

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 97.

Before we pick up where we left off, I have a quick correction. In the last episode, I mispronounced the name of one of the cities under Guan Yu's command that surrendered to Sun Quan. It's the city of Nanjun (2,4), not Nanzheng (2,4) as I had pronounced it. I didn't catch the mistake until after I recorded the whole episode, and it was a small enough mistake that I wasn't going to go back and re-record the whole thing. So my apologies for that slip-up.

Anyway, last time, while Guan Yu was busy laying siege to Fancheng, the forces of Dongwu mounted a sneak attack and took over his home base of Jing Province, along with several of the other key cities in the region. Cao Cao then directed an attack that repelled Guan Yu and broke his siege on Fancheng. Defeated and now stranded in hostile territory with no home to go back to, Guan Yu was filled with immense regret and impotent rage, and at a loss for what to do next.

His provisions officer, Zhao (4) Lei (4), said, "With our situations so dire, we should send someone to our capital Chengdu to ask for help while we take the land route to Jing Province to retake the city."

Guan Yu agreed and sent the advisers Ma Liang and Yi Ji to race west toward Chengdu to ask Liu Bei to send help. Meanwhile, he led his army toward Jing Province, with him leading the way while his son Guan Ping and the officer Liao Hua brought up the rear.

Meanwhile, having broken the siege on Fancheng, the general Cao Ren now led his officers to see Cao Cao, whereupon Cao Ren kneeled, wept, and begged to be punished for his failings.

"This was heaven's will, not your fault," Cao Cao told his kinsman. He then rewarded his troops and personally went to inspect Guan Yu's old base.

“The enemy’s location was well barricaded,” Cao Cao said to his officers. “Yet General Xu Huang was able to breach it and achieve total victory. I have been leading troops for 30-some years, and even I have never dared to do such a thing. General Xu truly excels in tactics and courage!”

When Cao Cao returned to camp, Xu Huang came to see him, and CAo Cao personally went out to welcome him. There, he saw Xu Huang’s troops marching in perfect order. Thoroughly impressed, Cao Cao heaped more praise on Xu Huang, along with the nifty title of the General who Pacifies the South. He then left an officer to oversee the city of Xiangyang to check Guan Yu, while Cao Cao himself garrisoned his troops at the location of Mobei (2,1) to await word of the pacification of Jing Province.

Now, let’s go back and check in on Guan Yu. He was presently stuck on the road to Jing Province, with enemies in front and behind, leaving him with no way to advance or retreat. He asked the officer Zhao (4) Lei (4), “Right now, we have Dongwu troops in front of us and Wei troops behind us. What shall we do if relief does not arrive?”

“The Dongwu general Lü Meng used to exchange frequent communications with you, pledging to ally with us to jointly take on the traitor Cao Cao,” Zhao Lei said. “And yet now he has helped Cao Cao to attack us. That is breaking his pledge. Sir, you should temporarily garrison the army here and send a letter to admonish Lü Meng and see what he says.”

Well, I can just imagine tons of hard eye-rolls among Guan Yu’s men at that suggestion, but Guan Yu was pretty desperate, so he did as Zhao Lei suggested and sent a messenger to deliver the letter to Jing Province.

Back at Jing Province, Lü Meng was continuing his efforts to win hearts and minds. He had sent out a decree that his soldiers were not to disturb the families of any soldiers in the army that left with Guan Yu on his campaign. Furthermore, those families were given monthly supplies of grain and

medical attention when they needed it. This, as you can imagine, made those families very grateful to Lü Meng, and they continued their daily lives in peace.

When Guan Yu's messenger arrived, Lü Meng welcomed him into the city and treated him like a guest. After reading the letter, Lü Meng told the messenger, "When I forged a friendship with General Guan, that was personal. Right now, I am following orders and have no choice in the matter. Please relay my views to General Guan as amicably as you can."

Then, Lü Meng held a banquet for the messenger before sending him to the guest house. While the messenger was there, he got visits from the families of many soldiers in Guan Yu's army, all asking him to either deliver a letter or a verbal message to let their loved ones know that they were ok, living in peace, and not lacking anything.

When the messenger took his leave, Lü Meng personally saw him out of the city. When the messenger returned to Guan Yu, he relayed what Lü Meng had said and added, "Your lordship's family and the other officers' families are all ok and not lacking for anything."

