

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 33.

Last time, Guan Yu had learned that Liu Bei was with Yuan Shao and was dead set on reuniting with his brother. Cao Cao tried to keep him around by denying him a chance to properly say goodbye, but Guan Yu grew weary of that game and said goodbye in a letter instead. He then left behind everything that Cao Cao had given him, with the exception of the Red Hare horse since he needed that to travel. He and a handful of attendants then escorted the carriage of his sisters-in-law and set off on a journey that would become the stuff of legends.

But to start this legendary trek, they first had to get through the gates of the city. As they approached the north gate, the guards tried to stop them, but they were easy enough to deal with. Guan Yu opened his eyes wide in anger, flashed his saber, and let out a loud roar, which sent the guards scurrying into hiding. Once the traveling party was outside the gate, Guan Yu told the attendants, "Escort the carriage and go on ahead. If anyone gives chase, I will deal with them. Do not alarm the two ladies."

So the attendants escorted the carriage toward Guandu (1,4), the strategic crossing on the Yellow River where Yuan Shao and Cao Cao's forces were currently engaged in a staring contest.

Meanwhile, Guan Yu's letter had reached Cao Cao. At that moment, Cao Cao was still going back and forth on what he should do about Guan Yu trying to leave, but then the letter arrived. When he was done reading, Cao Cao said with a tone of surprise, "He is gone!"

Then came urgent word from the north gate that Guan Yu and a party of about 20 people and a carriage had stormed through the gate and were heading north. This was followed by word from Guan Yu's residence that he had sealed all of Cao Cao's gifts in storage. The 10 beauties that Cao Cao had given him were in the inner residence. The seal of office for the Marquiship of Hanshou (4,4)

Precinct was hanging in his living room. All the servants that Cao Cao had assigned to him were left behind, as Guan Yu took only the attendants from the old days and whatever items he had on him.

When they heard this, all of Cao Cao's officers were silent, but one man stepped forth and said, "Give me 3,000 cavalry men, and I will go capture Guan Yu alive and offer him up to your excellency!"

Everyone looked and saw that it was the general Cai (4) Yang (2) who had spoken. So, among Cao Cao's officer corps, obviously Zhang Liao was a good friend of Guan Yu's. Aside from him, Xu Huang had also struck up a good friendship with Guan Yu, and the rest of the officers all at least respected him. All, that is, except for Cai Yang, who could not stand the way Cao Cao fawned over Guan Yu. So when he heard that Guan Yu had left, he wanted to go chase him down. But Cao Cao said no.

"He did not forget his old master, and his departure was as aboveboard as his arrival. He is a true man. You all should model yourselves after him," Cao Cao told his officers. He then dismissed Cai Yang and did not order a pursuit. But his adviser Cheng (2) Yu (4) now spoke up.

"Your excellency treated Guan Yu extremely well," Cheng Yu said. "And yet he has left without a proper goodbye and instead only sent this letter full of nonsense. It is a great offense. Besides, if he is allowed to join Yuan Shao, it would be like a tiger adding wings. Why not chase him down and kill him to rid yourself of future troubles?"

"I have already given him my word; I cannot break it," Cao Cao said. "He is loyal to his master, as you are to yours. Do not give chase."

Cao Cao then turned to Zhang Liao and said, "Guan Yu has sealed up the gold and hanged up the seal of office. It shows that wealth cannot move his heart and rank cannot touch his soul. I deeply respect such men. He must not have gone too far yet. I might as well do him one more favor and part on good terms. You go on and ask him to wait up, and I will be along shortly to see him off and give him money and clothing for the journey so that he will not forget me."

Zhang Liao accepted the order and rode off alone. Cao Cao then followed with a few dozen riders.

Now, Guan Yu did have the Red Hare horse, which was renowned for its speed. If he was galloping away, there would be no way for Cao Cao and company to catch up. But in this case, he had an entourage and a carriage to protect, so he had to travel at their pace. Suddenly, he heard someone shouting from behind, "My friend, please wait!"

