

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 96.

Last time, Guan Yu was riding high after he crushed the army that Cao Cao had sent to try to stop his attack on the city of Fancheng. But while he was concentrating on laying siege to the city, the Dongwu forces were planning a sneak attack on his home base of Jing Province.

Now, Guan Yu was on guard against Dongwu because the veteran Dongwu general Lü Meng was overseeing the forces garrisoned the key location of Lukou (4,3). To lure Guan Yu into complacency, Dongwu replaced Lü Meng with the crafty but relatively unknown Lu (4) Xun (4). As soon as Lu Xun took over command of the forces at Lukou (4,3), he sent an envoy to pay his respects to Guan Yu.

At this moment, Guan Yu was still recovering from an arrow wound, so his army was not on the move yet. One day, he got word that Lü Meng was deathly ill and that Sun Quan had appointed Lu Xun to take his place, and that an envoy from Lu Xun was there to see him.

Guan Yu summoned the envoy, pointed at him, and said, “Your lord Sun Quan is foolish to appoint a boy as general,” which yeah, is not really the most diplomatic thing to say.

The envoy kneeled and replied, “General Lu (4) sent me to deliver a letter and gifts to congratulate you and to ensure good relations between us. We hope you will accept them.”

Guan Yu perused the letter and found it filled with self-deprecation and reverence. Guan Yu looked up and laughed, and then he told his men to accept the gifts and sent the envoy on his way. The envoy reported back to Lu Xun that Guan Yu was delighted and appeared to no longer have any concerns about Dongwu.

Now it was Lu Xun’s turn to be delighted. He dispatched spies, who reported back that Guan Yu, as expected, had redeployed most of the troops that were guarding Jing Province and moved them to Fancheng to help with the siege on that city. As soon as his arrow wound healed, he was going to attack Fancheng. Lu Xun immediately relayed this intel to Sun Quan, who talked it over with Lü Meng.

“Guan Yu has redeployed the troops of Jing Province to attack Fancheng; we can now devise a plan to take Jing Province,” Sun Quan said. “What do you think about leading a large army with my brother Sun Jiao (3) for this mission?”

“My lord,” Lü Meng said, “if you want to send me, then send me alone. If you want to send your brother, then send him alone. Do you not know that back when Zhou Yu and Cheng Pu were co-commanders, even though Zhou Yu had the final say on everything, Cheng Pu was not happy because he was a veteran officer and yet found himself beneath Zhou Yu. It was only later when he witnessed Zhou Yu’s talent that he came to respect him. My talents are not the equal of Zhou Yu, and your brother is closer to you than Cheng Pu was. I worry that the two of us would not be able to work together.”

Hearing this, Sun Quan came to his senses and appointed Lü Meng and Lü Meng alone as the grand commander and put him in charge of all the troops of the Southlands. So yeah, that was a pretty nifty piece of politicking by Lü Meng. Sun Quan’s brother Sun Jiao (3) was relegated to the rear, overseeing the provisions.

Lü Meng took his leave and departed with 30,000 troops aboard 80-some fast ships. The soldiers manning the ships were all disguised as merchants and wore civilian clothing, while the crack troops laid hidden within the hulls. Lü Meng brought seven top generals with him, while Sun Quan and the other officers would follow to provide backup. At the same time, they also sent a letter to Cao Cao, asking him to commence the attack on Guan Yu’s rear. Another letter also went to Lu Xun, telling him that the game was afoot.

Now, with all the pieces in place, Lü Meng sent a group of soldiers disguised in civilian clothing on a fast ship to the Xunyang (2,2) River, where Guan Yu’s watchtowers dotted the bank. This ship sailed

to the north bank, which was Guan Yu's side of the river. There, the guards on the nearest watchtower stopped them and asked who they were.

"We are merchants," the Dongwu soldiers replied. "We ran into strong winds on the river, so we've come here to wait it out."

Along with this explanation, the Dongwu soldiers also sent along some presents slash bribes to the guards, and the guards believed their story and allowed them to dock their ship by the bank.

That night, around 9 o'clock, the crack troops hiding inside the hull of the Dongwu vessel stormed out and took the guards on the watchtower prisoner. They then sent a silent signal to their comrades. The other 80-some ships now made their move, and the troops on each of those ships attacked and captured all the watchtowers, not allowing a single guard to escape.

