

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 85.

Last time, Cao Cao decided to go out a-conquerin' again, this time setting his sights on the region of Hanzhong, which was controlled by Zhang Lu. Zhang Lu sent his brother Zhang Wei (4), along with the generals Yang (2) Ang (2) and Yang (2) Ren (4) to meet the enemy at the stronghold of Yangping (2,2) Pass. So they went and set up a series of camps in front of the pass and waited for Cao Cao's army.

Cao Cao's vanguard, led by the generals Xiahou Yuan (1) and Zhang He (2), approached the pass, and when they heard that enemy forces had already camped out there, they decided to set up camp about five miles away. Their men were exhausted from the march, and that night they all settled in for some sweet slumber when suddenly, a fire broke out behind their camp, and enemy forces swept in from two sides. By the time Xiahou Yuan and Zhang He got on their horses, enemy troops had swarmed into their camp, and their army was crushed.

Xiahou Yuan and Zhang He managed to escape, and they ran back to meet Cao Cao, who was marching with the main army.

"You two have been with the army for many years!" Cao Cao said angrily. "How can you not understand that when your troops are exhausted from a long march, you must guard against a raid?! Why were you not prepared?!"

Cao Cao was so angry that he wanted to execute the two losing generals, and these were no third-rate officers. They had been two of his top warriors for a long time, and Xiahou Yuan was his kinsman. Luckily for them, the other officers spoke up in their favor and convinced Cao Cao to spare them.

The next day, Cao Cao personally led his troops toward Yangping Pass. Along the way, he noticed how treacherous the mountainous terrain was, and how thick the woods were. On top of that, he

wasn't sure which was the right path and was worried about an ambush, so he turned around and headed back to his camp.

Once back at camp, Cao Cao said to two of his top generals, Xu Chu and Xu Huang, "If I had known this area was so treacherous, I would not have come here."

"But we ARE here, my lord," Xu Chu said. "We must not begrudge the labor."

The next day, Cao Cao rode out with just Xu Chu and Xu Huang, and the three of them went to scout out the enemy camp. When they made the turn around the foot of a hill, they spotted the enemy camps in the distance.

"Such strong fortifications cannot be taken quickly," Cao Cao said as he pointed with his whip.

Before he had finished speaking, a cry rang out from behind them, and arrows rained down in torrents as two squads of enemy troops charged toward them. Cao Cao was caught off guard by this surprise attack. Xu Chu, however, was like, yeah, bring it on!

"I will fight the enemy!" he shouted to his comrade Xu Huang. "You defend our lord!"

And so Xu Chu galloped forth with saber in hand to take on the enemy generals Yang Ang (2) and Yang Ren (4). They were no match for him and quickly fell back. The rest of their troops, seeing their commanders running away, said yeah, thanks but no thanks. We won't run away, but we aren't going to charge forward to our death either. That allowed Xu Huang and Cao Cao to get away. When they ran back behind the hill, they were met by their own reinforcements. Xiahou Yuan and Zhang He had heard the commotion and led their troops to help. They managed to fight off the enemy troops and escorted Cao Cao safely back to camp, where he rewarded all four officers handsomely.

After this little skirmish, the two sides did not fight again for nearly two months. After 50-some days, Cao Cao ordered his army to retreat.

“My lord,” his adviser Jia (3) Xu (3) said, “we don’t even know the enemy’s true strength yet. Why are we retreating?”

“I figure that with the enemy ever vigilant, it would be tough to achieve victory quickly,” Cao Cao said. “So I’m pretending to retreat so as to get them to drop their guard. Then I will send light cavalry to attack their rear. That will guarantee victory.”

“No one can guess your lordship’s divine strategies,” Jia Xu said.

So as the main army broke camp and marched away, Cao Cao sent Xiahou Yuan and Zhang He to each lead 3,000 light cavalry and sneak along the backroads to behind Yangping Pass.

In the enemy camp, when the general Yang Ang (2) heard that Cao Cao was retreating, he wanted to pursue, but his comrade Yang Ren (4) tried to talk him out of it, given Cao Cao’s reputation for cunning.

“If you won’t go, then I’ll go alone!” Yang Ang said. Turning a deaf ear to his comrade’s pleas, Yang Ang mobilized nearly all the soldiers in the camps to give chase, leaving only a token force behind.

