

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 57.

Last time, Zhou Yu had just tricked Jiang Gan, an envoy from Cao Cao, into thinking that he had uncovered a conspiracy within his own ranks. As a result, Cao Cao executed his naval commanders Cai Mao and Zhang Yun, the two guys whose knowledge of naval warfare was keeping Zhou Yu awake at night. But Zhou Yu had hardly finished patting himself on the back when he couldn't help but wonder if Zhuge Liang saw through his little trick. So he sent his friend and adviser, Lu Su, to see.

Lu Su went to Zhuge Liang's little boat. Zhuge Liang welcomed him into the boat, and once they sat down, Lu Su said, "I have been too busy with military matters to come receive your instruction."

"On the contrary," Zhuge Liang replied, "I am the tardy one. I have yet to congratulate Commander Zhou."

"Congratulate him for what?" Lu Su asked.

"The thing that he sent you here to see if I know about."

"How, how do you know that?"

"This scheme can only work on Jiang Gan. Although Cao Cao was momentarily fooled, he no doubt has realized his mistake. He just won't cop up to it, that's all. With Cai Mao and Zhang Yun dead, the Southlands have nothing to worry about. That is ample cause for congratulations. I have heard that Cao Cao has put Mao (2) Jie (4) and Yu (1) Jin (4) in charge of the navy. Those two are going to send that navy to its doom."

This left Lu Su speechless. After a little more small talk, he took his leave. But before he left, Zhuge Liang said to him, "Please do not mention to Commander Zhou that I saw through his scheme. I worry that he might get jealous and try to harm me again."

Lu Su agreed and left. But when he went back to Zhou Yu, he promptly reported the truth, with predictable results.

“We cannot leave this man alive! I am determined to kill him!” a stunned Zhou Yu said.

So first, I’m not sure why Zhou Yu is so taken aback by the fact that Zhuge Liang saw through his scheme, since he was half-expecting it BEFORE he sent Lu Su to go sound out Zhuge Liang. Second, here comes that murderous impulse again. Zhou Yu just has issues with that, doesn’t he?

Lu Su tried to talk him off the ledge.

“If you kill Zhuge Liang, Cao Cao might laugh at us,” he said.

“I will find a way to kill Zhuge Liang fairly, so that he can have no grounds for complaint,” Zhou Yu said.

“What do you mean ‘fairly’?”

“Don’t ask. You’ll see tomorrow.”

So, the next day, Zhou Yu invited Zhuge Liang to join a staff meeting in his tent and asked him, “We are about to engage Cao Cao’s forces. When we fight on the water, what should be our primary weapon?”

“On the Yangzi River, bow and arrow should be your weapon of choice,” Zhuge Liang replied.

“You took the words out of my mouth,” Zhou Yu said. “But right now, we are short on arrows. I would like to trouble you to supervise the production of 100,000 arrows for the coming battle. This is a matter that concerns the state. I hope you will not refuse.”

“Since you see fit to entrust me with this task, I shall do my utmost. May I ask when you need these 100,000 arrows?”

“Can you do it in 10 days?”

Now, 10 days is NOT a lot of time for making 100,000 arrows. In fact, it's likely nowhere near enough. So Zhuge Liang asked Zhou Yu to change the deadline.

"Cao Cao's forces will be here soon," Zhuge Liang said. "If we wait 10 days, it would derail our mission."

Wait, hold on. What's Zhuge Liang doing here? He couldn't possibly be asking for a SHORTER deadline ... could he?

"Then how many days do you think you'll need?" Zhou Yu asked.

"I just need three days to present you with 100,000 arrows," Zhuge Liang answered.

At this point, Zhou Yu was probably ecstatic and a little befuddled. Zhuge Liang could not possibly be playing even more into his hand.

"There are no jokes within the military," he said to Zhuge Liang, just to make sure he heard right.

"I would not dare to play a joke on you, commander. I am willing to write a military pledge. If I cannot complete this task in three days, I shall receive severe punishment."

When he heard this, Zhou Yu could hardly contain himself. He had Zhuge Liang write a pledge right away and then served him wine.

"Once this is done, I will naturally reward you," he told Zhuge Liang.

"There's not enough time left today," Zhuge Liang said. "We will start tomorrow. On the third day, you can send 500 soldiers to the river bank to transport the arrows."

After a few cups of wine, Zhuge Liang took his leave.

Once he's gone, Lu Su said to Zhou Yu, "Could he be lying?"

