce between those two guys when they were at each other's throats. But while laying siege to Nanyang (2,2), he was struck by an arrow and died. The control of his forces fell to his nephew, Zhang Xiu (4). With the help of Jia (3) Xu (3), a capable adviser who once served Li Jue and Guo Si, Zhang Xiu struck up a coalition with Liu Biao (3), the imperial protector of Jing (1) Province. Currently, Zhang Xiu had stationed his army at Wancheng (3,2) and was thinking about attacking Xuchang (3,1) and seizing the emperor.

Cao Cao was obviously not amused at this news and wanted to go put Zhang Xiu in his place. However, he was also worried about Lu Bu taking advantage of his absence and attacking Xuchang while he's away. So he consulted with Xun (2) Yu (4).

"That's easy," Xun Yu said. "Lu Bu is a fool and is easily pleased with a little treat. You can send a messenger to Xu Province to give him a promotion and a reward and order him to make peace with Liu Bei. This will satisfy Lu Bu and he will not try to get more."

Cao Cao agreed and did as Xun Yu suggested. He then mobilized 150,000 troops to take care of Zhang Xiu. He split them into three armies that he personally led, with Xiahou Dun heading up the vanguard. When this huge army drew near and camped out by the Yü (4) River, it gave Zhang Xiu and company second thoughts about the whole invading-the-capital plan. On the advice of Jia (3) Xu (3), Zhang Xiu decided to surrender, so he sent Jia (3) Xu (3) to Cao Cao's camp to negotiate terms.

Cao Cao immediately took a liking to Jia (3) Xu (3) after seeing how smoothly he handled every question, and wanted to bring Jia (3) Xu (3) into his service. But Jia Xu refused. "I once served Li Jue, which is an offense to all under heaven," he said. "Right now I'm serving Zhang Xiu, and he listens to my advice. So I cannot bear to abandon him." And so he took his leave.

The next day, Zhang Xiu went to Cao Cao's camp, and Cao Cao treated him well. Cao Cao then led part of his army into Wangcheng (3,2) while the rest remained camped outside the city, with the tents stretching for miles. Cao Cao then spent the next few days in the city, with Zhang Xiu throwing a feast

for him every day.

One day, after another of these feasts, Cao Cao retired to his quarters drunk. He asked his attendants, "Are there any courtesans in this city?"

Cao Cao's nephew, Cao Anmin (1,2), caught his drift and told him in private, "Last night I saw a rare beauty near the local inn. I asked around and found out that she was the wife of Zhang Xiu's uncle Zhang Ji."

Cao Cao then ordered his nephew to lead 50 soldiers to go fetch the lady. They returned soon thereafter, and the woman was indeed a delight to behold. When Cao Cao asked for her name, she answered that she was Lady Zou (1), the widow of Zhang Ji.

"Does your ladyship know who I am?" Cao Cao asked.

"I have long heard of your great name, and it is my great fortune to be in your presence," she answered.

"It was only for your sake that I decided to accept Zhang Xiu's surrender instead of exterminating his clan."

Lady Zou (1) prostrated herself and said, "Thank you for your great kindness."

"It is my fortune to meet you today," Cao Cao said. "I would like for you to share my bed tonight, and then follow me back to Xuchang to live a life of luxury. What do you think?"

Lady Zou prostrated herself again and thanked Cao Cao, and she spent the night in his tent. But she also cautioned Cao Cao, "If we stay in the city for long, it will surely arouse suspicion and make people talk."

"Then tomorrow we will go stay in my camp outside the city," Cao Cao said.

The next day, they moved out of the city and moved into Cao Cao's camp. Cao Cao ordered Dian (3) Wei (2), one of his top warriors, to stay outside his tent to stand guard. No one else may enter

without being summoned. Thanks to this, there was little communication going in and out of Cao Cao's tent, and he was too enraptured with Lady Zou to think about returning to the capital.

But something like this just wasn't going to stay a secret for long. Zhang Xiu's servants caught wind of this and reported it to him, and Zhang Xiu was naturally enraged at this humiliation. He met with Jia (3) Xu (3) to discuss what to do. Jia Xu told him to keep a lid on this matter for the time being and to do this and that when he next met with Cao Cao.

The next day, Zhang Xiu went to Cao Cao's tent and said, "Many of the newly surrendered soldiers have deserted. I would like to request permission to move my troops to the middle of your camp to prevent more from deserting."

Cao Cao consented, and Zhang Xiu moved his men, who now were stationed in four locations in the heart of Cao Cao's camp, near Cao Cao's tent, just waiting for the right opportunity to act. But they all knew that Dian Wei was guarding Cao Cao's tent, and they were well aware of his reputation, so they didn't dare to move against Cao Cao yet.

