

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 95.

Last time, Guan Yu was in a stalemate against a Wei army led by Yu Jin and Pang De. While Yu Jin was busy sabotaging Pang De out of jealousy, Guan Yu was busy plotting both of their downfalls. Yu Jin had unwittingly garrisoned his army inside a ravine. With it being the middle of the fall rainy season, Guan Yu devised a plan to unleash the rising torrents of a nearby river to drown Yu Jin's army.

Yu Jin might have been unaware of this pending threat, but one of his officers, a man named Cheng (2) He (2), was not. In fact, Cheng He went to see Yu Jin and said, "Our troops are camped inside a ravine, at a rather low elevation. Even though there are some hills, they are relatively far from our camp. With all the rain lately, it's been hard on the troops. Also, there have been recent reports that the enemy troops have moved to higher ground and are preparing rafts at the mouth of the Han (4) River. If they use the river's water against us, we would be in dire straits. We should plan for that possibility."

Yu Jin, however, admonished Cheng He.

"How dare you damage my troops' morale? If anyone dares to speak of this again, he shall be executed!"

Well, you can't say Yu Jin didn't get any warning. He Cheng, humiliated by his commander's rebuke, went to relay his worries to Pang De.

"I share your concerns," Pang De said. "Commander Yu refuses to move his troops, but tomorrow, I will move my own troops to another location."

But tomorrow turned out to be too late. That night, a strong gale kicked up and heavy rain poured down. As he sat in his tent, Pang De suddenly heard an earth-shaking noise that sounded like 10,000 horses sprinting. When he stepped outside to see what's going on, he found that the entire area was flooded by roaring torrents of water. The entire army was in chaos as countless soldiers were swept

away by the strong currents. Soon, the ravine was covered by water 10 feet high, forcing Yu Jin, Pang De, and the other officers to scramble to a few small hills for relief.

When dawn arrived, so did Guan Yu and his army, coasting into the ravine on large ships. At this point, Yu Jin only had about 50 or 60 men with him. Seeing no way out, Yu Jin quickly declared his willingness to surrender. So Guan Yu took him prisoner, removed his armor, and locked him up on a ship.

Guan Yu then turned his attention to Pang De, who was holed up on another hill with Cheng He and a couple other officer, along with about 500 foot soldiers. None of them had any armor, but when Guan Yu approached, Pang De showed no sign of fear and instead valiantly went forward to face him.

Guan Yu, however, didn't even have to get off his ship. He just ordered his fleet to surround the hill that Pang De was on and then bombard the trapped enemy with a shower of arrows, which killed most of the soldiers on the hill.

Seeing a hopeless cause, two of the officers trapped on the hill said to Pang De, "Most of our men are either dead or wounded, and there's no way out. Why don't we surrender?"

But that just riled up Pang De.

"I have received great kindness from the King of Wei; how can I submit to another?!" he said angrily as he personally cut down the two officers who dared to suggest surrender.

"Anyone else who advocates surrender will share their fate!" he declared.

Given that ultimatum, the remaining Wei soldiers put up a dogged fight and managed to hold out until noon. Guan Yu now amped up the assault from all sides. His men rained down stones and arrows on Pang De and his stubborn band of holdouts, who tried to counter by engaging in close combat.

Turning his comrade Cheng He, Pang De said, “You know the saying that not even death can make a general sacrifice his integrity in exchange for his life. This is my day to die. Let’s give it everything we have and fight to the death!”

Spurred on by this “Today is a good day to die” speech, Cheng He charged forward, but he was stopped dead in his tracks by an arrow from Guan Yu, which dropped him dead into the water. The remaining Wei soldiers soon surrendered, but Pang De alone refused to give up.

Just then, he spotted a small boat sailing by with a few dozen enemy soldiers on board. Pang De grabbed his saber and with one bound leaped onto the boat. In the blink of an eye, he cut down a dozen or so men, and the rest all abandoned ship and swam away. So now, Pang De looked like he had a ride out of this tight situation. Holding his saber in one hand and the oar in the other, Pang De rowed toward the city of Fancheng, where he hoped to find refuge with the Wei troops holed up inside.