It happened to be very foggy that day, so foggy that two people standing face to face could hardly see each other. After traveling for a while, Yang Ang had to tell his army to halt.

Meanwhile, Xiahou Yuan and his 3,000 riders had slipped around the hills, whereupon they, too, found themselves in the middle of this dense fog. They could hear the sound of people talking and horses neighing, which made them think that there might be an ambush nearby, so Xiahou Yuan told his men to advance quickly. Amid the fog, they unwittingly stumbled onto Yang Ang’s camp.

But even more unwittingly, the soldiers guarding the camp heard the hoofbeats of Xiahou Yuan’s horses, and they thought it was their own guys coming back, so they opened the gates. Xiahou Yuan

and company said thank you very much as they stormed into the mostly empty camp and set it ablaze. What soldiers Yang Ang did leave behind all fled.

By now, the fog was dissipating, and Yang Ang's comrade Yang Ren (4) had gotten word of what was going on, so he hurried over to try to retake the camp. After he and Xiahou Yuan had traded blows for just a few bouts, Cao Cao's other raiding party, led by Zhang He, appeared on the scene. This proved too much for Yang Ren, and he fled back to the city of Nanzheng (2,4), where his master Zhang Lu was situated.

Around this time, Yang Ang was on his way back to camp when he got word that, oops, the camp had been lost and that not only was he facing the enemy's light cavalry ahead, but Cao Cao's main army was sweeping in from behind. Yang Ang was trapped. As he tried to fight his way out, he ran into Zhang He, and Zhang He's spear made quick work of him.

With their general killed, Yang Ang's men fled back to Yangping Pass to tell their commander, Zhang Wei. But lo and behold, he wasn't there. Turns out that as soon as he got word that his two generals had been defeated, Zhang Wei decided to abandon the pass and flee, so both the pass and the camps in front of it easily fell into Cao Cao's hands.

When Zhang Wei and Yang Ren (4) ran back to see Zhang Lu, Zhang Wei got in the first word and blamed the whole thing on Yang Ang and Yang Ren. Zhang Lu was pretty ticked off and wanted to execute Yang Ren, but Yang Ren tried to pin the blame on the dead guy.

"I tried time and again to tell Yang Ang to not give chase, but he won't listen; that's why we lost," Yang Ren said. "I would like to beg you for another army to go challenge the enemy. I promise to kill Cao Cao. If not, then you may execute me."

Zhang Lu said fine and sent Yang Ren out with 20,000 troops. Pretty soon, he ran into Xiahou Yuan, who was leading 5,000 men to scout out the path to Nanzheng (2,4). The two sides lined up for

battle. Yang Ren first sent out a lieutenant, but he proved to be nothing more than a warmup lap for Xiahou Yuan, getting cut down after just three bouts.

That compelled Yang Ren to go out and personally fight Xiahou Yuan. They traded blows for 30-some bouts without a winner. But then Xiahou Yuan decided to use a little trickery. He turned and pretended to flee, which induced Yang Ren to give chase. When Yang Ren got close, Xiahou Yuan deployed the dragging-saber technique, whereby he suddenly stopped, whirled around, and took a swing. That swing found its mark, and Yang Ren fell dead to the ground.

With their leader vanquished, Yang Ren's men fled back to Nanzheng, while Cao Cao marched his army all the way to the city before setting up camp. Inside the city, a panic-stricken Zhang Lu called an all-hands-on-deck meeting, where one of his advisers, Yan (2) Pu (3), said, "I would like to recommend someone who is a match for any of Cao Cao's warriors."

"Who is it?" Zhang Lu asked.

"The general Pang De," Yan Pu said. "He followed his master Ma Chao here. Then, when Ma Chao set off for the Riverlands, Pang De was sick and could not follow him. Your lordship has treated him very well since then. Why not send him to fight?"

So Zhang Lu summoned Pang De and gave him a bunch of nice swag, along with 10,000 troops. Pang De was ordered to go meet Cao Cao's army a few miles outside the city, and off he went. When the two sides came across each other, they lined up and Pang De rode out to challenge for combat.

Cao Cao knew all about Pang De from his past battles against Ma Chao, so he told his generals, "Pang De is a valiant warrior from Xiliang. He used to serve Ma Chao. Even though he's now under Zhang Lu, but he's not yet committed. I want to have him in my service. You all take turns fighting him to tire him out, and then we can capture him."