"He asked for this deadline himself; I didn't force him," Zhou Yu said with a shrug. "Now that he has written a pledge in front of everyone, even if he sprouts wings, he would not be able to fly away. I will also instruct our carpenters to stall and not give him enough material so as to make sure that he

misses the deadline. Then, when I hand down his punishment, what can he possibly say? My friend, go see what he's up to and report back to me."

So Lu Su went to see Zhuge Liang. As soon as they met, Zhuge Liang said to him, "I asked you to not tell Zhou Yu that I saw through his scheme because he would surely try to harm me. But who knew you would not cover for me. And now look what's happened. How can I produce 100,000 arrows in three days? You must save me!"

"Sir, you brought this upon yourself. How can I save you?"

"I pray that you can lend me 20 ships, each with 30 soldiers. On both sides of each ship, I want a thousand bundles of straws, wrapped up in black cloth. I will have good use for them. On the third day, I can guarantee you that there will 100,000 arrows. But you must not let Zhou Yu know about this, or my plan will fail."

Lu Su agreed to Zhuge Liang's request, although he did not understand it. This time, when he went back to see Zhou Yu, he indeed withheld the truth from him and did not mention Zhuge Liang's request. He just told Zhou Yu, "Zhuge Liang doesn't seem to be using bamboo, feathers, glue, or other material. He seems to have something else in mind."

Zhou Yu was greatly puzzled, but he figured, hey, I've got his pledge right here, and what are the chances he would be able to come up with 100,000 arrows by the deadline anyway? We'll just see what he comes back with in three days.

Lu Su then quietly delivered all the things that Zhuge Liang requested, but on the first day, Zhuge Liang did nothing. Then, the second day passed, and still, Zhuge Liang did nothing. Around 1 a.m. on the third day, however, Zhuge Liang sent a secret message inviting Lu Su to his boat.

"What is the meaning of this?" Lu Su asked when he showed up.

“I am inviting you to go with me to pick up the arrows,” Zhuge Liang told him.

“Where are we going?”

“Don’t ask. You’ll see soon enough.”

So between Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang, Lu Su was probably getting a little sick of these prodigies telling him “Don’t ask. You’ll see.” But, he was as curious as anyone, so he tagged along. Zhuge Liang ordered the 20 ships, which at this point had been linked together by long ropes, to set out toward the north bank. Coincidentally, the north bank is where Cao Cao’s navy was stationed.

That night, a heavy fog stretched across the sky, and it was especially thick near the surface of the river. It was so dense that even people who were face-to-face could not see each other. Someone once wrote a poem describing this foggy scene. It’s a long poem, so I will not read it here. Instead, there’s a link to the poem with this episode on our website, [3kingdomspodcast.com](http://3kingdomspodcast.com), spelled with the number 3.

Zhuce Liang pressed his ships into this dense fog. By around 3 a.m., they were approaching Cao Cao’s naval camp. Zhuge Liang now instructed the ships to turn so that their front faced west and their rear faced east. The ships then spread out in a line and the soldiers aboard started to bang battle drums and shout battle cries.

“If Cao Cao’s troops storm out to intercept us, what would we do?” a panicked Lu Su asked.

But Zhuge Liang merely smiled. “I expect that Cao Cao will not dare to come out because of this fog. Let’s keep drinking and enjoy ourselves. Once the fog dissipates, we will leave.”

Inside Cao Cao’s naval camp, all this ruckus obviously did not go unnoticed. The two new commanders of the navy, Mao (2) Jie (4) and Yu (1) Jin (4), hurriedly reported to Cao Cao.

“The enemy suddenly shows up while the river is cloaked in fog. This must be a trap,” Cao Cao said. “Do not make any rash moves. Just tell the navy’s archers to shower them with arrows.”

In addition, Cao Cao also ordered another 3,000 archers from his camp on land to go to the river bank to help shoot back the enemy. By the time this order arrived, Mao Jie (4) and Yu Jin, fearing that the enemy would try to storm their naval camp, had already dispatched their archers. Moments later, the archers on land also arrived. About 10,000 men now fired one hailstorm of arrows after another toward the ships.

After a while, Zhuge Liang ordered his ships to turn so that their front was now facing east and their tails facing west. He then had the ships move even closer to the camp and even farther into the onslaught of arrows, making a ton of ruckus all the while.