Just then, though, a large raft approached from upstream. Aboard was a Shu officer, who steered the raft directly into the side of Pang De’s boat, ramming it and sending Pang De flying into the water. The Shu officer quickly followed him into the water, dragged him onto the raft, and took him prisoner. This officer was Zhou Cang (1), Guan Yu’s trusted follower who was both a skilled swimmer, thanks to his many years in Jing Province, and a strong guy, which allowed him to capture Pang De.

And just like that, the battle was over. Nearly all of Yu Jin’s troops perished in the water, and those who knew how to swim surrendered. A poet later commemorated the battle with these lines:

Battle drums beat hard throughout the night

As Lord Guan sent a flood across their flats.

Inspired tactics forced the foe’s defeat:

Immortal now, the name the heartland feared.

Guan Yu now returned to the high ground and assembled his men to deal with the prisoners. First up was Yu Jin, who threw himself onto the ground and begged for mercy.

“How dare you oppose me?” Guan Yu asked.

“I was following orders and had no choice,” Yu Jin said. “I hope you will take pity and spare me. I promise to repay you with my life!”

Stroking his beard, Guan Yu laughed and said, “Killing you would be like killing a dog. It would just stain my blade.”

So Guan Yu did indeed spare Yu Jin’s life, at least for now. He ordered that Yu Jin be taken back to the prison in Jing Province to await his fate.

Next up was Pang De, who was the complete opposite of Yu Jin. Instead of pathetically begging for his life, Pang De glowered and refused to kneel.

“Your brother is currently in Hanzhong, and your former master Ma Chao is one of our top generals,” Guan Yu said to Pang De. “Why don’t you surrender?”

“I would rather die under your knife than surrender!” Pang De shot back angrily as he cursed nonstop.

Guan Yu, not known for his temper, was enraged and happily obliged Pang De’s deathwish, as he ordered the guards to take the prisoner outside and behead him. Pang De eagerly accepted his fate, stretching his neck out for the executioner. Moved by his foe’s unyielding courage, Guan Yu allowed Pang De the dignity of a burial.

Having dealt with the army sent to stop his siege, Guan Yu now turned his attention back to the city he was besieging. The water had not yet receded, so he got back on his ships and headed back to Fancheng, determined to sack the city.

At this point, Fancheng was surrounded by torrents of water as far as the eye could see, and the city walls were starting to buckle. The whole city worked to fortify the walls with earth and bricks, but to no avail. The officers all lost heart and went to see their commander Cao Ren.

“We’re facing an unavoidable calamity,” they told him. “We should flee on our ships tonight before the enemy arrives. Even though we’ll lose the city, at least we can save ourselves.”

Cao Ren was just about to cave in to their demands and flee, but his adviser Man Chong stopped him.

“This is a mistake,” Man Chong said. “Within the mountains, floods may come in a flash, but they never stay long. The water will recede within 10 days. Even though Guan Yu has not laid siege to the city, he has already dispatched officers to the city of Jiaxia (2,4). This shows that he is worried about us attacking him from behind and thus does not dare to advance lightly. If we abandon the city now, everything south of the Yellow River will be lost to the country. General, I hope you will protect this city to maintain our defenses.”

Those words brought Cao Ren back to his senses, and he thanked Man Chong for keeping him from losing sight of what’s important. He then rode to the top of the city walls, where he assembled the officers and made this pledge:

“I have been commanded by the King of Wei to defend this city. Anyone who dares to suggest abandoning it will be executed!”

Given no choice, his officers all pledged to defend to the last. Cao Ren was delighted and immediately went about fortifying his defenses. He stationed hundreds of archers and crossbowmen atop the city walls. His men kept up a tight watch at night, while the civilians continued to try to patch up the walls. And sure enough, within 10 days, the water receded.

While this was going on, Guan Yu was basking in his latest victory and all the glory and reputational gains that came with it. He also got a visit from his second son, Guan Xing (4), and Guan Yu sent him to see Liu Bei in Chengdu to deliver a list of accomplishments by his officers and to request promotions for them.

This matter taken care of, Guan Yu now split his army and sent half of his men to attack the city of Jiaxia (2,4), while he himself led the other half and went to lay siege on Fancheng from all four sides. The day the siege commenced, Guan Yu sat atop his horse outside the north gate. He pointed toward the city with his whip and declared, "You vermin! Surrender now!"