Guan Yu turned and saw Zhang Liao galloping near. Guan Yu told his entourage to go on ahead along the main road, while he waited with his saber in hand and asked Zhang Liao, "Are you trying to make me go back?"

"No. His excellency found out that you are going on a long journey and wanted to see you off. So he sent me ahead to ask you to wait up. That is all."

"Even if the prime minister is coming with the armored cavalry, I would rather fight to the death than go back," Guan Yu said. And so he waited on a nearby bridge and saw in the distance Cao Cao at the head of a few dozen riders, sprinting this way. Behind him were the likes of Xu Chu, Xu Huang, Yu (1) Jin (4), and Li Dian. When Cao Cao saw Guan Yu waiting on the bridge with saber in hand, he ordered his men to halt and spread out in a line. Seeing that none of them was carrying a weapon, Guan Yu breathed a little easier.

"My friend, why such haste?" Cao Cao asked.

Guan Yu bowed from atop his horse and said, "I had an agreement with your excellency, Now that I know my old master is in Hebei, I have no choice but to go to him at once. I called on your residence many times but could not see you. So I wrote a letter to take my leave and locked up all your gifts and my seal of office so as to return them to you. I hope your excellency have not forgotten your promise."

“I am trying to earn the country’s trust, so how can I go back on my word?” Cao Cao said. “I was worried that you might not have enough money and supplies for the trip, so I have come to give you some.”

At this, one of Cao Cao’s men brought out a tray of gold.

“Thanks to your generosity, I have enough saved up,” Guan Yu said to Cao Cao. “Please keep this gold and use it to reward your men.”

“This is but a tiny fraction of what I owe you,” Cao Cao said. “Why refuse it?”

“I have rendered but meager service to you. It’s not worth mentioning,” Guan Yu humbly bragged.

Cao Cao smiled and said, “You are a man of exceptional honor. But alas, I am not fortunate enough to keep you. I have a fine cloak for you, a tiny token of my admiration.”

Cao Cao now ordered one of his red shirts to dismount and hold the cloak with both hands and walk it over to Guan Yu. Guan Yu, worried that something might happen if he dismounted to receive the gift, remained on his horse and used the tip of his saber to pick up the cloak from the red shirt’s hands. You can imagine how scared the poor nameless schmuck was at that moment.

Guan Yu put on the cloak, wheeled his horse away from Cao Cao and company, then turned around and said, “Thank you, your excellency, for this cloak. I hope we meet again.” And with that, he galloped off the bridge and headed north.

One of Cao Cao’s generals, Xu Chu, had seen enough. “That barbarian is too rude!” he shouted. “He should be arrested!”

“No,” Cao Cao said. “He was alone while we had dozens of men. How could he not be on guard? I have already spoken. We must not give chase.”

So Cao Cao led his men back to the capital, lamenting Guan Yu’s departure the whole way home, which I’m sure was exactly what Xu Chu wanted to hear.

Meanwhile, after taking his leave of Cao Cao, Guan Yu galloped forth to catch up to his entourage. But after about 10 miles, he still did not see them, and he was getting worried. So he rode around looking for them. Suddenly, from the top of a hill, someone shouted, "General Guan, please wait!"

Guan Yu looked up and saw a young man dressed in yellow, riding a horse, and holding a spear. From the neck of his horse hanged a head. He had with him about a hundred foot soldiers, and they sprinted down to see Guan Yu.

"Who are you?" Guan Yu asked.

The young man tossed his spear aside, hopped off his horse, and prostrated on the ground. Guan Yu was afraid it was a trick, so he stayed on his horse and held on to his saber.

"Young warrior, please tell me your name," he said.

"My name is Liao (4) Hua (4)," the young man replied. "The chaos of the land turned me into a bandit. I have gathered 500-some people and we rob to stay alive. Just now, my partner was on patrol and he abducted the two ladies and their traveling party. When I asked them, I learned that they were the wives of the imperial uncle and that they were under your protection. I wanted to let them go, but my partner refused and even dared to make vulgar suggestions. So I killed him, and now I present his head to you to apologize."

"Where are the ladies now?" Guan Yu asked.