With this line of defense silently compromised, nothing stood between the Dongwu fleet and Jing Province, so they advanced without being detected. As they approached Jing Province, Lü Meng used his powers of persuasion, which included comforting words and handsome bribes, to convince the captives from the watchtowers to switch sides.

In the middle of the night, Lü Meng and company arrived outside Jing Province. The captives from the watchtowers led the way and called out to the guards inside to open the gates. The guards looked and recognized that these were their own people, so they unsuspectingly opened the gates.

But as soon as the gates swung open, a loud cry rose up from the troops outside, and they all stormed in and started a fire just inside the gates as a signal. Lü Meng and the Dongwu troops now poured into the city, capturing it without breaking a sweat. Just like that, Jing Province, Guan Yu's home base, a key piece of Liu Bei's plans to reunify the empire, and the source of so much conflict between Liu Bei and Sun Quan over the years, belonged to Dongwu.

Upon taking control of the city, Lü Meng set about winning over the hearts of the people inside. He sent out word to his troops that anyone who dared to kill a single civilian or take a single item from the civilians would be dealt with harshly. He kept the old officials in their posts. He also moved Guan Yu's family to a safe residence, where they were not to be bothered by anyone. All this done, Lü Meng sent the good news to Sun Quan.

One day, it was pouring down rain as Lü Meng rode around with a few men, inspecting the city. He noticed one of his soldiers wearing a civilian cape and straw hat over his armor. Lü Meng promptly had the man seized and questioned about why he had taken civilian property. It turns out that this guy was from Lü Meng's hometown, but that was not going to do him any good in this case.

"You and I may be from the same hometown," Lü Meng said, "but I have already sent out my decree, and you violated that order. You must be punished according to military law."

"But I was worried about the rain soaking my armor, which is government property," the man said as he sobbed. "That's why I used the cape and hat to cover it. It wasn't for myself. I hope you will spare me for the sake of our common roots."

"I understand that you were trying to protect government property, but you still should not have taken something from the civilians," Lü Meng replied, and that was that. Lü Meng then ordered his men to behead the offender and hang his head on public display, after which Lü Meng collected his remains and gave him a teary burial. Word of this spread quickly, and everybody was put on notice that Lü Meng meant business.

Within a day, Sun Quan arrived, and Lü Meng welcomed him into his new conquest. Sun Quan heaped lavish praise on Lü Meng and his troops, and then kept Pan (1) Jun (4), the guy that Guan Yu had left in charge of the city, in his old post as the administrator of the city. He also freed the Wei

general Yu (1) Jin (4), who was rotting in prison inside the city after his capture by Guan Yu, and sent him back to Cao Cao as a gesture of goodwill. And of course there were the usual rounds of making nice with the civilians and the army, and the requisite feasting to celebrate.

During the banquet, Sun Quan asked Lü Meng, “Jing Province is ours now, but how should we go about reclaiming the cities of Gongan (1,1) and Nanzheng (2,4)?”

Before he had finished his question, the adviser Yu (2) Fan (1) spoke up.

“There is no need to even fire an arrow,” he said. “With my words alone, I can convince Fushi (4,4) Ren (2), the defender of Gongan, to surrender.”

“How do you plan to do that?” Sun Quan asked.

“I have been good friends with Fushi (4,4) Ren (2) since our childhood,” Yu (2) Fan (1) answered. “I just need to go explain the pros and cons to him, and he will no doubt surrender.”

Delighted, Sun Quan gave Yu (2) Fan (1) 500 men and sent him to Gongan.

Inside the city of Gongan, the commanding officer Fu Shiren got word that Jing Province had been lost, and he immediately ordered that the city’s gates be shut and its defenses fortified. When Yu Fan arrived and saw this, he wrapped a note around an arrow and fired it into the city. The guards inside brought the the letter to Fu Shiren. The letter told Fu Shiren that he should surrender.