But as he was speaking, Cao Ren noticed that Guan Yu was wearing only a breastplate and that his arms and legs were exposed. So Cao Ren immediately ordered 500 archers and crossbowmen to fire at once. Guan Yu quickly turned around to ride away, but before he could do so, an arrow found its mark and struck him in the right arm, sending him tumbling off his horse. Cao Ren now stormed out of the city. Fortunately, Guan Ping surged forward to fight off the enemy and escorted his father back to camp.

Unfortunately, however, when Guan Yu returned to camp and had the arrowhead removed, they discovered that the arrow was poisoned, and the toxin had already worked its way into the bone. Guan Yu's right arm swelled up and turned blue, and he could not move it.

Panicked, Guan Ping and the other officers gathered and decided amongst themselves that they should fall back to their base in Jing Province for the time being while Guan Yu recuperated. But when they brought this suggestion to Guan Yu, he would not hear of it.

"I am on the verge of sacking Fancheng," he said. "Once we take Fancheng, I shall march forward with my whole army, all the way to Xuchang to exterminate Cao Cao's treasonous clan and protect

the House of Han. How can I let a minor injury ruin such a grand enterprise? How dare you damage the army's morale?!"

Rebuffed, Guan Ping and company went away in silence. So the army wasn't going anywhere, but there was still the problem of Guan Yu's arrow wound, which was not healing. So they sent out men to look around for renowned doctors.

One day, a man arrived aboard a small boat from the eastern side of the river and came to the camp. The guards brought him in to see Guan Ping. The visitor wore a square cap and loose-fitting clothes. A black satchel dangled from his arm. He introduced himself as Hua (4) Tuo (2) and said that he had heard that Guan Yu, one of the greatest heroes of the realm, had been struck by a poisoned arrow, so he had come to treat him.

"Are you the healer who tended to the Dongwu general Zhou Tai?" Guan Ping asked.

"Indeed," Hua Tuo answered.

So this is a callback to episode 87, when the general Zhou Tai suffered numerous injuries while rescuing his master Sun Quan from a battle. Zhou Tai's life was on the brink, but Hua Tuo worked his magic and saved the man's life. So Guan Ping was delighted to have this miracle healer in camp, and he and the other officers immediately brought Hua Tuo to see Guan Yu.

At this time, Guan Yu's arm was really bothering him, but he was afraid of letting on because he didn't want to hurt his men's morale. So he was just sitting in his tent and playing chess with his adviser Ma (3) Liang (2). When he heard that a doctor had come to see him, he immediately welcomed Hua Tuo in and offered him a seat and tea.

After tea was served, Hua Tuo asked to see Guan Yu's right arm. Guan Yu pulled down his robe and showed Hua Tuo the wound.

“This wound is from a crossbow,” Hua Tuo said. “The arrowhead was dipped in poison, and the poison has seeped into the bone. If we do not treat it immediately, you will lose all use off this arm.”

“What can we use to treat it?” Guan Yu asked.

“I have a remedy,” Hua Tuo said, “But it might scare you.”

When he heard this, Guan Yu laughed and said, “Even death does not scare me, so what is there to be afraid of?”

Well, alright then. Hua Tuo then laid out his proposed procedure.

“Find a quiet spot and erect a post. On the post, secure a large metal ring. I will ask you to place your arm in the ring and secure it in place with rope. Cover your head with a bedsheet. Then I will use a sharp knife to cut open your skin and flesh, all the way to the bone, scrape the poison off the bone, administer some medicine, and then stitch your wound back together. Only then will it heal. But you might be to scared.”

But Guan Yu was not scared. In fact, he just laughed and said, “That’s easy! We don’t even need a post or a ring.” He then set out wine to thank Hua Tuo.

After Guan Yu had drunken a few cups of wine, he resumed playing chess with his adviser Ma Liang. As they were doing so, he extended his right arm and signaled for Hua Tuo to begin the procedure. Now, remember, Hua Tuo suggested tying his arm to a post and covering his head with bedding before the next stop, but Guan Yu basically just shrugged and said that’s for sissies.

Now, Hua Tuo picked up a sharp blade and ordered the guards to place a large basin under Guan Yu’s arm to catch the blood.