"They are in our base on top of the hill," Liao (4) Hua (4) answered.

Guan Yu immediately asked that they be brought down. Soon, a hundred or so men escorted the traveling party down the hill. Guan Yu now dismounted and hitched his saber and bowed in front of the carriage.

"Sisters-in-law, are you alright?" he asked.

The attendants said, "The other bandit leader suggested to Liao Hua that they each take one of the ladies as wife. When Liao Hua found out who they were, he showed great respect. The other guy disagreed, and Liao Hua killed him."

Upon hearing this, Guan Yu bowed and thanked Liao Hua. Liao Hua wanted to lead his men and escort Guan Yu on his journey, but Guan Yu figured that Liao Hua was, after all, a former Yellow Turban rebel, so he didn't really know how much he could trust him. So Guan Yu declined. Liao Hua then offered him gold and silk as a gift, but Guan Yu also refused. So all Liao Hua could do was to bow and take his leave and lead his men back to their base on the hill. Guan Yu then told his sisters-in-law about how Cao Cao gave him a cloak as a parting gift. They then set out on the road again.

As night approached, they stopped at a farmstead and asked for lodging for the night. The head of the household, an old man with white hair, came out to greet them and asked who they were.

"I am Liu Bei's brother Guan Yu," Guan Yu said.

"Are you the General Guan who slayed Yan Liang and Wen Chou?" the old man asked.

"Indeed."

This delighted the old man, since hey, we've got a celebrity at our house. So he invited Guan Yu inside.

"My sisters-in-law are in the carriage," Guan Yu told him.

So the old man called on his wife and daughter to come out and greet the two ladies and escort them into the parlor, because, you know, you have to let these womenfolks deal with each other. While the two ladies sat, Guan Yu stood beside them respectfully. When the old man asked him to sit, Guan Yu replied, "I dare not sit in the presence of my honorable sisters-in-law."

So the old man told his wife and daughter to invite the two ladies into the inner apartments, where they could do whatever womenfolks do, while he remained in the parlor to talk with Guan Yu. When Guan Yu asked the old man for his name, he said,

“My name is Hu (2) Hua (4). During the reign of Emperor Huan (2), I was a court counselor, but I have retired to my farm. Right now, my son Hu (2) Ban (1) is serving as an aide to Wang (2) Zhi (2), the governor of Xingyang (2,2). If you happen to be going that way, would you mind delivering a letter to my son?”

Guan Yu agreed. The next morning, after breakfast, Guan Yu helped his sisters-in-law into their carriage, accepted the letter from Hu (2) Hua (2), and then took his leave and headed toward Luoyang (4,2). Now, between where Guan Yu was and where he was going, there were a number of checkpoints. The first of these that they ran into was Dongling (1,3) Pass, which was being defended by 500 soldiers under the command of an officer named Kong (3) Xiu (4). When his men reported that Guan Yu and his traveling party were approaching, Kong Xiu came down from the pass to greet them, and Guan Yu dismounted and exchanged bows with Kong Xiu.

“General, where are you headed?” Kong Xiu asked.

“I have taken my leave of the prime minister and am going to Hebei (2,3) to search for my brother,” Guan Yu answered.

“Hebei is under the control of Yuan Shao, and he is currently at war with the prime minister,” Kong Xiu said. “Do you have a document from his excellency authorizing you to go there?”

“I left in a hurry, so I did not have time to get one.”

“Since you don’t have authorization, I’ll have to send a messenger to get the ok from the prime minister before I can let you through.”

“But that would delay my journey,” Guan Yu objected.

“Those are the regulations. I have no choice,” Kong Xiu responded.

Well, Guan Yu was getting a little testy now. “You really won’t let me pass?” he asked.

“If you want to pass, then you must leave your traveling party as guarantee,” Kong Xiu said.

That was the wrong answer, and it riled up Guan Yu. He hoisted his green dragon saber and made for Kong Xiu. Kong Xiu quickly ran back into the pass and locked the gates behind him. He sounded the alarm and gathered his troops. He then donned his armor and led them out of the pass again. This time, he shouted from his horse, “Do you dare to try to pass?!”