Zhang Xiu then consulted his lieutenant, Hu (2) Che (1) Er (2), on what to do about Dian Wei. This Hu (2) Che (1) Er (2) was remarkable in his own right, as he could lift 600 pounds and walk 200 miles in a day. But of course, instead of drawing on these strengths, Zhang Xiu was asking him for ideas, and he offered up one.

"What makes Dian Wei really fearsome is his twin halberds," Hu (2) Che (1) Er (2) said. "Tomorrow, you should invite him to your tent for a feast and get him drunk before letting him return to his tent. I will sneak into the ranks of his soldiers, slip into his tent, and steal his halberds. Then we would have nothing to fear."

Umm, ok. If you've been paying attention at all in the story, you are probably saying, "Wait a second. There're plenty of things that make Dian Wei fearsome other than his halberds. This sounds

like a half-baked plan.” Well, fully baked or half-baked, Zhang Xiu was going with it, and he sent out word for his men to get ready.

The next day, he ordered Jia Xu to invite Dian Wei to his tent and treated him to lots and lots of booze. By the time night fell, Dian Wei was good and drunk. Hu Che Er sneaked in among Dian Wei’s men and returned to their camp. That same night, Cao Cao was in his own tent, drinking with Lady Zou. Suddenly, he heard people and horses outside his tent, and he sent an attendant to see what was going on. They returned and said it was just Zhang Xiu on a night patrol, so Cao Cao did not pay it any mind.

Around 9 p.m., Cao Cao suddenly heard shouts coming from his camp, and word came that a cartload of hay had caught fire. “This is just an accident; do not panic,” Cao Cao said.

But he was wrong. Soon, more stuff started catching on fire all around the camp. Now it was Cao Cao’s turn to panic, and he called out for Dian Wei. Dian Wei had just fallen into a drunken stupor when he was awoken by the sound of gongs and the cries of battle. He leaped to his feet, but his halberds were nowhere to be found. By now, the enemy were already at the camp entrance. Dian Wei grabbed a knife from a foot soldier, but by then, countless enemy soldiers with long spears were pouring into the camp, heading toward Cao Cao’s tent.

Dian Wei charged forward and cut down 20-some enemies, convincing the enemy cavalry to fall back. But just then, Zhang Xiu’s infantry showed up, and they started poking at Dian Wei with long spears. Dian Wei, who had not a shred of armor on him, was stabbed dozens of times, but still he kept on fighting. By now, his knife’s edge had been worn down and couldn’t anything anymore. So he tossed the knife and just grabbed two enemy soldiers and used them as weapons. And he managed to beat eight or nine guys to death with their comrades. So yeah, there was definitely more to Dian Wei than just his halberds.

This display of ferocity kept Zhang Xiu’s men at bay, as none of them dared to venture near Dian

Wei. Instead, they stayed back and rained down arrows on him. Even as he was struck by the arrows, Dian Wei still stood his ground by the camp entrance. However, by now the enemy had breached the rear of the camp, and Dian Wei took another spear in his back. He let out a number of loud cries and bled to death. Still, no one dared to come in through the front entrance long after he was dead.

Dian Wei's self-sacrifice bought Cao Cao the previous time he needed to hop on a horse and flee out of the back of the camp, with only his nephew Cao Anmin (1,2) following on foot. Cao Cao took an arrow in the right arm, and his horse also was struck by three arrows. But that horse was a fine steed and kept running despite the pain. When they came upon the Yu (4) River, Zhang Xiu's forces caught up to them, and they cut Cao Anmin to pieces. Cao Cao managed to cross the river, but as soon as he got up on the opposite bank, an arrow struck his horse in the eye, and the horse tumbled to the ground. Just then, his eldest son, Cao Ang (2), arrived and gave Cao Cao's his horse. Cao Cao took it and rode away, but Cao Ang (2) was killed by a shower of arrows. Cao Cao, though did manage to escape the immediate danger, and he met up with scattered remnants of his forces along the way and began to regroup.

In the midst of all the chaos of the night, some of Cao Cao's own soldiers, the Qing Province army under the command of Xiahou Dun, lost their sense of discipline and took the opportunity to loot and pillage in the surrounding villages. Another of Cao Cao's generals, Yu (1) Jin (4), saw this and led his own troops in to kill these troublemakers and protect the villagers. But some of these troublemakers got away and ran to tell Cao Cao that Yu Jin had rebelled and was killing his troops. Cao Cao was shocked to hear this, and when his generals Xiahou Dun, Xu (2) Chu (3), Li Dian (3), and Yue (4) Jin (4) arrived a short while later, he told them that Yu (1) Jin (4) had rebelled and ordered them to prepare their forces to face him.



When Yu Jin heard that Cao Cao and company were arriving, he told his men to entrench. One of his men asked him, "Someone told the prime minister that you've turned against him. Now that he's here, why do you worry about entrenching instead going to see him first to clear yourself?"

