

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 98.

Last time, we killed off a major character for the first time in a long time, as Guan Yu lost Jing Province and fell into the hands of Sun Quan, who had him beheaded. As you can imagine, this is going to knock over a whole lot of dominoes. So let's get to it.

The first person we need to talk about is ... well, Guan Yu. I know, Guan Yu is dead, so what more is there to say? Well, apparently we need to tie up the loose ends with his ghost. Hey, this is a novel, not history. So Guan Yu's ghost was, understandably, just slightly peeved about having lost his head. So instead of drifting off to heaven, his spirit just kind of hung around the mortal realm, drifting here and there.

One day, he came upon a mountain called Jade Fountain Mountain. On this mountain resided an old monk by the name of Pu (3) Jing (4). We've actually met him before. Back in episode 33, when Guan Yu was leaving Cao Cao's service to rejoin Liu Bei, the commander at one of the checkpoints along the way set up an ambush to kill Guan Yu at a nearby monastery. The abbot of that monastery was none other than this monk, Pu (3) Jing (4). Pu Jing was from the same hometown as Guan Yu, and he tipped off Guan Yu to the deception. After Guan Yu killed the officer trying to ambush him, Pu Jing decided to get out of dodge as well. His travels took him everywhere before he came across this mountain. He loved the view, so he stayed, built himself a straw hut, and spent his days in meditation. He also had a young acolyte with him, whose job it was to go out and beg for food, which was a common way for monks to make a living.

On a clear and breezy night, Pu Jing was sitting in his hut and meditating. Just after midnight, he suddenly heard a loud cry from the sky.

"Return my head!"

Since this wasn't something that happened every day, Pu Jing stepped outside to take a look. In the sky, he saw a man riding a Red Hare horse and holding the green dragon saber. He was flanked by two officers, one with a fair complexion, and the other with a dark complexion and curly whiskers. As the cloud that this trio rode on drifted near the peak of the mountain, Pu Jing recognized that it was Guan Yu. He struck the door with a deer-tail whisk, an act that's supposed to protect him against spirits.

"General Guan, where are you now?" the monk said.

Guan Yu's spirit dismounted and glided down to the hut.

"Who might you be, master?" he asked.

"My name is Pu Jing. We met when I was at the monastery near Sishui (4,3) Pass. Have you forgotten?"

"I am forever grateful for your saving me, and will never forget it," ghost Guan Yu said. "Today, a calamity has befallen me, and I am dead. I would like to request your redeeming counsel to point me out of the darkness of my wandering."

And this was what Pu Jing said to Guan Yu:

"Right and wrong, past and present are relevant no more. Retribution follows human action with the certainty of fate. You died at Lü Meng's hand and cry, 'Return my head.' Yet, what about the likes of Yan Liang, Wen Chou, or the six officers at the five checkpoints you ran? Whom should they ask for their heads backs?"

And in case you weren't paying attention, all those guys that the monk just named were people who fell under Guan Yu's blade. So basically, Pu Jing just told Guan Yu that hey this is karma, so stop whining. This advice showed Guan Yu the meaning of life or something, and he bowed in acceptance of karma and went on his way. From that point on, his spirit often appeared around this mountain to

help and protect the locals, which prompted them to build him a temple on the mountain and present offerings to him. And this was the beginning of Guan Yu's ascendance to god status.

Meanwhile, back in the land of the living, Sun Quan was celebrating the reacquisition of Jing Province. He rewarded his army and threw a big feast for his generals. At this feast, Sun Quan gave Lü Meng, the commander of the Dongwu forces, the seat of honor, and he told the other officers,

"I had long desired Jing Province in vain, but now it's ours just like that, and it's all thanks to General Lü. Back when Zhou Yu was alive, he was a man of exceptional talent and vision. He crushed Cao Cao at Red Cliff, but unfortunately he died young. Then Lu Su took his place. When Lu Su first met me, he laid out a grand imperial strategy for the Southlands. That was his first great deed. Then, when Cao Cao marched South, everyone advised me to surrender, but only Lu Su told me and Zhou Yu that we should resist. That was his second great deed. The only thing is that he also advised me to lend Jing Province to Liu Bei, and that was a failing. Now, General Lü devised the plan that reclaimed Jing Province, which puts him far above Zhou Yu and Lu Su."