Unfortunately for Kong Xiu, Guan Yu dared. He told his entourage to back up a bit, and then he galloped forward with saber in hand. Kong Xiu hoisted his spear to come meet Guan Yu, but as soon as their horses crossed, Guan Yu’s saber flashed, and Kong Xiu was lying dead on the ground. His soldiers tried to flee, but Guan Yu roared, “Do not run! I had no choice but to kill Kong Xiu. It has nothing to do with you. I ask that you relay this to prime minister Cao: ‘Kong Xiu tried to kill me, so I had to kill him.’ ”

There was no way anybody was going to say no to that request, as all the soldiers from the pass were kneeling in front of Guan Yu’s horse at that moment. Guan Yu then immediately moved his party through the pass and continued toward Luoyang (4,2).

It didn’t take long for word of the encounter to reach Luoyang, the next checkpoint on the journey. The governor of Luoyang, Han (2) Fu (2), immediately gathered his officers to discuss what to do. His lieutenant Meng (4) Tan (3) said, “Since he does not have documentation from the prime minister, then his trip must be unauthorized. If we do not stop him, we would bear the responsibility.”

“But Guan Yu is an extremely fearsome warrior,” Han (2) Fu (2) said. “Even Yan Liang and Wen Chou fell to his blade. We cannot take him by force. We must use strategy.”

“I have an idea,” Meng (4) Tan (3) said. “Let’s first put up barricades outside the gate. When he gets here, I will go and fight him. I will pretend to flee and lure him into pursuing me. Then you can



surprise him with an arrow. If he is hit and falls from his horse, then we can capture him and take him to Xuchang for a huge reward.”

And so it was decided. When word came that Guan Yu had arrived, Han Fu carried his bow and arrow and led 1,000 men outside the gates of the pass.

“Who goes there?” he asked.

Guan Yu bowed from atop his horse and replied, “I am Guan Yu, the Marquis of Hanshou (4,4) District. I would like to pass through.”

“Do you have documentation from the prime minister?” Han (2) Fu (2) asked.

“I left in a hurry and did not get it,” Guan Yu said.

“On orders of the prime minister, I am defending this location and keeping an eye out for spies,” Han Fu said. “If you do not have any documentation, then you must be trying to flee.”

Oh boy, here we go again. Guan Yuan, becoming angry, warned Han Fu, “Kong (2) Xiu (4) of Dongling (1,2) Pass has already been killed by my blade. Do you want to follow his lead?”

Han Fu turned to his men and asked, “Who will go capture him for me?”

That was Meng (4) Tan’s (3) cue. He galloped out and headed straight for Guan Yu, wielding twin knives. Guan Yu told his party to back up while he rode forth to meet Meng (4) Tan (3). Within three bouts, Meng Tan turned and ran, and Guan Yu gave chase.

So everything seemed to be going according to plan for Meng Tan, except for one little detail. He forgot that Guan Yu was riding Red Hare, a horse renowned for its speed. Meng Tan’s idea was to lure Guan Yu to within arrow range, but before he could do that, Guan Yu had already caught up to him from behind. With one wave of the green dragon sabre, Guan Yu cut Meng Tan in half.

Just as Guan Yu was pulling up his horse, however, Han Fu let fly his arrow from the gate of the pass, and it struck Guan Yu in his left arm. Guan Yu grabbed the stem of the arrow with his teeth and pulled it out. With blood gushing from his arm, Guan Yu galloped toward Han Fu. The enemy soldiers

scattered as Guan Yu approached, and Han Fu could not run in time. With one blow, Guan Yu chopped off his head and a piece of his shoulder, sending his body tumbling to the ground.

Guan Yu then scared off the rest of the troops and hurried his entourage through the pass. Once they were through, he used a piece of cloth to bind his arrow wound to stop the bleeding. After this encounter, he was afraid that they might be ambushed, so he dared not linger for long on the road. Instead, they traveled through the night toward Sishui (4,4) Pass, the next stop on their journey.