"The enemy forces are right behind them and will be here any minute," Yu Jin said. "If we don't prepare first, how would we fight back? Clearing myself is insignificant. Fending off the enemy is what's important."

And won't you know it, as soon as his forces were entrenched, Zhang Xiu's army arrived. Yu Jin went out to face the enemy, and Cao Cao's other generals, seeing Yu Jin charging out, led their own forces forward as well. Zhang Xiu's army was routed and fell back. With his forces depleted, Zhang Xiu led the remnants of his army to go join up with Liu Biao.

With the enemy defeated, Cao Cao called his army back to camp. Only now did Yu Jin go to see him and tell him that the Qing Province army had been looting and disturbing the common people and that's why he had to kill them.

"Why did you choose to entrench instead of telling me this first?" Cao Cao asked.

Yu Jin gave him the same reason as before, and Cao Cao was full of praise.

"General, in the midst of all the chaos, you were able to organize your men and entrench. You were unmoved by slander, undaunted by toil, and turned defeat into victory. Even the greatest generals of old cannot do better."

And so Cao Cao rewarded Yu Jin with a pair of gold vessels and made him the lord of the Yishou (4,4) District. He also scolded Xiahou Dun for not instilling discipline in his men. With that done, Cao Cao then performed sacrifices to honor Dian Wei. Cao Cao wept as he personally offered a sacrifice, and he told his commanders, "Although I've my eldest son and my favorite nephew, neither hurts more than the loss of Dian Wei!" This remark moved everyone.

The next day, Cao Cao gave the order to return to the capital. We're going to leave him there and flash back to catch up with Lu Bu. Remember that before Cao Cao had set out to pacify Zhang Xiu, he had sent a messenger to Xu Province to offer Lu Bu a promotion to keep him at bay. Lu Bu greeted the messenger, who read aloud the imperial decree, which bestowed a generalship upon Lu Bu. The messenger then gave him a personal letter from Cao Cao and conveyed to him how much Cao Cao respected and admired him. All of this made Lu Bu very happy.

Just then, a messenger from Yuan Shu arrived, and Lu Bu called him in. This messenger said, "My lord is going to become emperor sooner or later, at which time he will name a successor. So he wishes for you to send your daughter to Huainan (2,2) soon so his son can marry her."

"How dare that rebel?!" Lu Bu said angrily. He ordered his men to execute Yuan Shu's messenger and then put Han (2) Yin (4), the official that Yuan Shu had sent to play matchmaker, in chains. He then ordered the official Chen Deng (1) to accompany Cao Cao's messenger back to the capital, along with a thank-you note and Han (2) Yin (4). In addition to saying thanks, Lu Bu's letter to Cao Cao also included a request to be named the imperial protector of Xu Province.

When Cao Cao got the letter and learned that Lu Bu had refused Yuan Shu's marriage proposal, he was delighted. He then had Han Yin beheaded in public. Chen Deng then said to Cao Cao in private:

"Lu Bu is like a jackal. He is all brawn and no brain and his loyalty is fickle. It's best to eliminate him sooner than later."

"I've long known that he has the heart of a wolf and cannot be kept for long," Cao Cao replied. "You and your father know him better than anyone. I will depend on your counsel in this matter."

"When your excellency is ready to make a move, I will be your inside man," Chen Deng said.

Cao Cao then named Chen Deng the governor of Guangling (3,2) and rewarded his father with a stipend. When Chen Deng was about to head back to Xu Province, Cao Cao took his hand and said, "The affairs of the east are in your hands."

Chen Deng nodded and took his leave. When he got back to Xu Province, he went to see Lu Bu, and Lu Bu asked him how things went in the capital

“My father received a stipend, and I was appointed a governor,” Chen Deng answered.

Lu Bu was outraged.

“Instead of requesting the imperial protectorship for me, you were more worried about your own gains! Your father advised me to join with Cao Cao and refuse Yuan Shu’s marriage proposal, but now I’ve not been granted any of my requests, while you two have reaped the rewards. You and your father have sold me out!”

At this, Lu Bu pulled out his sword and was about to kill Chen Deng. But Chen Deng simply laughed.

“General, you’ve misunderstood.”

“How so?”

“When I saw the prime minister, I told him that keeping you is like keeping a tiger. You must feed the tiger enough meat, or it would start eating people. Cao Cao laughed and said, ‘Not so. My treatment of General Lu is like keeping an eagle. As long as there are still foxes and rabbits to be hunted, I dare not feed the eagle too much. As long as the eagle is still hungry, it will hunt; but once it’s full, it will leave me.’ So I asked Cao Cao who were the foxes and rabbits, and he said, ‘Yuan Shu, Sun Ce, Yuan Shao, Liu Biao, Liu Zhang (1), and Zhang Lu (3).’ “

Upon hearing this, Lu Bu tossed his sword aside and laughed, “Cao Cao really knows me!” And so he was content to drop the matter for the moment.

