

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 83.

Last time, Liu Zhang had reached out to his nemesis Zhang Lu for help against Liu Bei. Zhang Lu sent the general Ma Chao to lead a relief force, but Ma Chao ended up joining Liu Bei and volunteered to go force Liu Zhang to surrender.

When Liu Zhang saw the help he had been waiting on showing up on his doorstep demanding his surrender, he collapsed on the wall of the city of Chengdu. When his officials brought him back around, he lamented, “I was blind! And now it’s too late for regrets! Let’s open the gates and surrender, so as to save the civilians.”

One of his officials objected. “We still have more than 30,000 troops inside the city and enough money and provisions to last us a year. How can we just surrender?”

But Liu Zhang would not hear of it.

“My father and I have reigned in Shu for 20-some years and have not done anything for the people,” he said. “After three years of war, the fields are covered with blood and bodies, and it is all my fault. How can I live with myself? I would rather surrender to protect the people.”

These words made everyone around him tear up, but just then, someone spoke up and said, “My lord, your words are in accordance with heaven.”

This was a man named Qiao (2) Zhou (1), and he was known for his knowledge of astrology. Liu Zhang asked him to elaborate, and Qiao (2) Zhou (1) said, “When I observed the night sky, I saw many stars clustered over Shu, and the main star was as bright as the moon. This is the imperial sign. Also, a year ago, there was a children’s limerick that said, ‘If you want fresh rice, you must wait until the First Ruler comes.’ This is a clear omen. We must not go against heaven’s will.”

A couple of the loyal officials, like Huang Quan and Liu Ba (1), were outraged by these words and wanted to kill this Qiao (2) Zhou (1), but Liu Zhang stopped them. Just then, word came that the

district governor of Shu had already said see ya later and slipped out of the city to surrender to Liu Bei. Seeing his men abandoning him, Liu Zhang wept bitterly and returned to his residence.

The next morning, Liu Bei sent his aide Jian (3) Yong (1) to request an audience with Liu Zhang. Liu Zhang ordered the gates to be opened, and Jian Yong entered in his carriage. As he rode through the streets, he was feeling and acting mighty smug, until suddenly, an official named Qin (2) Mi (4) pulled out a sword and shouted, “Just because you upstarts got your way, do you think you are above us all? How dare you slight us, the worthy men of Shu?!”

This little outburst set Jian Yong straight, and he immediately got out of his carriage to greet Qin (2) Mi (4). “Forgive me, sir. I did not recognize you,” he said.

Thus somewhat appeased, Qin Mi accompanied Jian Yong to go see Liu Zhang. Jian Yong told Liu Zhang how Liu Bei was generous and magnanimous and bore no ill will toward him, nevermind that big army he’s got parked outside your city. This convinced Liu Zhang to make up his mind and surrender.

The next day, Liu Zhang personally carried his seal and cord of command, along with other paperwork, and rode out of the city with Jian Yong in his carriage. Liu Bei personally came out of his camp to greet him.

Taking Liu Zhang by the hand and sniffing, Liu Bei said, “It’s not that I am dishonorable or inhumane; I was compelled by circumstances.”

One can only imagine what Liu Zhang was thinking when he heard this. Yeah, circumstances. Ok, whatever you say, man. Whatever he thought, Liu Zhang obviously did not dare to say much. They went inside the camp and completed the handover, after which the two kinsmen rode side by side back into the city to show that everything was cool between them.

Inside the city, the civilians were waiting to welcome Liu Bei by the gates with incense, flowers, and lanterns. When he arrived at the main hall, Liu Bei sat in the big chair, and all the officials of the district kneeled in front of him. All, that is, except for two guys who remained loyal to Liu Zhang to the end: Huang Quan and Liu Ba (1). Both of them stayed home and kept their doors shut.

This did not please Liu Bei's officers, and many wanted to go kill the two obstinate holdouts. Liu Bei, however, quickly sent out word that whoever harmed either of those men would have their entire clans exterminated. Liu Bei then personally went to call on the two men and asked them to serve him. His humility did its usual thing, and the two men caved and said, fine, you twisted our arms; we'll serve you.

With the initial transition taken care of, Zhuge Liang now said to Liu Bei, "The Riverlands are now at peace, but it's not big enough for two masters. You should send Liu Zhang to Jing Province."

"But I just took over the region; I cannot send him so far away yet," Liu Bei said.