The commander stationed at Sishui (4,3) Pass was a man named Bian (4) Xi (3). His weapon of choice was a mace tied to a long chain. He used to be a Yellow Turban rebel, but then submitted to Cao Cao and was stationed here. When Bian (4) Xi (3) heard that Guan Yu was coming his way, he concocted a scheme. In front of Sishui (4,3) Pass was Zhen (4) Guo (2) Monastery, a buddhist sanctuary. So Bian (4) Xi (3) set an ambush there, putting 200-some armed men in hiding. He would lure Guan Yu there and then throw his wine cup as the signal for his men to jump out and kill Guan Yu.

With all the arrangements made, Bian (4) Xi (3) went out to welcome Guan Yu. Seeing a welcoming party instead of a war party, Guan Yu dismounted and exchanged courtesies.

“General, your name is revered throughout the realm!” Bian Xi said. “And now you’re rejoining the imperial uncle. It is a testament to your loyalty and honor!”

Guan Yu did not beat around the bush. He told Bian Xi that, oh by the way, I’ve killed the commanders at the last two checkpoint. But Bian Xi brushed it off.

“You were right to do so,” he told Guan Yu. “When I see the prime minister, I shall explain everything for you.”

This delighted Guan Yu, and the two of them got back on their horses and rode past Sishui (4,3) Pass and arrived at the monastery, where they were welcomed by the monks. There were 30-some monks who resided at the monastery at the time, and one of them happened to be from the same

hometown as Guan Yu. This monk's Buddhist name was Pu (3) Jing (4), or Universal Purity, and he was on to Bian Xi's scheme. When Guan Yu arrived, Pu (3) Jing (4) stepped forward and asked him, "General, how long has it been since you left your hometown Pudong (2,1)?"

"Almost 20 years," Guan Yu replied.

"Do you still remember me?" the monk asked.

"I have been away from home too long. I'm afraid I do not recognize you," Guan Yu said.

"Our homes were on opposite sides of the river," Pu (3) Jing (4) reminded him.

Seeing this monk and Guan Yu carry on like this made Bian (4) Xi (3) worry that his scheme might be blown. So he tried to shoo the monk away, but Guan Yu said, "It is only right for townsmen to reminisce about old days when they meet."

Pu (3) Jing (4) then invited Guan Yu to the abbot's quarters for tea.

"The two ladies are in the carriage," Guan Yu said. "You should serve them first."

So Pu Jing told attendants to serve tea to the ladies and then invited Guan Yu to the abbot's quarters. As they entered, Pu Jing raised the ceremonial knife that monks carry and flashed Guan Yu a look. Guan Yu immediately caught his meaning and told his men to follow closely with knives in tow.

Bian Xi then escorted Guan Yu to the temple's main hall for the welcome banquet. When they entered, Guan Yu asked him, "Sir, what is your intent in inviting me here?"

Before Bian Xi could answer, Guan Yu had already spotted the armed men hiding behind the walls, and he shouted at Bian Xi, "I took you to be a good man! How dare you?!"

Knowing the cat is out of the bag, Bian Xi yelled for his men to attack. Before his attendants could even move a muscle, however, Guan Yu had already pulled out his sword and cut them down. Bian Xi fled around a corridor, while Guan Yu tossed his sword aside, grabbed his sabre, and gave chase. Bian Xi flung his mace at Guan Yu, but Guan Yu easily knocked it away with his sabre. Guan Yu then ran

forward and cut Bian Xi in two with one blow. When Guan Yu turned around, he saw that soldiers had surrounded his two sisters-in-law. But this was no problem. As soon as he stomped his way back, those soldiers scattered.

With the scuffle concluded, Guan Yu thanked Pu (3) Jing (4). "If not for you, I would have already fallen victim to that scoundrel," he said.

"I can no longer remain here," Pu Jing said. "I shall collect my things and go wherever my steps lead. May we meet again."