But instead of being relieved that his family was ok, Guan Yu was enraged.

"This is a scheme by that bastard!" he said. "Even if I die, I will kill him for vengeance!"

He then dismissed the messenger, but soon all the other officers went to see the guy to ask about their own families. He told them that hey your families are doing fine and Lü Meng is treating them well, and oh here's a letter from your family. Well, this was exactly what Lü Meng wanted, as many of Guan Yu's officers were both relieved to hear that their families were safe and now completely uninterested in keeping up the fight.

Guan Yu now resumed his march toward Jing Province in an effort to retake it. But along the way, more and more soldiers began to defect and flee back to Jing Province, which just made Guan Yu brood even more.

As he advanced, he was suddenly greeted with loud cries and an army cutting off his path. This army was led by the Dongwu general Jiang (3) Yin (1), who shouted, "General Guan, why not surrender now?!"

"I am a general of the Han! How can I surrender to traitors?!" Guan Yu said angrily as he made straight for Jiang (3) Yin (1).

After just three bouts, Jiang Yin turned and fled, and Guan Yu gave chase for about 7 miles when he stumbled into an ambush. Loud cries rose up from a canyon. From the left came troops led by the Dongwu general Han (2) Dang (1), while from the right came an army led by Zhou (1) Tai (4). Meanwhile, Jiang Yin turned around to join the attack.

Faced with an attack on three fronts, Guan Yu and his men quickly fell back. They had not gone far when they saw a group of people atop a nearby hill, where they had erected a giant white banner that read, "The People of Jing Province." These people were calling out to all the Jing Province natives in Guan Yu's ranks, encouraging them to abandon a sinking ship and surrender. Guan Yu was enraged and wanted to attack the hill, but two more detachments of enemy troops appeared, led by the generals Ding (1) Feng (4) and Xu (2) Sheng (4). Meanwhile, the other three Dongwu battalions were catching up from behind.

Amid earth-shattering cries and horns, the Dongwu troops surrounded Guan Yu. Guan Yu's troops gradually thinned as Guan Yu fought until dusk. By now, everywhere Guan Yu looked, soldiers from Jing Province were standing on hilltops, calling out to their relatives in Guan Yu's army, and many of those calls were answered by Guan Yu's men deserting in droves. Guan Yu tried to order his men to hold their ground, but to no avail, and pretty soon, he found himself left with only 300-some men.

The battle raged on until around midnight when suddenly, cries of battle could be heard coming from the east. Soon, two battalions, led by Guan Yu's officers Guan Ping and Liao Hua, breached the enemy lines and rescued Guan Yu.

“Our troops are in a panic,” Guan Ping said. “We must find a city to hole up in temporarily while we wait for help. The city of Maicheng (4,2) may be small, but it’s enough to hold us.”

Guan Yu consented and led his tattered army toward the tiny outpost. There, he dispatched soldiers to maintain a tight watch on the four gates while he discussed the situation with his staff.

“We are close to the city of Shangyong (4,1),” the officer Zhao Lei said. “It’s being defended by the officers Liu Feng and Meng Da. We should send someone to ask them for help. If we can get that army to help us hold out until a large relief force arrives from the west, our men’s morale will be restored.”

But there was just one problem. While they were talking about this, Dongwu’s troops had arrived and surrounded the city. The officer Liao Hua volunteered to fight through the enemy ranks to go find help, and Guan Ping offered to escort him through. So Guan Yu wrote a letter, which Liao Hua hid under his clothes. He then ate a full meal before riding out of the city with Guan Ping. The Dongwu general Ding Feng blocked their way, but Guan Ping put up valiant effort and drove him off, allowing Liao Hua to make it out. Once he was through, Liao Hua headed straight for the city of Shangyong (4,1), while Guan Ping returned to Maicheng (4,2).

As we mentioned earlier, the city of Shangyong (4,1) was being defended by the officers Liu Feng and Meng Da. Liu Feng was Liu Bei’s adopted son, and Meng Da was one of the Riverlands officials who concocted the original scheme to help Liu Bei take over the territory. They had heard about Guan Yu’s setbacks and were just talking about it when Liao Hua arrived asking for help.

“General Guan suffered a defeat and is trapped inside Maicheng,” Liao Hua said. “The situation is dire, and the relief force from Shu won’t make it in time. So he ordered me to fight through the enemy lines to come ask you for help. I hope you will immediately mobilize your troops. If you delay, General Guan will be lost!”