Now, remember what happened to Fu Shiren a couple episodes back. He and the officer Mi (2) Fang (1) were originally supposed to lead Guan Yu’s vanguard for the campaign against Cao Cao’s holdings in the region. But the night before they set out, their carelessness allowed a fire to get out of hand inside their camp, which led to lots of property damage and a few dead soldiers. Guan Yu was incensed and initially wanted to execute the two, but then was talked out of it. Instead, Guan Yu gave them a beating, stripped them of their assignment, and relegated them to overseeing the defense of the cities of Gongan and Nanzheng.

So of course, Fu Shiren had not forgotten about that disgrace and Guan Yu's enmity toward him. That was all the convincing he needed to throw open the gates and welcome Yu Fan (1). The two old friends spent some time catching up, and Yu Fan told Fu Shiren all about how generous and respectful Sun Quan was toward men of talent. Fu Shiren liked what he heard, so he grabbed his seal of command and accompanied Yu Fan back to Jing Province to offer his surrender.

Sun Quan was delighted and ordered Fu Shiren to return to Gong'an to resume his old post. Lü Meng, however, begged to differ. He told Sun Quan in private, "We have not captured Guan Yu yet. If we allow Fu Shiren to remain at Gong'an, he will turn on us eventually. Why don't we send him to Nanzheng instead to have him convince his comrade Mi Fang to surrender as well?"

So Sun Quan tasked Fu Shiren with convincing Mi Fang to surrender, promising a big reward should he succeed. So Fu Shiren rode off with a dozen men and headed to Nanzheng. Inside Nanzheng, Mi Fang was presently in a panic over what to do now that Jing Province was lost. When he got word that Fu Shiren was there to see him, he welcomed his comrade in and asked what's up.

"It's not that I am disloyal," Fu Shiren began, "but we're in dire straits and cannot hold out. I have surrendered to Dongwu. Why don't you do the same?"

"But I have received great kindness from the King of Hanzhong; how can I turn my back on him?" Mi Fang said. And I should pause here to remind you that Mi Fang's sister was Liu Bei's wife and the mother of Liu Bei's only son. She was the one who heroically threw herself down a well so that Zhao Yun would be unburdened as he transported her son through Cao Cao's massive army. So Mi Fang was Liu Bei's brother-in-law, which naturally gave him pause about this surrender business.

"When Guan Yu departed, he held us in contempt," Fu Shiren told Mi Fang. "If he returns in triumph, he would not spare us. Think about it."

“But my brother and I have long served the King of Hanzhong. How can I turn against him just like that?”

Just as Mi Fang was going back and forth, his men reported that a messenger from Guan Yu had arrived. Now, remember that Guan Yu still had no idea what was happening behind his back, so this messenger wasn't here about the loss of Jing Province. Instead, he told Mi Fang, “General Guan's army is running low on provisions, so he sent me here and to Gong'an to ask for resupply. He wants you two to deliver the provisions right away. If you delay, you would be executed.”

This order left Mi Fang greatly alarmed. “But Jing Province has been taken by Dongwu,” he said to Fu Shiren. “How can the provisions get through?”

“No more second thoughts!” Fu Shiren shouted. In that moment, he pulled out his sword and cut down the messenger from Guan Yu. Well, I guess they have reached the point of no return.

“Why did you do that?!” a stunned Mi Fang said.

“Guan Yu obviously wants us dead; how can we just sit and wait for our fate?” Fu Shiren answered. “If you don't surrender to Dongwu now, you WILL die at Guan Yu's hand.”

And as if the dead messenger wasn't enough, word came just then that Lü Meng had arrived outside the city with an army. Caught between a rock and a harder rock, Mi Fang said the heck with this and accompanied Fu Shiren out of the city to surrender. A delighted Lü Meng brought them both to see Sun Quan, and Sun Quan rewarded them handsomely before turning his attention to calming the civilians and rewarding the army.

While all this was going on, the messenger that Dongwu sent to Cao Cao arrived in the capital Xuchang and found Cao Cao in the middle of a meeting with his advisers, talking about Jing Province. Cao Cao summoned the messenger in and read the letter, which said that Dongwu was mobilizing its troops to stage a sneak attack on Jing Province and asked Cao Cao to mount a joint attack on Guan Yu.