"Liu Zhang lost his enterprise because he was too feeble," Zhuge Liang said. "If your lordship is soft-hearted like a woman and indecisive, I worry that this territory would not be ours for long."

Oh, well, since you called me a woman, I guess I'll take your advice. Thus convinced, Liu Bei held a big banquet and told Liu Zhang to pack his bags. He gave Liu Zhang a spiffy title -- the General Who Exhibits Might, which, yeah, kind of seems like rubbing it in. But more to the point, this highly prized position is based not in the Riverlands, but in the Jing Province city of Gong'an (1,1), so Liu Zhang and his family had to hit the road that very day.

Now that that's taken care of, Liu Bei got down to the business of doling out rewards and titles to all the civil officials and military officers of the Riverlands who surrendered to him, and yeah, there were a lot of them who surrendered, 60-some in all.

And of course, he made sure his old entourage was well taken care of. Zhuge Liang was named director general. Both of Liu Bei's brothers, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, got generalships and marquiships. Zhao Yun, Huang Zhong, Wei Yan, and Ma Chao all got generalships. The rest of the group that followed him through thick and thin, guys like Sun Qian, Jian Yong, the Mi brothers, his adopted son Liu Feng (1) and so on, along with all the officials from Jing Province, got nice promotions. Liu Bei also went a step farther in rewarding Guan Yu, sending him a ton of gold and silver, along with lots copper coins and fine silk.

As for the rank-and-file foot soldiers, Liu Bei threw a big party for them and fed them lots of oxen and horses. He also opened up the city's granaries and distributed food to the civilians. And all this free stuff did what they were meant to do -- make the army and the civilians very happy and grateful to Liu Bei.

Liu Bei wasn't done being generous though. He also wanted to distribute the finest land and buildings in Chengdu to his officials, but the general Zhao Yun spoke up against it.

"The people of Yi Province have suffered the ravages of war and their fields lie fallow and their buildings are deserted," Zhao Yun said. "We should return the fields and buildings to the civilians and allow them to resume their occupations. That would make them accept our rule. We should not take what is theirs for ourselves."

See, this is why I love Zhao Yun. The guy is not only a great warrior, but he was also righteous and knew a thing or two about how to treat people right. Liu Bei was impressed with his reasoning and took his advice.

Liu Bei then put Zhuge Liang in charge of laying down the new laws of the land, and Zhuge Liang came up with a set of laws that carried with them particularly stiff punishments for wrongdoings. Fa Zheng, the Riverlands official who helped concoct the conspiracy to give the territory to Liu Bei, objected.

“When the Supreme Ancestor entered the capital of the vanquished Qin (2) Dynasty, he reduced the legal code to just three provisions, and that made the people appreciate his benevolence,” Fa Zheng said. “I hope, Director General, that you will be more lenient and reduce the scope of the law.”

So we are basically engaged in a debate about big government vs. small government here, and Zhuge Liang was firmly on the side of big government, and here’s why.

“Sir,” he said to Fa Zheng, “You don’t know the whole story about the Supreme Ancestor. The Qin Dynasty had a cruel legal code that drew the ire of the people. That is why the Supreme Ancestor treated them with benevolence and leniency. But Liu Zhang was weak. His benevolence inspired no dedication, and his severity received no respect. The relationship between lord and officials gradually broke down. Those he favored with office became cruel as their power increased, and those who were kept dependable by his generosity became indifferent as his generosity was exhausted. That’s why he failed.

“Our new administration must win respect through legal authority. When the laws are carried out, the people will appreciate our kindness. Also, we must use rank to limit ambition, so that when a rank is granted, the honor will be appreciated. Balanced bestowing of kindness and honor will restore the proper relationship between lord and officials, and the principles of good governance will again flourish.”

This little speech impressed Fa Zheng, and he bowed to show that he was impressed. So from that day on, with troops garrisoned throughout the region, peace returned to the Riverlands. But before we go, there’s a quick aside here about Fa Zheng. He was named the district governor of Shu, which was a pretty powerful posting. With this newfound power, he set out to repay all the people who had once bestowed kindness upon him, even if it was something as minor as a free meal. That was the good part. The bad part, though, was that Fa Zheng also set out to settle old scores, and even miniscule slights were paid back.