“Please take a quick rest and allow us to devise a plan,” Liu Feng told Liao Hua.

So Liao Hua went off to the guest house to rest and wait for the relief force to head out. But Liu Feng and Meng Da had other plans.

“My uncle is trapped; what shall we do?” Liu Feng asked Meng Da.

“Dongwu’s troops are ferocious, and all of Jing Province already belongs to them,” Meng Da said. “The only place left is Maicheng, and it’s tiny. I’ve also heard that Cao Cao is personally leading some 500,000 troops in the area. We’re but a small mountain outpost. How can we take on two strong foes? We must not move rashly.”

“I understand,” Liu Feng said. “But General Guan is my uncle after all; I cannot just sit by and do nothing.”

But Meng Da laughed and said, “General, you might think of Guan Yu was your uncle, but I’m not sure if he thinks of you as his nephew. I’ve heard that when his highness first adopted you, General Guan was not happy about it. Later, when his highness assumed his throne and was deliberating whom to name as his heir, he asked Zhuge Liang. Zhuge Liang told him that this was a family matter and that he should consult Guan Yu and Zhang Fei. When his highness sent a messenger to Jing Province to consult with General Guan, he said that a foster son could not be rightfully named heir. He also advised his highness to station you to this remote location to mitigate future concerns. Everyone knows about this. Are you saying you don’t? Why would you now take such risks for this so-called uncle?”

“You are right, but how should I answer his request?” Liu Feng asked.

“Just say that we’ve just recently took over administration of this outpost and that the locals’ loyalty is still not assured. So we dare not send any troops, lest we lose the town.”

So Liu Feng did as Meng Da suggested. The next day, he told Liao Hua, “We’ve just taken over this outpost, so we cannot send any troops to help you.”

Stunned, Liao Hua kowtowed and said, "In that case, General Guan is done for!"

Meng Da now chimed in and said, "Even if we go, it would be like trying to put out a cartload of burning firewood with a cup of water. General, you should hurry back and wait for help from Shu."

Liao Hua begged and begged, but to no avail as Liu Feng and Meng Da waived their sleeves and left. Realizing that there was no hope here, Liao Hua cursed the two as he left the town and headed toward Chengdu to ask Liu Bei for help.

Inside Maicheng (4,2), Guan Yu was desperately waiting for relief from Shangyong (4,1), but he was disappointed. At this point, he only had about 500 men with him, and the majority were wounded. To make matters worse, there was no food in the outpost.

One day, a man approached the outpost and asked the guards to hold their arrows, saying that he was there to talk to Guan Yu. Guan Yu told the men let him in. This turned out to be Zhuge Jin (3), who was Zhuge Liang's older brother and an adviser for Sun Quan.

After the formalities, Zhuge Jin said, "General, I have come on my master's orders to speak to you. As the old saying goes, 'He who recognizes the circumstances is the hero.' Right now, all your former territory belongs to someone else. All you have is this one outpost, with no food and no help coming. You're in dire straits. You should listen to me and submit to my master. You would be able to resume your post and preserve your family. I hope you will think it over carefully."

Guan Yu, however, said sternly, "I am but a simple soldier. My lord has treated me as a brother; how can I turn my back on him and surrender to an enemy? If the city falls, then I will die. That is all. Jade may shatter, but will never change its whiteness. Bamboo may burn, but its joints will always remain. A man may die, but his name will live on through history. Say no more, and leave right now. I will fight Sun Quan to the death!"

“But my lord wishes to become allies,” Zhuge Jin pressed. “He only wants to join together to defeat Cao Cao and restore the House of Han, nothing else. Why are you so stubborn?”

Before Zhuge Jin could finish speaking, Guan Ping pulled out his sword and stepped forward to cut him down, but Guan Yu checked his son.

“His brother is serving your uncle,” Guan Yu told his son. “If you kill him, it would damage their brotherly bond.”

And with that, Guan Yu ordered his men to kick Zhuge Jin out of the city. Humiliated, Zhuge Jin rode back to see Sun Quan and told him that Guan Yu’s steely conviction could not be swayed.

“What a loyal man!” Sun Quan said in admiration. “So what should we do now?”