This went on until the sun had climbed high into the sky and the fog began to dissipate. Zhuge Liang now ordered his ships to sail off quickly. By now, the bundles of straws on each of the 20 ships were covered with arrows. As they sailed away, Zhuge Liang told the soldiers on board to shout as one, "Thank you for the arrows, your excellency!"

By the time word of this reached Cao Cao, Zhuge Liang's ships were already well beyond his reach, and Cao Cao could only brood.

Aboard his boat, Zhuge Liang ducked back inside the cabin and said to Lu Su, "Each ship is carrying five to six thousand arrows. Without hardly expending any effort on our part, we have acquired more than 100,000 arrows, to be shot back at Cao Cao's troops tomorrow. How convenient is that?"

"Sir, you are truly supernatural!" a thoroughly impressed Lu Su said. "But how did you know that there would be a heavy fog today?"

"A military officer who is not well-versed in the patterns of heaven, the advantages of the terrain, the maps of deployment, or the balance of the forces is but a mediocrity," Zhuge Liang replied, quite humbly. "Three days ago, I calculated that there would be a heavy fog today. Otherwise, how would I dare to accept this deadline? Zhou Yu wanted me to complete the task in 10 days but did not provide

enough materials or manpower. He's obviously just trying to use this lame excuse to kill me. But my fate rests with heaven. What can Zhou Yu do about it?"

Lu Su was by now totally a card-carrying member of the Zhuge Liang fan club. When their ships pulled up on the south bank of the river, Zhou Yu had already sent 500 soldiers there to wait for arrows. Zhuge Liang told them to go collect the arrows from the ships. They counted more than 100,000 arrows and moved them all to Zhou Yu's headquarters.

When Lu Su saw Zhou Yu, he recounted what Zhuge Liang had done, and Zhou Yu was absolutely stunned. He could not help but sigh and say, "I cannot match Zhuge Liang's miraculous strategies!"

A poet later commemorated Zhuge Liang's outside-the-box solution thus:

That day the river-shrouding fogs  
Melted all distance in a watery blur.  
Like driving rain or locusts Cao Cao's arrows came,  
And Zhuge Liang humbled the Southland commander.

When Zhuge Liang entered the camp, Zhou Yu greeted him, saying, "Sir, your supernatural cunning is truly impressive!"

"Oh, it's just a common bit of trickery; nothing to write home about," Zhuge Liang replied, humble as ever.

Perhaps too awestruck at the moment to let his murderous impulse be stirred up again, Zhou Yu invited his rival slash ally into his tent, where they shared a drink.

"Yesterday, my lord sent word urging us to advance," Zhou Yu said. "I have not yet come up with a good plan of attack. I hope you will enlighten me."

“I am but a run-of-the-mill pedant. What great ideas could I offer?” Zhuge Liang said, which, yeah, ok, whatever man.

“When I scouted Cao Cao’s naval camp, I saw that it was very orderly and cannot be easily besieged,” Zhou Yu said. “I did come up with one idea, but I don’t know if it’ll work. I hope you can help me decide.”

“Commander,” Zhuge Liang said, “Don’t speak of it out loud. Let’s each write our idea in our hand and then see if they match.”

Delighted, Zhou Yu fetched a brush and ink. He wrote his idea in the palm of his hand first, and then handed the brush to Zhuge Liang, who did likewise. The two of them then pulled their chairs close to each other and opened their hands to reveal their plans. When they looked at each other’s hand, both began to laugh out loud. On both of their palms was written the same word -- “FIRE”.

“Since we are of one mind, then I have no further doubts,” Zhou Yu said. “Do not leak our plan.”

“This is our common cause, so of course I would not leak it,” Zhuge Liang said. “Even though Cao Cao has been scorched by my fires twice already, I expect he will still not be prepared for it. You may employ it to your heart’s content.”

After a few more cups of wine, they parted ways. And no one else knew of their plan.

On the other side of the river, Cao Cao was still brooding, and who can blame him? The Southlands hasn’t knocked him out, but had dealt him a bunch of small blows. He lost their first battle on the river, allowed Zhou Yu to scout out his camp, got duped into executing his best naval commanders, and now, watched helplessly as Zhuge Liang absconded with more than 150,000 of his arrows, and rubbed his face in it. All the while, Cao Cao had not been able to land any counterpunches, so he’s understandably grumpy.



One of his advisers, Xun (2) You (1), now offered up an idea. "With Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang pulling the strings, it's hard to defeat the enemy quickly," he said. "We should send someone to pretend to defect to Dong Wu so as to serve as our spy and keep us informed. Then we can think about making a move."