One of Cao Cao's advisers, Dong (3) Zhao (1), said, "Right now Fancheng is under siege and is desperately awaiting relief. We should shoot an arrow with a letter into the city to put their minds at ease. Then we let Guan Yu know that Dongwu is going to attack Jing Province. He will no doubt retreat out of fear of losing Jing Province. Then we can order the general Xu Huang to pursue. That will ensure a total victory."

Cao Cao agreed with this thinking, so he sent an order to Xu Huang to attack Guan Yu, while he himself led a large army and headed to Yangling (2,2) Slope to come to the rescue of his kinsman Cao Ren, who was presently holed up inside Fancheng, trying to fend off Guan Yu's siege.

The order to attack reached Xu Huang, and he also got word that Guan Yu's officers Guan Ping and Liao Hua were garrisoned at two nearby cities, which were linked by 12 connected camps. So Xu Huang ordered two of his lieutenants to pretend to be him by carrying his banner and go to fight Guan Ping, while Xu Huang himself led 500 crack troops to mount a sneak attack on Guan Ping's rear.

When Guan Ping heard that Xu Huang was approaching, he led his troops out to face the enemy. Once they lined up, Xu Huang's two lieutenants came out to fight Guan Ping, but both quickly turned and fled. Guan Ping gave chase for about 7 or 8 miles, but suddenly, word came that the city he was defending was on fire. Realizing he had fallen for a ruse, Guan Ping quickly turned around to try to save the city, but his path was cut off by the real Xu Huang.

"Guan Ping, my worthy nephew, have you no fear of death?" Xu Huang said, and just to note, he's calling Guan Ping "nephew" here because Xu Huang used to be tight with Guan Yu when Guan Yu was in Cao Cao's service, so this is sort of a term of endearment rather than an actual familial relationship.

"Dongwu has already taken Jing Province," Xu Huang continued. "How dare you try to show off here?"

Guan Ping was enraged at this taunt, and he made straight for Xu Huang. After just a few bouts, Xu Huang's army roared as the fire inside the city turned into a rollicking blaze. Guan Ping did not dare



to linger, so he fought his way out and headed toward his comrade Liao Hua's base. When he arrived, Liao Hua greeted him and said, "People are saying that Lü Meng has taken Jing Province. Our soldiers are panicked. What should we do?"

"This must be a lie," Guan Ping said. "Any soldier who dares to repeat it shall be executed."

Just then, an urgent message arrived that Xu Huang was attacking the first camp to the north.

"If the first camp is lost, the other camps will be threatened," Guan Ping said. "This location is on the Mian (3) River, and the bastards would not dare to come here. Let's go save the first camp."

So Liao Hua instructed his subordinates, "You guys stay here and defend the camp. If the enemy comes here, start a fire as signal."

"Our camp is well fortified," his subordinates said. "Not even a bird can fly in here, much less the enemy!"

Thus assured, Guan Ping and Liao Hua mobilized their best troops and hurried toward the first camp. From a distance, Guan Ping noticed that the Wei troops were garrisoned atop a small hill.

"Xu Huang has stationed his troops at a bad location," Guan Ping said to Liao Hua. "Let's raid their camp tonight."

"General, you can take half of our men for the raid. I will stay and carefully guard our camp," Liao Hua said.

So that night, Guan Ping led a detachment of troops and stormed into Xu Huang's camp, but there was not a single soul inside the camp. Recognizing a trap, Guan Ping tried to retreat, but by now, Xu Huang's two lieutenants had already sprung out of hiding with troops and attacked Guan Ping from two sides. Guan Ping was routed and fled back to his camp, with the Wei army in hot pursuit. Soon,

the Wei troops had surrounded Guan Ping and Liao Hua's camp, and the two realized they couldn't hold their position, so they abandoned the first camp and retreated back toward their base.

But well before they reached the base, they could see flames shooting up from inside the camp. When they rushed to the camp, they saw that it was already occupied by enemy banners. So they now quickly turned and fled along the main road toward Fancheng, but soon were cut off by another army. This one was led by none other than Xu Huang. Guan Ping and Liao Hua put up a dogged fight and managed to slip away and fled back to Guan Yu's main camp.

When they saw Guan Yu, they told him, "Xu Huang has taken our cities. Cao Cao is coming with a large force from three directions to save Fancheng. Also, there's much talk that Jing Province has fallen to Lü Meng."