The adviser Lü Fan (4) suggested a little divination to plot their next course of action. They did so, and the results apparently suggested that Guan Yu would attempt to make a break for it. Sun Quan now asked the general Lü Meng how they should proceed.

“This forecast fits my plan,” Lü Meng said with a smile. “Even if Guan Yu has wings, he will not escape my net. He has but a few men, so I expect he will not try to flee along the main road. He will instead try to take the backroads. We can send the general Zhu Yan (2) to lead 5,000 crack troops and lie in wait a few miles north of the city. When Guan Yu arrives, instead of fighting him head on, we should just pursue him after he passes. His men will not be in the mood to fight, so they will run toward Linju (2,3). We can have the general Pan (1) Zhang (1) and 500 men hide along the backroads there, and Guan Yu will be captured for sure. Right now, let’s attack all the gates except the north gate, so that Guan Yu would flee in that direction.”

That sounded like a good plan, but Sun Quan first asked for another divination, and the outcome was favorable. Convinced that heaven was on his side, Sun Quan agreed to the plan and deployed the troops as Lü Meng suggested.



Inside Maicheng, Guan Yu was left with just 300-some men and no food. That night, the Dongwu troops were calling to his soldiers by name, and many more defected. With no relief force in sight, Guan Yu was all out of ideas as he went to talk to the officer Wang (2) Fu (3).

"I regret ignoring your advice before," Guan Yu said. "We're in dire straits now. What should we do?"

Wang Fu wept and said, "With things as they are, even the great strategist Jiang (1) Ziya (3,2) would be out of ideas!"

Their comrade Zhao Lei said, "No one is coming from Shangyong (4,1) because Liu Feng and Meng Da refuse to move. How about we abandon this lone city and make a run for the Riverlands. Then we can return with an army and reclaim what we've lost?"

"That is my thought as well," Guan Yu said. He then observed the enemy from atop the city wall and noticed that there weren't many troops outside the north gate. He then asked the city's civilians what laid to the north. They told him that it was mountainous backroads that led into the Riverlands.

"We will take that road tonight," Guan Yu decided.

"But there might be an ambush along the backroads," Wang Fu said. "We should take the main road."

"Even if there is an ambush, what need do I have for fear?" said Guan Yu, confident even in this dire hour. He then ordered the troops to get ready to head out.

Wang Fu now told Guan, with tears streaming down, "My lord, please be careful! I will remain with the 100-some men under my command and hold this city to the last. Even if the city should fall, I will never surrender. I hope you will return soon with a relief force."

Everybody realized what Wang Fu was doing. He was basically volunteering to stay for a suicide mission so as to keep the enemy partly at bay to help Guan Yu make his escape. Guan Yu bid him a

teary farewell and ordered his officer Zhou Cang to stay as well to help Wang Fu hold the city. Now remember that this Zhou Cang had been loyally following Guan Yu everywhere for years, never leaving his side. But now, he, too, must bid goodbye to his master.

Guan Yu now led his son Guan Ping, the officer Zhao Lei, and 200-some soldiers out the north gate, with Guan Yu leading the way. Shortly after 7 o'clock that night, they had traveled for a few miles when suddenly, loud cries and the banging of drums and gongs rang out from the hills. An army arrived, led by the Dongwu general Zhu Yan. Wielding a spear, Zhu Yan shouted, "General Guan, stop! Surrender now and you may yet live!"

Guan Yu was in no mood to talk, and he rode straight for Zhu Yan. Zhu Yan turned and ran, and Guan Yu gave chase. But then a drum sounded, and Dongwu troops sprang out from everywhere. Guan Yu did not dare to linger, so he hurriedly fled toward Linju (2,3). Zhu Yan gave chase, and Guan Yu's already-small band of soldiers gradually diminished even more. After another mile or so, his path was blocked by troops led by the Dongwu general Pan Zhang. After just three bouts, Pan Zhang turned and ran, but Guan Yu did not dare to fight on. Instead, he hurried toward the mountain paths.

Soon, Guan Ping caught up to him and told him that their comrade Zhao Lei had perished in the fight. Deeply saddened by the loss of Zhao Lei, Guan Yu now ordered Guan Ping to bring up the rear while Guan Yu himself led the way. By now, they had only a dozen or so men left as they traveled down a path enclosed on both sides by the mountain and surrounded by tall grass and thick woods.