So the general Zhang He (2) was the first to go out, and he fought Pang De for a number of bouts before retreating. Xiahou Yuan followed and fought a number of bouts before falling back. Xu Huang was next up, and he quit the fight after just five bouts. Xu Chu then went out and fought Pang De for 50-some bouts before turning back.

So that part went according to plan, but there was just one problem: Pang De wasn't getting tired. In fact, he showed no fear as he went head to head against his four opponents, all of whom went back to their lines singing Pang De's praises to Cao Cao.

While Cao Cao was happy that Pang De was proving to be the real deal, there was still the slight problem of having to capture the guy first, so Cao Cao asked his staff for ideas. The adviser Jia Xu said, "I know that Zhang Lu has an adviser named Yang Song (1). This man never turns down a bribe. We can secretly send him some valuables and have him speak ill of Pang De to Zhang Lu. Then we can make our move."

"But how do we get someone into their city?" Cao Cao asked.

"Tomorrow on the battlefield, pretend to lose and abandon our camp in retreat. Let Pang De occupy our camp. Then at night, stage a raid on the camp. Pang De would no doubt fall back into the city. Have a well-spoken soldier disguise himself as one of the enemy's men and slip into the city amid the chaos."

So Cao Cao found a smart soldier and gave him a handsome reward in advance. He then gave the soldier a suit of golden armor and ordered him to wear it under his uniform. You might think, oh, how nice of Cao Cao to be concerned for his man's safety, but alas, the armor wasn't for the soldier. The armor was the bribe; the soldier was just keeping it warm and delivering it. The soldier then waited along the road to the city for his opportunity.

The next day, Cao Cao first sent out two detachments of troops to stage an ambush, and then sent the general Xu Huang to go challenge for combat. After just a few bouts, Xu Huang turned and fled,

and Pang De led his army in pursuit. Cao Cao's army ran away, leaving their camp behind. Upon capturing the camp, Pang De was delighted to see that it held a large amount of provisions, so he sent word of the victory to Zhang Lu and threw a celebratory feast in the camp.

But around 9 o'clock that night, three sides of the camp were suddenly lit up by fire, as Cao Cao's troops attacked from three directions. Pang De was caught off guard, and all he could do was fight his way back to the city. With the enemy in hot pursuit, he called for the city gates to be opened, and he and his men rushed inside.

That was the opening Cao Cao's spy needed. He slipped into the city with Pang De's army and headed straight to see Yang Song, whereupon he told Yang Song how Cao Cao had always respected him and offered up the golden armor and a letter from Cao Cao. Yang Song happily accepted the bribe, read the letter, and assured the messenger that he would take care of it.

So that very night, Yang Song went to see Zhang Lu and told him that Pang De had thrown that night's fight because he had taken Cao Cao's bribe. I'll say this for Yang Song: He may be greedy and unscrupulous about whom he takes a bribe from, but once he accepted your bribe, he sure didn't waste any time making good on his promises. And he was effective, too, as Zhang Lu bought his story hook, line, and sinker. An enraged Zhang Lu immediately summoned Pang De for a tongue-lashing, which quickly escalated to an order for his execution. The adviser Yan (2) Pu (3) managed to talk Zhang Lu off that ledge, but not before Zhang Lu gave Pang De an ultimatum: Win tomorrow, or you WILL be executed.

The next day, Cao Cao laid siege to the city, and Pang De went out to take him on. Cao Cao sent Xu Chu to face him, and Xu Chu quickly feigned retreat, luring Pang De into giving chase. In the midst of this pursuit, Pang De suddenly spotted Cao Cao standing on a hilltop.

"General Pang, why don't you surrender now?" Cao Cao called out to him.

Pang De, who was feeling the heat on the homefront after last night's tongue-lashing from Zhang Lu, thought to himself, "If I capture Cao Cao, it'd beat defeating a thousand top-flight warriors."

So Pang De galloped up the hillside toward Cao Cao, but suddenly, the ground under him gave way, and both he and his horse fell into a deep trench. Before he knew what was going on, hooks on ropes rained down from every side, and Pang De was soon tangled up. Cao Cao's men took him alive and brought him to the top of the hill to see their master.