Eventually, someone complained to Zhuge Liang about Fa Zheng's overzealous paybacks, but Zhuge Liang's response was, "Back when my lord was stuck in Jing Province, dreading Cao Cao to the north and Sun Quan to the east, it was Fa Zheng who lent him wings and helped him soar beyond anyone's reach. So how can we restrict him or deny him his way now?"

Uh, well, that's not exactly the kind of response you would expect from a guy who just a moment ago was preaching about imposing the rule of law. But thus are the ways of the law in China since time immemorial. But while Zhuge Liang turned a blind eye to Fa Zheng's ways, word of what he said did get back to Fa Zheng, who was shamed into reining himself in. So maybe Zhuge Liang knew what he was doing after all.

One day, Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang were just sitting around shooting the bull. Guan Yu's son Guan Ping suddenly arrived from Jing Province, bearing a note from his father thanking Liu Bei for all the nice loot Liu Bei had sent. But as he handed over the letter, Guan Ping said, "My father heard about Ma Chao's superior fighting skills and wanted to come to the Riverlands to have a contest with him. He wanted me to relay this to you, uncle."

Liu Bei was quite alarmed. "If brother Guan comes to compete with Ma Chao, they might become mortal foes," he said.

"No worries," Zhuge Liang said. "I will write a reply to take care of it."

Knowing that his brother was not the most patient of men, Liu Bei asked Zhuge Liang to write the reply right away and then sent Guan Ping back to Jing Province at once. When Guan Ping returned to Jing Province, Guan Yu asked him about the whole competition thing, and Guan Ping showed him the letter from Zhuge Liang, which said:

"General, I heard that you wanted to have a contest with Ma Chao. In my estimation, even though Ma Chao has great valor, he is no more than the likes of Ying (1) Bu (4) and Peng (2) Yue (4)." And

both of those guys, by the way, were famous generals from the time of the founding of the Han Dynasty, but they were not seen as the greatest generals of their age.

“Ma Chao,” the letter continued, “may be a match for your brother Zhang Fei, but he cannot compare with the unique and incomparable ability of you, our Lord of the Beautiful Beard. Your current governorship of Jing Province is no small responsibility. If you leave your post and come to the Riverlands and something happens to Jing Province, that’d be a grave offense. Please exercise discretion.”

So what Zhuge Liang did here was basically turn the flattery dial up to 11. Note that he didn’t say exactly in what ways Guan Yu was superior to Ma Chao or even his own brother Zhang Fei, but just that he was superior. And that was enough to placate Guan Yu’s ego. As he stroked his beautiful beard, Guan Yu laughed and said, “Zhuge Liang really understands me.” And from that point on, he dropped the notion of going to the Riverlands, and everything was kumbaya again for Liu Bei and company.

While Liu Bei was making himself comfortable in the Riverlands, the ruler of the Southlands, Sun Quan, was getting restless. When he heard that Liu Bei had conquered the Riverlands, he summoned his top two civil officials, Zhang Zhao and Gu (4) Yong (1), and said to them, “When Liu Bei borrowed Jing Province from us, he said he would return it as soon as he took the Riverlands. Well, he now has the 41 districts of Shu and is about to extend his rule to the region of Hanzhong (4,1). If he doesn’t return Jing Province now, we are going to come to blows.”

But Zhang Zhao said, “We must not mobilize our army. I have a plan that would make Liu Bei offer Jing Province back to your lordship. The person that Liu Bei relies on the most is Zhuge Liang. Zhuge Liang’s brother Zhuge Jin (3) is currently serving as an official in Dongwu. Why don’t we arrest his entire family and send him to the Riverlands to tell his brother and demand that Liu Bei return Jing

Province. He can tell them that if they refuse to return it, then his entire family will be doomed. Zhuge Liang, on account of his family, would no doubt agree.”

“But Zhuge Jin is an honest gentleman; I cannot bear to arrest his family,” Sun Quan said.

“Just let him know that this is all a ruse, and he will have no worries,” Zhang Zhao countered.

Sun Quan consented, so he moved Zhuge Jin’s entire family to his own residence under the pretense of house arrest and sent Zhuge Jin to the Riverlands with a letter.

After a journey of a few days, Zhuge Jin arrived in Chengdu, where he sought an audience with Liu Bei. Liu Bei asked Zhuge Liang what his brother was doing here, and it didn’t take a genius to figure out that an envoy from Dongwu could only mean one thing: They want Jing Province back, again. The two of them hashed out an appropriate response, and Zhuge Liang went out to welcome his brother. Instead of bringing Zhuge Jin to his own home, however, Zhuge Liang led him straight to the guest house.