"Lies!" Guan Yu growled. "They're trying to make us panic! Lü Meng is on his deathbed, and he was replaced by that boy Lu Xun. There's no need for concern."

Before Guan Yu had finished speaking, his men reported that Xu Huang had arrived with his pursuing troops. Guan Yu ordered that his horse be prepared for battle.

"But father, your wound has not healed yet," Guan Ping said. "You must not fight."

"Xu Huang and I go way back," Guan Yu said. "I know his skills well. If he refuses to fall back, then I will kill him as a warning to the other enemy officers."

So Guan Yu donned his armor, grabbed his saber, hopped on his horse, and led his men out. All the soldiers on the enemy's side were intimidated at the sight of the famed Lord of the Beautiful Beard. Reining in his horse, Guan Yu asked, "Where is General Xu?"

The Wei army's banners parted, and Xu Huang rode out to the front of the lines, where he offered a deep bow from his horse and said, "Sir, since we have parted, the years have flown by. Who would have thought that your hair and beard would have turned so gray already? I will never forget your

tutelage during our years together. Right now, your name send shockwaves through the realm. It makes an old friend sigh in admiration. Fortune has granted us this meeting, and my long-endured yearning is appeased.”

“Our friendship is stronger than most,” Guan Yu replied. “So why did you pursue my son so hard?”

And now, Xu Huang turned to his officers and shouted, “Whoever can bring me the head of Guan Yu will be handsomely rewarded!”

“My friend, why such words?!” a surprised Guan Yu asked.

“Today, I am here on state business,” Xu Huang replied. “I dare not neglect state affairs for personal friendships.”

And with that, Xu Huang wielded his battle axe and made for Guan Yu. Guan Yu was pretty ticked off at this turn of events, so he rode forth to meet Xu Huang. After the two of them traded blows for 80-some bouts, for the first time in the novel, Guan Yu began to falter in battle. His right arm, still recovering from the arrow wound, was not back to back strength. Guan Ping saw this and quickly rang the gong to signal retreat.

Guan Yu turned around and quit the fight. He had barely returned to camp when suddenly, loud cries rose up from all around. This was Cao Ren, the commander who had been holed up inside Fancheng. He had received word that help was on the way, so he now led his troops and stormed out of the city to attack. So Cao Ren and Xu Huang now attacked Guan Yu from front and back, and Guan Yu’s troops fell into disarray.

Guan Yu and his officers fled to the head of the Xiang (1) River. With the enemy in hot pursuit, Guan Yu ordered his men to cross the river and make for the city of Xiangyang. But just then, a soldier arrived with an urgent message: Jing Province had fallen to Lü Meng, and Guan Yu’s whole family was now in the enemy’s hands.

Shocked by this news, Guan Yu no longer dared to go to Xiangyang, so he directed his troops toward the city of Gong'an (1,1) instead. But soon, another message arrived: Fu Shiren, the defender of Gong'an, had surrendered to Dongwu.

Guan Yu was incensed, but the bad news kept coming. Momentarily, the guys sent out to get provisions reported back and said that Fu Shiren had gone to the city of Nanzheng, where he killed Guan Yu's messenger and convinced the officer Mi Fang to surrender to Dongwu as well.

This was a stunning turn of events for Guan Yu. One day, he was riding high and seemed on the verge of sacking Fancheng. The next day, everything had fallen apart. Not only had he been defeated in battle, he had lost Jing Province, which was critical to Liu Bei's plans for eventual unification of the empire. The anger over being defeated and betrayed overwhelmed Guan Yu. His arrow wound burst open, and he passed out.

When his men brought him back around, Guan Yu said to the officer Wang (2) Fu (3), "I regret not listening to your advice, and now it is just as you had predicted!"

Guan Yu then asked, "Why did the watchtowers along the river not raise a signal?"

The scout told him, "Lü Meng disguised his navy as merchants and crossed the river. They hid their best troops inside the hulls of their ships and surprised the guards on the watchtowers. That's why there was no signal."

Stamping his foot, Guan Yu lamented, "I have fallen for that scoundrel's trick! How can I face my brother now?!"

To see how Guan Yu will face Liu Bei, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!