Guan Yu thanked him once more and then took off toward Xingyang (2,2), where yet another minor boss villain awaited. This guy was Wang (2) Zhi (2), the governor of Xingyang (2,2). Unbeknownst to Guan Yu, he was an in-law of Han (2) Fu (2), one of the guys that Guan Yu had killed back at Luoyang (4,2). So there was no way he was going to let Guan Yu just waltz on by. But he also was smart enough to know he could never beat Guan Yu in a fight, so he concocted his own diabolical scheme.

When Guan Yu arrived, Wang (2) Zhi (2) went out to greet him with a big grin. After Guan Yu relayed the purpose of his journey, Wang Zhi said, "You and the ladies must be exhausted from the hard travel. Come, enter the city and rest in our guest quarters tonight before you resume your journey tomorrow."

Swayed by Wang Zhi's apparent sincerity, Guan Yu escorted his sisters-in-law into the city, where they found that the guest house was ready and waiting. Wang Zhi invited Guan Yu to a banquet, but Guan Yu begged off, so Wang Zhi had someone deliver the food to the guest house instead. Guan Yu himself was feeling the wear and tear of the journey, so after his sisters-in-law finished dinner and turned in for the night, he told the traveling party to make sure the horses were fed and then get some rest. He himself also took off his armor and relaxed.

While Guan Yu and company were taking it easy, Wang Zhi was busy scheming. He summoned one of his aides and told him, "Guan Yu is on the run from the prime minister, and he has killed the governors and officers at the checkpoints along the way. These are unpardonable offenses. But he is too stout a warrior to fight head on. So tonight, you will lead 1,000 men and surround the guest house. Every man will carry a torch. When 11 o'clock rolls around, set the place ablaze and incinerate everyone inside. I will also lead some troops to back you up."

The aide took the order and arranged everything. The aide then thought to himself, "I have long heard of Guan Yu, but I don't know what he looks like. Let me take a peek." So he entered the guest house and asked where Guan Yu was. The attendants told him Guan Yu was reading in the parlor. The aide sneaked to outside the parlor and peeked in. There, he saw Guan Yu, with his left arm bandaged with a piece of his cloak, reading by the candlelight.

"Truly a god!" the aide muttered to himself.

Guan Yu, though, heard his voice and asked who was there. The aide went in, bowed, and said, "I am an aide to Governor Wang Zhi. My name is Hu (2) Ban (1)."

"Oh? Are you the son of the Hu (2) Hua (2) that resides outside Xuchang?" Guan Yu asked.

"Indeed."

Guan Yu quickly told his attendants to fetch the letter that Hu Hua had asked him to deliver. Hu Ban read the letter and sighed, "I almost killed a worthy man!"

He then told Guan Yu in private, "Wang Zhi means to kill you, general. He has ordered men to surround the guest house and set it on fire around 11. I will go open the city gates right now. You should leave at once."

Guan Yu was shocked by this intel, and he immediately grabbed his gear and led his traveling party out of the guest house. And indeed, they saw soldiers outside with torches, awaiting their

orders. Guan Yu quickly led his group to the city walls, where he saw the gates were flung open. After Guan Yu and company left the city, Hu Ban then went back to the guest house and ordered his men to set it on fire just as planned. No doubt it probably seemed kind of strange to the guys outside, being told to burn an empty house. But hey, such questions are way above my pay grade. So if you say you want this empty house burned, this empty house is going up in flames.

Meanwhile, Guan Yu and company had not gone far when a detachment of troops with torches caught up from behind. At their head was Wang Zhi, who shouted for Guan Yu to stop. Unfortunately for Wang Zhi, Guan Yu indeed stopped.

“You scoundrel!” Guan Yu cursed. “There is no bad blood between us! Why did you order your men to burn me?!”

Wang Zhi hoisted his spear and made for Guan Yu, but you can probably guess what happened next. Guan Yu’s blade swung once, and Wang Zhi ended up in two pieces. His troops quickly beat a valiant retreat, while Guan Yu hurried his party on in the other direction, feeling indebted to Hu Ban the whole way.

Alright, so that’s four checkpoints run and five officers slain by Guan Yu on this trip, and he’s not done yet. We will see how his journey ends next time on the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.