“I’m about to begin,” Hua Tuo said. “Everyone, please remain calm.”

“Do what you need to do,” Guan Yu told him. “Do not think that I will shrink from pain like some commoner.”



Ok, if you say so. Hua Tuo began. Wielding the blade, he cut open the skin and flesh around the wound and picked his way to the bone. By this time, the bone had already started to turn blue from the poison. Hua Tuo now scraped the bone with the blade, and the grating sound of knife against bone could be heard in the tent. I'm sure some of you, like me, are wincing just listening to this description. The officers present did more than wince. Everyone who witnessed this procedure turned away as color drained from their faces.

How was Guan Yu taking all this? Well, he just kept drinking, eating, making small talk, laughing, and playing chess without showing any sign of pain. Now THAT is hardcore.

Pretty soon, the basin was filled with blood. Hua Tuo now applied some medicine and stitched up the wound. Once that was done, Guan Yu laughed and rose to his feet.

"The arm feels as flexible as ever," he said to his men. "I feel no pain at all. Master Hua Tuo, you're truly a miracle healer!"

"I have never seen such a thing in my whole career," Hua Tuo said. "Sir, you're truly a god!"

For performing and enduring this surgery, Hua Tuo and Guan Yu earned themselves a poem:

Physic and surgery -- two branches of one art --

The rare and subtle science of the mortal world.

For superhuman might, Lord Guan may take the crown,

For sacred skill in healing, Hua Tuo wins renown.

With his arm feeling much better, Guan Yu now threw a banquet to thank Hua Tuo.

"My lord," Hua Tuo told him, "Your wound has been treated, but you must take good care of it. Do not get aggravated. After 100 days, your arm will be back to normal."

Guan Yu then offered a large amount of gold to express his gratitude, but Hua Tuo steadfastly refused.

“I came to treat you because I admire your honor. I never sought payment,” he said.

And with that, Hua Tuo gave Guan Yu some more medicine and took his leave.

While Guan Yu recuperated, word of his recent capture of Yu Jin and execution of Pang De traveled through the realm and sent shockwaves through the north. When this news reached Xuchang, Cao Cao was stunned and quickly assembled his staff to discuss their next move.

“I have long known that Guan Yu possesses unrivaled valor and cunning,” Cao Cao said to his officials. “Right now, with control of the territory of Jing Province, he is like a tiger with wings. Yu Jin is his prisoner, and Pang De his vanquished foe. Our troops have been defeated time and again. If he marches all the way here, what shall we do? I am thinking about moving the capital to avoid him.”

Moving the capital, of course, was no small thing, but Cao Cao was really THAT spooked about Guan Yu. However, his adviser Sima Yi objected.

“You must not, my lord,” Sima Yi said. “Yu Jin and company were drowned rather than defeated in battle. Their loss does not affect the government’s position. Right now, there is discord between Liu Bei and Sun Quan. Sun Quan cannot be happy about Guan Yu’s victories. Your highness should send a messenger to Dongwu to make them understand the pros and cons, then order Sun Quan to secretly mobilize his army to attack Guan Yu’s rear. You can promise Sun Quan that when we’re victorious, we will give him the territory south of the river. That will take care of the threat on Fancheng.”

Another adviser chimed in and said, “Sima Yi is quite right. We should send a messenger to Dongwu, not move our capital.”

Cao Cao was swayed and decided to stay put. He did, however, lament to his officers, “Yu Jin followed me for 30 years, and yet, in the face of danger, he could not match Pang De’s loyalty. Right now, I must send a letter to Dongwu while finding a general who can match Guan Yu.”

Before he had finished that last part, an officer had already stepped forward and volunteered to go take on Guan Yu. This was the general Xu Huang. Cao Cao was delighted by his eagerness and gave him 50,000 crack troops, with the order to advance to Yangling (2,2) Slope, where he was to camp out and wait for Dongwu to make its move before advancing.

Next, let’s follow Cao Cao’s message out of Xuchang and into the Southlands. Once Sun Quan got the message, he agreed to do what Cao Cao asked and sent the messenger back with a reply. He then discussed the matter with his people.