"That idea suits me," Cao Cao said. "Who from our side can take on this mission?"

"Although Cai Mao has been executed, his clansmen are still serving in our ranks," Xun You said. "His younger brothers Cai Zhong (1) and Cai He (2) are currently lieutenants. Your excellency can bestow kindness upon them to gain their goodwill, and then send them to pretend to defect to Dong Wu. That would not raise too much suspicion."

Cao Cao took this suggestion and secretly summoned Cai Zhong (1) and Cai He (2) to his tent that night.

"Take some soldiers and go to Dong Wu to pretend to defect," Cao Cao told them. "Keep us apprised of any development. When we are victorious, you shall be handsomely rewarded. But do not harbor any stray thoughts."

"Our families are still in Jing Province, so how could we dare to entertain any stray thoughts?" the two officers replied. "Your excellency need not have any doubts. We promise to deliver Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang's heads to you."

Cao Cao then gave them a sample of the fabulous prizes they had coming to them. The next day, Cai Zhong and Cai He led 500 soldiers and sailed toward the south bank on a few ships.

When they arrived at Zhou Yu's camp, Zhou Yu was in the middle of a meeting. When he heard that two of Cai Mao's brothers were coming to defect, he summoned them. The two defectors wept and prostrated on the ground, saying, "Our elder brother was innocent, and yet that scoundrel Cao

Cao killed him. We want to avenge our brother, so we have come to surrender. We hope you will take us in. We are willing to lead the way for you.”

Zhou Yu was delighted when he heard this and rewarded the two handsomely. He then assigned them to serve in the vanguard under the general Gan Ning. The two Cai brothers thanked him and thought that they pulled the wool over Zhou Yu’s eyes.

But of course, Zhou Yu was not that easily fooled. After the two defectors left, he secretly summoned Gan Ning and told him, “Those two did not bring their families along. This defection must be fake. They are here to serve as Cao Cao’s spies. I’m going to turn their scheme against them and use them to send false intel. You should be as hospitable to them as possible, but be on guard. When we launch our attack, we will sacrifice them to our banners. Take great care and do not slip up.”

After Gan Ning left, Lu Su came in to see Zhou Yu and said, “The Cai brothers’ defection is more than likely a deception. We must not take them in.”

“They have defected because they want to avenge their brother’s wrongful death at Cao Cao’s hands. What deception could there be?” Zhou Yu said. “How can we welcome the talents of the realm if you are so suspicious?”

This mild admonishment sent Lu Su away in silence. He then went to talk about this with Zhuge Liang. When Zhuge Liang heard this, he could not stop laughing.

“Why are you laughing?” Lu Su asked.

“I’m laughing at you, for not recognizing Commander Zhou’s scheme. It is difficult to gather intel with the river serving as the great divide. Cao Cao sent the Cais here to pretend to defect so that they can gather intel on our military affairs. Now, Commander Zhou is turning their plan against them and using them to send false intel. There is no such thing as too much deception in war. This is a good move by Commander Zhou.”

Only after Zhuge Liang had connected the dots for him did Lu Su realize what's going on. This is getting to be a rather familiar theme here, with Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang showing off their respective genius left and right, while Lu Su is kind of stumbling around in the dark, playing catch up. God bless his heart.

That night, Zhou Yu was sitting in his tent when suddenly the old general Huang Gai slipped in to see him. This guy has been a bit player in our narrative so far. He was one of the original generals who followed Sun Jian (1), the patriarch of the Sun family who started their enterprise. So he's someone who holds great stature in the Southlands.

"General Huang, for you to come so late, you must have some sage advice for me," Zhou Yu said.

"We are at a numerical disadvantage," Huang Gai said. "It is not in our interest to maintain this stalemate for long. Why not attack the enemy with fire?"

"Who gave you that idea?" Zhou Yu asked, a bit surprised.

"No one. I thought of it myself," Huang Gai answered.

"That is what I plan to do," Zhou Yu told him. "That's why I kept the fake defectors Cai Zhong and Cai He, so that I can use them to send false information. But regrettably, I have no one here who can pretend to defect to Cao Cao."

"I am willing to do it," Huang Gai said.

"But if you don't suffer a little, how can Cao Cao believe you?"

"I have received great kindness from the Sun clan. Even if my brain and innards were scattered across the ground, I would have no regrets."

When Zhou Yu heard this, he kneeled to thank Huang Gai.