Just then, though, came another new development. Scouts reported that Yuan Shu had mobilized his army and was coming to take Xu Province. Let’s backup just a little bit and see what’s happening with Yuan Shu. As we’ve mentioned earlier, he had made a nice little empire for himself in Huainan (2,2), and he’s been thinking about declaring himself emperor. So he assembled his officials and said to them,

“The Supreme Ancestor started out as nothing more than the head of a precinct, and yet he won an empire. After 400 years, that empire has run its course and rebellion is everywhere. My family has

held high office for four generations, and we enjoy the confidence of the people. I intend to comply with the will of heaven and men and declare myself emperor. What do you all think?"

But Ge (2) Xiang (4), the first secretary, said, "That cannot be done. Remember that Hou (4) Ji (4), the high ancestor of the house of Zhou (1), had both great virtue and great merit, and yet even in the last days of the Shang (1) Dynasty, his house remained loyal the ruling family. Even the founder of the Zhou Dynasty, King Wen (2), did not overthrow the Shang even though he controlled two-thirds of the realm. My lord, your family may be prestigious, but it does not yet match that of the house of Zhou; and although the house of Han (4) is weak, it has not sunken to the brutality of the house of Shang (1). Thus you cannot proceed."

But Yuan Shu was not in the mood for no. Citing some mumble jumble about how the order of the elements and prognostications about the name of the one who shall supplant the Han were all pointing to him as the ordained successor to the throne, he declared that anyone else who dares to oppose his plan would be executed. That pretty much ended the discussion, and he went ahead with the coronation ceremony, where he rode in on an imperial litter, performed rituals at the northern and southern ends of the city, and named his empress and his successor.

When he was naming his son the successor, it came up that oh yeah, his son was supposed to marry Lu Bu's daughter. But then he got word that Lu Bu had already sent to matchmaker Han (2) Yin (4) to Cao Cao for execution. Needless to say, this was too much of an outrage for his new royal highness. So Yuan Shu appointed Zhang (1) Xun (1) as his grand commander and put him at the head of more than 200,000 troops. These forces were divided into seven field armies and they all made for Xu Province to exact revenge. The guy he initially put in charge of provisions for the armies declined the job, so Yuan Shu had him executed, just to show everyone he meant business. He then ordered the general Ji (4) Ling (2) to serve as backup for the seven armies, while Yuan Shu himself led 30,000 men to drive the lines forward and oversee reinforcements.

When Lu Bu got word that seven armies were headed toward various key locations in his province, he immediately assembled his advisers. Among those present were his top strategist Chen

Gong, as well as Chen Deng (1) and his father Chen Gui (4). Even though these guys shared the same last name, Chen Gong hated Chen Deng and Chen Gui.

“The calamity that’s heading toward Xu Province is all the doing of Chen Gui (4) and his son,” Chen Gong said. “Their advice was designed to curry favor and earn themselves rewards from the court, and you are stuck with the consequences. You should execute them both and send their heads to Yuan Shu. His armies would naturally retreat.”

Hearing this, Lu Bu ordered that Chen Gui and Chen Deng be arrested, but Chen Deng laughed out loud.

“What are you so afraid of?” he said. “To me, these seven armies are but seven piles of rotten straws and are of no concern.”

“If you have an idea that can defeat the enemy, I will spare your lives,” Lu Bu said.

“If you would follow my advice, I can guarantee that Xu Province will be safe,” Chen Deng said.

“Tell me your idea,” Lu Bu said.

“Yuan Shu may have a lot of troops, but they are a motley crew with no mutual trust. If we defend our cities and stage surprise raids, we will defeat them easily. I also have another idea that will not only guarantee our province’s safety, but could also capture Yuan Shu.”

“What is it?” Lu Bu asked.

“Han (2) Xian (1) and Yang (2) Feng (4), commanders at the heads of two of Yuan Shu’s armies, used to be officials of the Han court, but they fled out of fear of Cao Cao and only joined up with Yuan Shu because they had nowhere else to go. I wager Yuan Shu must have treated them with little respect, and they must be displeased with him. If you write a letter to convince them to join us and serve as our inside men, and then we add in support from Liu Bei, we would surely capture Yuan Shu.”

“Then you must personally go deliver the letter to Han (2) Xian (1) and Yang (2) Feng (4),” Lu Bu said.

Chen Deng agreed, and so Lu Bu sent messengers to Xuchang (3,1) and Yu (4) Province to tell Cao Cao and Liu Bei of the plan, and then ordered Chen Deng to lead a few riders to head to the path leading to the city of Xiapi (4,1), where Han Xian (1) and Yang Feng were headed.

To see how well Chen Deng's words would go over with those two, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.