The veteran adviser Zhang Zhao said, “I heard that Guan Yu recently captured Yu Jin and killed Pang De. The north trembles at the mention of his name, and Cao Cao even thought about moving his capital to avoid Guan Yu. Right now, Fancheng is in dire straits, so they have come to ask for our help. But once the deed is done, they might not honor the agreement.”

Before Sun Quan could reply, word came that the general Lü Meng had arrived from his post at Lükou (4,3) to report something. Sun Quan summoned him and asked what’s up.

“Guan Yu has mobilized his army to lay siege to Fancheng,” Lü Meng said. “While he is away on this expedition, we should use the opportunity to take Jing Province.”

“I was thinking about going north to take Xu Province instead; what do you think of that?” Sun Quan asked.

“Right now Cao Cao is also far from his base on the north side of the river,” Lü Meng said. “It’s true that he has no time to look east to Xu Province. Moreover that province is lightly defended and would fall easily. But the terrain favors the army rather than the navy. Even if we do capture it,

holding it would be another matter. I would take Jing Province first so that we secure the entire river. Then we can consider our next move.”

“My intent all along was to take Jing Province,” Sun Quan said. “I just wanted to sound you out. You should devise a plan quickly. I will be right behind you with my army.”

Given the green light, Lü Meng took his leave and returned to his post at Lükou (4,3). Scouts soon reported to him that Guan Yu had constructed watchtowers every few miles along the bank of the river. Oh, and by the way, the forces inside Jing Province were well prepared.

“If that’s the case, it’d be hard to take Jing Province quickly,” Lü Meng thought to himself. “I had advised Lord Sun to take Jing Province, but now what should I do?”

At a loss for ideas, Lü Meng needed to do something to stall, since Sun Quan had already told him to make his move. So Lü Meng literally called in sick. He sent someone to tell Sun Quan that he had come down with, uhh, something and couldn’t mobilize his troops yet. This news made Sun Quan very sad,

But one of his officers, Lu (4) Xun (4), went to see Sun Quan and told him, “General Lü is pretending to be sick.”

“If you’re sure of that, then you can go take a look,” Sun Quan told him.

So Lu Xun set out immediately and went to Lukou (4,3), where, lo and behold, Lü Meng looked just fine.

“I have come on behalf of our lord to see how you’re doing,” Lu Xun said.

“There was no need for his lordship to inquire after my wretched being,” Lü Meng answered.

“His lordship has entrusted you with an important mission,” Lu Xun said, getting down to business. “So why do you just sit here nursing this melancholia rather than seizing the opportunity?”

Busted, Lü Meng could only sit and look at Lu Xun in silence. Lu Xun now continued.

“I have an idea that can prevent the watchtowers along the river from sending a signal and make the forces of Jing Province surrender. How does that sound?”

Stunned, Lü Meng said, “Sir, you can see through me. I would like to hear your plan.”

Lu Xun smiled and replied, “Guan Yu thinks he has no equal. The only one who gives him any concern is you. Why don’t you take this opportunity to take a sick leave and let someone else take over command of Lukou (4,3). Let them flatter Guan Yu to make him drop his guard. He will no doubt redeploy the troops from Jing Province to attack Fancheng. When Jing Province is unprepared, we can then launch a surprise attack with but one army, and it will be ours.”

“THAT is a brilliant idea!” Lü Meng exclaimed. So he promptly wrote a letter to Sun Quan offering his resignation from his post on the excuse of his phantom illness. Lu Xun went back to see Sun Quan and laid out the plan. So Sun Quan recalled Lü Meng back to his seat of power at Jianye (4,4) to ... umm ... recover. When Lü Meng arrived, Sun Quan asked him,

“The command at Lukou (4,3) was first overseen by Zhou Yu, and then passed from Zhou Yu to Lu (3) Su (4), and then from Lu Su to you. Now, you must recommend to me a renowned talent to take your place.”

“If we send someone with a strong reputation, Guan Yu will no doubt be on guard,” Lü Meng said. “Lu Xun is a profound strategist, but his name is not well-known yet, so Guan Yu will not be wary of him. If you assign him to take my place, you will not regret it.”

Sun Quan was delighted with this recommendation and immediately appointed Lu Xun as subordinate commander and inspector of the right and sent him to oversee Lukou (4,3).

To see how Guan Yu will react to all these cloak-and-dagger maneuvers, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!