"General, if you are willing to endure torture for the sake of deception, it would be an immense blessing to the Southlands," Zhou Yu said.

“Even if I die, I would hold no grudge,” Huang Gai said before taking his leave.

The next day, Zhou Yu assembled all the officers in his tent, and Zhuge Liang was also present.

“Cao Cao’s army is immense and their camps run for a hundred miles,” Zhou Yu told his men. “We cannot defeat them quickly. So each of you are to take three months’ provisions and prepare to defend our line.”

Before he had finished speaking, Huang Gai stepped up and said, “Even if we had 30 months’ of provisions, it would be no good, much less three months! If we can defeat Cao Cao this month, then so be it. Otherwise, we should do as Zhang Zhao had suggested, lay down our arms and surrender to the North!”

Zhou Yu’s face turned several shades of color when he heard this, and he became incensed.

“I have been commanded by our lord to lead this army to defeat Cao Cao. Anyone who dares to suggest surrender shall be executed. How dare you say such things on the eve of battle to damage our troops’ morale? If I don’t execute you, I would have no standing with our men!”

So Zhou Yu called for the guards to take Huang Gai outside and behead him. But far from showing any fear, Huang Gai also got mad.

“I have served the Suns for three generations now. I was helping General Sun Jian (1) march through the Southlands when you were still in diapers!”

This ticked off Zhou Yu even more, and he ordered Huang Gai be executed at once. But the general Gan Ning rushed forward and pleaded for leniency.

“General Huang is one of the Southlands’ senior officers. Please have mercy!”

But Zhou Yu now turned his ire on Gan Ning.

“How dare you?! Are you trying to flout my authority?!” he shouted as he ordered guards to beat Gan Ning and kick him out of the tent.

But now, all the officers present kneeled and begged for mercy. "Huang Gai does deserve to die," they told Zhou Yu. "But killing him right now is not auspicious for the army. Please restrain your anger. Record his offense for now. You can execute him after we have defeated Cao Cao."

Zhou Yu, however, remained obstinate, making his officers beg some more. After sufficient begging had been lodged, Zhou Yu told Huang Gai, "If not for all the other officers' sake, I would execute you for sure. I will spare your life for now!"

But just because he wasn't being executed, it did not mean Huang Gai was going to get off unscathed. Zhou Yu now told the guards: "Tie him up on the ground and give him a hundred strokes on his back as punishment!"

A hundred strokes was no small matter, especially at Huang Gai's age. So the other officers again begged for leniency, but Zhou Yu was not about to be leaned on once again. He kicked over his desk, shushed the officers, and told the guards to proceed. So the guards stripped off Huang Gai's clothes, tied him up and pinned him on the ground, and commenced with the beating.

When the count reached 50 strokes, the other officers had worked up the courage to once again intercede and beg for leniency. With just about everyone in the tent on their knees, Zhou Yu relented. He stood up, pointed at Huang Gai, and said, "How dare you disrespect me?! We will save the other 50 strokes for now. If you dare to slight me again in the least, I will punish you for both transgressions!"

Zhou Yu then proceeded to storm back into his tent, cursing the whole way. The other officers helped Huang Gai up off the ground. By now, his skin and flesh were covered with gashes and welts, and blood oozed out. As they helped him back to his own tent, he lost consciousness several times. Everyone who heard what happened could not help but shed tears.

Lu Su went to see how Huang Gai was doing. Afterward, he went to Zhuge Liang's little boat, where he admonished Zhuge Liang.

“When Commander Zhou was punishing General Huang this morning, we, as his subordinate, did not dare to intercede too much. But sir, you are a guest. Why did you just sit and watch without saying anything?”

“My friend, you mock me,” Zhuge Liang said with a smile.

“How can you say that? I have never mocked you since you accompanied me across the river to the Southlands,” Lu Su protested.

“Do you not recognize that this beating today was a scheme?” Zhuge Liang said. “So how could I intercede?”

Once again, Lu Su went “Aahhhhh.”

“Without some suffering, how can they fool Cao Cao?” Zhuge Liang continued. “Now, Commander Zhou must intend to have General Huang defect, and have Cai Zhong and Cai He report today’s events to Cao Cao to corroborate his story. But when you see Commander Zhou, you must not tell him that I saw through his scheme. Just say I was fooled as well.”

So will Lu Su keep this from Zhou Yu? And will Cao Cao be fooled? Find out on the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.