After the two brothers exchanged greetings, Zhuge Jin began to weep loudly.

“Brother, tell me what’s bothering you?” Zhuge Liang said.

“My whole family is done for!”

“Is it because we haven’t returned Jing Province yet?” Zhuge Liang asked knowingly. “How can I live with myself knowing that your family is in trouble because of me?! Brother, don’t worry. I’ll think of a way to return Jing Province.”

This cheered up Zhuge Jin, and he went with Zhuge Liang to see Liu Bei. Upon reading the letter from Sun Quan, Liu Bei put on an angry face.

“Sun Quan married his sister to me, and yet while I was away from Jing Province, he secretly sneaked her back to Dongwu. That is inexcusable! I was just about to mobilize my troops and conquer the Southlands to quell my anger. How dare he come ask for Jing Province?”

Now, Zhuge Liang began to cry and kneeled on the floor and begged.



“Lord Sun has arrested my brother’s entire family. If we don’t return Jing Province, he and his whole family will be executed. If my brother dies, how can I go on living? My lord, I hope that for my sake, you will return Jing Province so as to preserve my brotherly bond!”

Liu Bei, however, steadfastly refused while Zhuge Liang kept crying and begging. After this good-cop-bad-cop routine had gone on for a convincing length of time, Liu Bei made a concession.

“Fine! For the sake of my director general, I will return half of Jing Province. I will give them the counties of Changsha, Lingling (2,2), and Guiyang (4,2).”

“In that case,” Zhuge Liang said, “please write a letter instructing General Guan to hand over those three counties.”

Liu Bei wrote a letter and gave it to Zhuge Jin, along with a little warning.

“When you see my brother Guan Yu, be sure to speak kindly to him. He has a fiery temper. Even I am wary of him. Please tread carefully.”

So Zhuge Jin took the letter and headed to Jing Province, where he was welcomed in by Guan Yu. After the necessary courtesies, Zhuge Jin produced the letter from Liu Bei and said, “The imperial uncle has agreed to return three counties to Dongwu for now. I hope, general, that you will transfer them to our control quickly so that I may report back to my master.”

But Guan Yu’s face changed colors and he said sternly, “I swore and oath in the peach orchards with my brother to support the House of Han. Jing Province belonged to the Han, how can I give an inch of its territory to someone else? A general in the field can refuse a lord’s command. Even though my brother has written this letter, I refuse to return the counties.”

“But my master has arrested my family,” Zhuge Jin protested. “If I can’t get Jing Province back, they would surely be killed. General, please have pity!”

“[Scoff] That is a ruse by your master. How can it fool me?”

“General, why are you so unreasonable?”

Well, that was the signal for Guan Yu to end this conversation. He drew his sword and declared, “Say no more! This sword is blind!”

Guan Yu’s son, Guan Ping, now tried to play good cop and said, “Father, please calm down, or it might not look good with the director general.”

“If not for the director general, I’d see to it that you do not make it back to Dongwu!” Guan Yu said to Zhuge Jin.

Zhuce Jin was now humiliated and flummoxed. He quickly took his leave and headed back to the Riverlands to tell his brother that, umm, we have a problem. But Zhuge Liang, conveniently, was out doing inspections around the region, so Zhuge Jin had no choice but to bring his trouble to Liu Bei.

“My brother is impulsive and difficult to reason with,” Liu Bei consoled him. “You should return home for now. Once I have taken the eastern part of the Riverlands and the region of Hanzhong (4,1), I will reassign Guan Yu there. Then I will be able to hand over Jing Province to you.”

Welp. What choice did Zhuge Jing really have? The poor guy trudged back to Dongwu and told Sun Quan what happened, and Sun Quan was not amused.

“You ran back and forth for nothing!” he said angrily. “Was it a trick by Zhuge Liang?!”

“No,” Zhuge Jin said. “My brother also cried and begged Liu Bei. It was only because of him that Liu Bei agreed to return the three counties first. It’s just that Guan Yu obstinately refused to do so.”

“Since Liu Bei has already said he’s returning the three counties, then let’s send officials there take over administration and see what they’ll do,” Sun Quan said.