Cao Cao dismounted and shooshed the soldiers away. He then personally untied Pang De and asked him if he was willing to surrender. After the treatment he received from Zhang Lu the night before, Pang De had no reason to die for the man, so he promptly switched sides.

Cao Cao then personally helped Pang De back onto his horse and they returned to camp together. Cao Cao made sure that they took a route that allowed the soldiers on the city walls to see them. When those soldiers reported to Zhang Lu that they had seen Cao Cao and Pang De riding side by side, it only confirmed to Zhang Lu that Yang Song was spot on in thinking Pang De a traitor.

The next day, Cao Cao laid siege on the city from three sides, and things were not looking good. Zhang Lu, seeing the dire straits that he was in, huddled with his brother Zhang Wei (4). Zhang Wei advised that they should burn the grain storehouses in the city, escape through the one side that was not under siege, and make their stand elsewhere. Yang Song, however, was advocating surrender.

While Zhang Lu was going back and forth, Zhang Wei said, "Let's burn it all down already." But Zhang Lu refused.

"I've long wanted to submit to the government, but was never able to," Zhang Lu said. "Right now, I have no choice but to flee, but the storehouses are government property and must not be destroyed."



So instead of destroying the storehouses, Zhang Lu ordered that they be sealed so as to keep anyone from tampering. That night, he took his family and fled out of the city through the south gate, which was the only side of the city not under siege. Cao Cao told his men to not give chase. Instead, he took his army into the city.

Once inside the city, Cao Cao saw that Zhang Lu had sealed all the storehouses and was touched by this effort to protect government property, so he sent a messenger to see Zhang Lu to try to convince him surrender. Zhang Lu, now set up in his new headquarters in Bazhong (1,1), wanted to surrender, but his brother Zhang Wei (4) would not hear of it. So the turncoat Yang Song secretly wrote to Cao Cao, telling him to attack, and that he would serve as the inside man.

Cao Cao did as Yang Song suggested, and when his army approached, Zhang Lu sent his brother Zhang Wei out to fight. Zhang Wei had the misfortune of going up against Xu Chu, aka Mad Tiger. In no time at all, Xu Chu was victorious and Zhang Wei was dead.

When the defeated troops scampered back to tell Zhang Lu what had happened, Zhang Lu wanted to just fortify his defenses and try to hold out. Yang Song, however, told him, "If you don't go out and fight, you would be sitting here awaiting your demise. I will defend the city, and your lordship shall go out and settle this."

Zhang Lu agreed, despite vehement objections from his other adviser, Yan (2) Pu (3). So he led an army out of the city, but before they even traded a single blow with the enemy, the guys in the back of Zhang Lu's lines had already started running away. Zhang Lu hurriedly fell back, with Cao Cao's army in pursuit. Zhang Lu ran back to the foot of the city and ... uh oh, the gates were shut, and when Zhang Lu demanded that they be opened, Yang Song went all HAL-9000 on him and said I'm sorry, I can't do that.

Meanwhile, Cao Cao and his troops had caught up from behind, and Cao Cao now shouted to Zhang Lu, "Why don't you surrender?!"

Seeing no other way out, Zhang Lu quickly dismounted and surrendered. Cao Cao was delighted, and, still mindful of Zhang Lu's protection of the storehouses, treated him with courtesy and respect. Cao Cao named Zhang Lu the General Who Guards the South. Zhang Lu's staff, such as Yan Pu, all received marquiships. As for Yang Song, the guy who served as the inside man for Cao Cao, well, he got a special treat. Cao Cao had him executed in public for betraying his master. Can't say I exactly feel sorry for the guy, given how he screwed his master time and again, first with Ma Chao, then with Pang De, and then finally, against Cao Cao.

Cao Cao then put his own guys in charge of the various cities of his newly won territory, and he now controlled the East Riverlands. At this point, his first secretary, Sima Yi, suggested he turn his sights westward.

"Liu Bei conquered Liu Zhang through deception, and the people of Shu have yet to declare their allegiance to him," Sima Yi said. "Since your lordship now controls Hanzhong, Yi Province must be feeling anxious. You should advance your army quickly, and you will be unstoppable. The wise man pounces when opportunity presents itself; you must not miss yours."

However, Cao Cao responded with a sigh. "A man must not be ever wanting," he said. "I have already conquered the region of Long (3); how can I hope to take Shu as well?"