Around 3 a.m., they were startled by another loud cry as another ambush was sprung. From both sides Dongwu troops leaped out, and they attacked with long hooks, tripping up Guan Yu's horse. Guan Yu tumbled to the ground and was captured by one of Pan Zhang's lieutenants, an officer named Ma (3) Zhong (1). When Guan Ping heard that his father had been captured, he hurried forward to try to save him, but from behind came Pan Zhang and Zhu Yan with more troops. Guan

Ping was isolated and surrounded. He put up a dogged fight, but in the end, exhaustion caught up to him, and he, too, was captured.

By dawn, word had reached Sun Quan that Guan Yu and his son had been captured alive. Sun Quan was delighted and immediately assembled his staff in his tent. Momentarily, the officer Ma Zhong (1) brought Guan Yu in.

“General, I have long admired you and wanted to join our houses by marriage,” Sun Quan said. “Why did you spurn me? And how did you come to be my prisoner today? Will you acknowledge at last that I have beaten you?”

“You little green-eyed punk! You purple-bearded rat!” Guan Yu shouted sternly. “I swore an oath with the imperial uncle in the peach orchard to support the house of Han. Why would I ever consider having a traitor like you as a relative?! Today, I fell for your dirty trick, so I will die. That’s all there is to it!”

Sun Quan, though, wasn’t quite ready to go that far. He turned to his staff and said, “General Guan is a hero, and I am exceedingly fond of him. I want to treat him with respect and convince him to surrender. What do you think?”

But one of his advisers, Zuo (3) Xian (2), quickly said, “You must not. When Cao Cao had this man, he gave him a title, treated him to a small banquet every three days, a large banquet every five days, and lavished him with riches. But even such kindness could not keep him, and he ended up storming through checkpoints and slaying officers as he left. And he ended up being such a thorn in Cao Cao’s side that Cao Cao on several occasions thought about moving his capital to dodge him. Since you have captured him, if you do not eliminate him now, he will come back to bite you.”

Sun Quan gave this some thought and then said, “You’re quite right.”

And with that, he ordered the guards to take Guan Yu outside. Both Guan Yu and his son were executed. It was the 12th month of the year 220, and Guan Yu died at the age of 58.

Now, I don't know about you, but the first time I got to this part of the book, I did a doubletake. I mean, surely this cannot be. Guan Yu was, for most of the novel, the most fearsome warrior in the land. Sure he was in a tight spot, but you were just waiting for him to somehow escape from this seemingly impossible situation to fight another day. But no, history cares nothing for drama, and so Guan Yu exits stage left. And yes, we will definitely do a supplemental episode on him soon. But for now, let's remember him with this poem:

Unrivaled in the latter years of Han,  
Lord Guan towered high above all men.  
Bold in arms by dint of godlike might,  
He knew his letters in a scholar's right.  
Like glare of day, his heart reflected true.  
His *Spring and Autumn* honor touched the clouds --  
A shining spirit to live through history,  
Not just the crowning glory of a world in three.

So Guan Yu now departed the mortal world and set off on his journey into immortal fame. Since he wasn't going to need it anymore, his ride, the Red Hare horse, was given to the man who captured him as a reward. But the horse refused to eat anything, and within a few days, it starved to death, I guess so that it could join its master in the afterlife.

While Guan Yu certainly accomplished much in life, in death, he left a mess in Jing Province. To tie up the loose ends, let's go back to the tiny city of Maicheng, where his officers Wang Fu and Zhou

Cang were still holed up. That night, Wang Fu felt uneasy and he said to Zhou Cang, "Last night I dreamed that General Guan was standing in front of me, covered in blood. I was just about to ask him what's going on when I suddenly woke up. I wonder how he's doing."

Of course, such heavy-handed omens don't leave much doubt. Just as the two of them were talking, word came that Dongwu troops were outside the city, displaying the heads of Guan Yu and his son, and demanding those inside to surrender. Stunned, Wang Fu and Zhou Cang hurried to the top of the city walls to take a look. And right there, outside the city, were indeed the heads of Guan Yu and Guan Ping.

Wang Fu let out a loud cry and leaped off the wall, plunging to his death. At the same time, Zhou Cang pulled out his sword and slit his own throat. With both remaining officers dead, the city quickly fell into Dongwu's hands as well.

So, Guan Yu is dead, and Jing Province has switched hands. This was bound to have some serious consequences. To see what those consequences are, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!