So Sun Quan released Zhuge Jin’s family and sent off officials to the three counties. Within a day, all the officials came scurrying back and told Sun Quan, “Guan Yu would not tolerate us and chased us back immediately. He threatened to kill us if we lingered.”

Sun Quan was incensed, and he needed to take it out on someone. That someone was Lu Su, the guy who was now the top commander of Dongwu's forces. Sun Quan summoned him and chewed him out.

"You were the one who vouched for Liu Bei when he 'borrowed' Jing Province," Sun Quan said. "Now he has conquered the Riverlands, and yet he refuses to return Jing Province. How can you just sit by and watch?"

"My lord," Lu Su said, "I have already come up with a plan and was just about to inform you."

Well, of course you were. What is this brilliant plan, Sun Quan asked.

"Our forces are garrisoned at Lukou (4,3)," Lu Su said. "I will invite Guan Yu to a banquet. If he comes, then I will ask him nicely for Jing Province. If he refuses to hand it over, I will stage an ambush and kill him. If he does not come, then I will mobilize the troops immediately, settle this on the battlefield, and take Jing Province by force."

"That suits me," Sun Quan said. "You may proceed."

One of his advisers, however, objected.

"You cannot! Guan Yu is a tiger, not a common man. If things go south, you might end up dead by his hand."

"When will we ever get Jing Province back then?!" Sun Quan shot down this objection angrily and told Lu Su to proceed at once.

Lu Su went to Lukou (4,3) and discussed the matter with his top two generals, Lü (3) Meng (2) and Gan (1) Ning (2). They decided to hold the banquet at a pagoda by the river outside their camp and dispatched a well-spoken messenger with an invitation to cross the river to see Guan Yu. The messenger met with Guan Yu's son Guan Ping on the other side and was taken to Jing Province to deliver the invitation.

Upon reading the invitation, Guan Yu said, "Since Mr. Lu is inviting me, then I shall attend tomorrow. You may return."

After the messenger left, Guan Ping voiced some concerns.

"There cannot be anything good behind this invitation," he said. "Father, why did you agree to go?"

"[Laugh] You think I don't know?" Guan Yu said with a laugh. "This must be because Zhuge Jin went back and told Sun Quan that I refused to hand over the three counties, so they had Lu Su garrison his troops at Lukou and invite me to a banquet to demand Jing Province back. If I don't go, they'd think that I'm afraid of them. Tomorrow, I will take just a small boat with a dozen or so men and attend the banquet with only my saber. Let's see what Lu Su can do to me!"

So on one hand, this is a pretty bold move. On the other hand, this is also a pretty idiotic move if the only reason Guan Yu insists on sailing into an obvious trap is because he didn't want to look chicken.

"Father, you cannot risk your valuable self by going into a den of tigers and wolves!" Guan Ping said. "I don't think uncle would approve."

"Even in the chaos of battle, I ride freely as if no one is there!" Guan Yu scoffed. "Why should I fear the vermins of the Southlands!"

One of Guan Yu's top aides, Ma (3) Liang (2), now also tried to talk him out of it.

"Even Lu Su has a reputation for honesty, he is in a tight spot and must be harboring ill intent," Ma Liang said. "You cannot go lightly."

"Back in the Warring States period, Lin (2) Xiangru (1,2) of the kingdom of Zhao (4) had not an ounce of strength, and yet he dared to look down upon the king and officials of the powerful kingdom of Qin (2)," Guan Yu said. "So why should I, one who has fought against tens of thousands, be afraid? Since I have already accepted the invitation, I must not back out."

And if you are wondering who this Lin (2) Xiangru (1,2) character was, revisit the second half of supplemental episode 3, The Deal with the Seal. Anyway, Ma Liang told Guan Yu that if he really insisted on going on this seemingly foolhardy and quite possibly suicidal visit, then he should at least be prepared. So Guan Yu told Guan Ping to prepare 10 fast ships with 500 soldiers on board and wait on the river. As soon as they see Guan Yu's flag waving across the way, they were to speed across the river to provide backup.

Meanwhile, Lu Su got word that Guan Yu was really coming, and he discussed with the general Lü Meng on how to proceed.

"If he brings troops with him," Lü Meng said, "Gan Ning and I will each lead a squad of soldiers and lie in wait by the river bank. Sound an explosive as the signal, and we will attack. If he comes without any troops, then we just need to hide 50 armed men at the banquet and kill him right there."

And so it was settled. To see how this treacherous feast will turn out, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!