His adviser Liu (2) Ye (4), however, disagreed. "Sima Yi's words are quite right," he said. "If we delay, with Zhuge Liang's talent in administration and the valor of Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, and the like, the people of Shu will be pacified and the region's defenses solidified. Then we would not be able to encroach."

"But our soldiers are exhausted from the distant campaign; let them rest for a while first," Cao Cao said. And so he kept his army right where it was and made no move westward.

But while Cao Cao was standing still, the people of the West Riverlands were fidgeting. Once they heard that Cao Cao now controlled the East Riverlands, the civilians in the western half of the region figured that he would be heading their way soon, and within a day, the whole region of in panic, prompting Liu Bei to consult Zhuge Liang for ideas.

“I have a plan that would make Cao Cao retreat on his own,” Zhuge Liang said. “The reason Cao Cao has garrisoned troops at the city of Hefei (2,2) is because he is worried about Sun Quan. We can return the counties of Jiangxia (1,4), Changsha (2,1), and Guiyang (4,2) to Dongwu, and then send a well-spoken envoy to explain the pros and cons to Dongwu and convince them to attack Hefei, that will no doubt force Cao Cao to turn his army south instead.”

The adviser Yi (1) Ji (2) volunteered to serve as the envoy, so Liu Bei sent him first to Jing Province to tell Guan Yu that hey, we’re giving back three counties for real this time, so play nice. Then, Yi Ji headed to Dongwu, where he went to see Sun Quan in the city of Moling (4,2).

“What are you doing here?” Sun Quan asked Yi Ji upon summoning him in.

“Previously, when Zhuge Jin went to claim the three counties we had handed back to you,” Yi Ji said, “our director general was out, and that caused some miscommunication. Now, I am delivering the official paperwork to return the counties. We originally wanted to also return the rest of Jing Province, but with Cao Cao taking over the East Riverlands, we were worried that General Guan Yu would not have a place to call home. Right now, the city of Hefei is vulnerable. We hope your lordship will attack it and force Cao Cao to retreat and head south. If my lord can take the East Riverlands, then we shall return Jing Province to you in its entirety.”

So I can imagine Sun Quan’s reaction being, “Uh, you guys have got some gall, to call what happened last time a miscommunication. Also, how is it that the terms of returning Jing Province keep

changing?" But Sun Quan kept his cool and asked Yi Ji to go to the guest house while he and his staff talked it over.

"Liu Bei is afraid that Cao Cao would attack the West Riverlands, so he devised this scheme," the senior adviser Zhang Zhao said. "But even so, it's still a good move to take Hefei while Cao Cao is in Hanzhong."

Sun Quan concurred, and so he told Yi Ji to tell Liu Bei that Dongwu would indeed mobilize its forces and attack Hefei. Meanwhile, he told his commander Lu Su to go take over administration of the three counties that were returned to Dongwu and garrison troops at the key point of Lukou (4,3). He also summoned back three of his top generals from their posts: Lü Meng, Gan Ning, and Ling Tong.

Within a day, Lü Meng and Gan Ning arrived. Lü Meng suggested to Sun Quan that he should first take the city of Wancheng (3,2), where the governor had been garrisoning troops and planting grains, actions that make the location a potential long-term threat to Dongwu. Sun Quan agreed and sent Lü Meng and Gan Ning as vanguards, while he personally led a bunch of other officers and the main army.

As the Dongwu troops approached Wancheng (2,3), the city's governor sent messengers to Hefei to request help while he got busy fortifying the city's defenses. He refused to go out to fight, and when Sun Quan approached the city to take a look, he was greeted with a shower of arrows, some of which hit his canopy.

Upon returning to camp, Sun Quan asked his staff how they could take the city. A couple guys suggested building earthen mounds or erecting ladders to lay siege to the city, but Lü Meng dismissed those ideas.

"Such approaches would take too long, and once they get reinforcements from Hefei, we would not be able to take the city anymore," he said. "Our army has just arrived and our soldiers are fresh.

We should take advantage of that and throw everything we've got at the city. If we attack at first light tomorrow, we will sack the city by noon time."

Sun Quan consented to Lü Meng's plan, so the Dongwu troops finished breakfast at 3 a.m. and began to lay siege on the city. To see if they will make good on Lü Meng's predicted timetable, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.