I'm sure the ghosts of Zhou Yu and Lu Su probably did not appreciate that, but Sun Quan was really happy. He now personally filled a cup with wine and offered it to Lü Meng. Lü Meng accepted it and was just about to drink when he suddenly threw the cup to the floor and grabbed Sun Quan.

"You green-eyed punk! You purple-bearded vermin! Do you know who I am?!" Lü Meng shouted.

All the officers present were shocked and ran forward to protect Sun Quan. Lü Meng now threw Sun Quan to the floor, stomped over to Sun Quan's seat, and made himself comfortable in it. Then, with arched eyebrows and round eyes, he shouted,

"Ever since defeating the Yellow Turban rebels, I have crisscrossed the realm for 30-some years, only to be done in by your despicable scheme! I could not eat your flesh in life, but in death I shall hound the spirit of the scoundrel Lü Meng! I am Guan Yu!"

Sun Quan was shocked when he heard this, and he immediately ordered everyone present to kneel and pay their respects. Then, they saw Lü Meng collapse to the ground. Blood streamed out of his orifices, and he was dead. Well, I guess accepting the idea of karma did not preclude coming back from the dead to possess and kill your mortal foe.

Everyone at the banquet was understandably spooked by what just happened. Sun Quan ordered that Lü Meng be buried and bestowed posthumous titles upon him, and gave his rank to his son. But that did nothing to quell Sun Quan's anxiety.

Soon, the old adviser Zhang Zhao (1) arrived to see Sun Quan and told him, "My lord, now that you have killed Guan Yu and his son, calamity for the Southlands is on the horizon! When Guan Yu swore his oath with Liu Bei in the peach orchard, they pledged to live and die together. Now Liu Bei possesses the forces of the Riverlands, plus the strategies of Zhuge Liang and the valor of Zhang Fei, Huang Zhong, Ma Chao, and Zhao Yun. When he hears of his brother's fate, he will no doubt mobilize all of his forces to seek revenge. It would be tough for Dongwu to match up."

An alarmed Sun Quan stamped his foot and said, "I made a mistake! What should we do now?"

"My lord, do not worry," Zhang Zhao said. "I have a plan that can keep the Shu forces from encroaching on Dongwu and secure Jing Province. Right now, Cao Cao is powerful and he scours the empire like a tiger. Liu Bei will be lusting after revenge, so he will try to ally with Cao Cao. If both of them attack us, then Dongwu will be in danger. You should send Guan Yu's head to Cao Cao. That will show Liu Bei that you were acting on Cao Cao's instructions. He will despise Cao Cao instead, and the troops of Shu will be used against Wei instead against Dongwu. Then we can sit and watch to see how things go and act accordingly. That is the best course of action."

Sun Quan followed Zhang Zhao's advice. He had Guan Yu's head placed in a wooden box and sent an envoy to deliver it to Cao Cao right away. At this time, Cao Cao had returned to the city of Luoyang (4,2). When he heard that Dongwu was delivering the head of Guan Yu, he rejoiced.

"Now that Guan Yu is dead, I can finally sleep easy."

But not so fast, said one of his advisers.

"This is Dongwu's attempt to shift the blame to us," the guy said.

The man who had spoken was Sima Yi, and Cao Cao asked him to elaborate.

Sima explained, "When Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei swore their oath in the peach orchard, they pledged to live and die together. Right now, Dongwu has killed Guan Yu and fears reprisal, so they sent his head to your highness to try to redirect Liu Bei's anger toward you and make him attack Wei instead of Dongwu, while Sun Quan tries to take advantage of the situation."

"You're quite right," Cao Cao said. "How should I counter?"

"That's easy," Sima Yi told him. "You can use fragrant wood to craft a body to go with Guan Yu's head, and then give him a funeral befitting a high-ranking official. When Liu Bei hears of this, he will despise Sun Quan and focus on attacking the South. Then we can see who comes out ahead. If Shu wins, then we attack Dongwu; if Dongwu wins, then we attack Shu. If we conquer either one, then the other will not last for long either."

This plan sounded great to Cao Cao, so he summoned the envoy from Dongwu. The envoy presented the box. Cao Cao opened it. Inside rested the head of Guan Yu, and his countenance looked just as it had in life.

"My friend, how have you been?" Cao Cao asked the head with a smile.

But before Cao Cao finished speaking, Guan Yu's mouth and eyes suddenly started moving, and his hair and beard stood up like quills. Cao Cao was super freaked out and collapsed onto the floor. His

officials helped him up and brought him back around, at which point he told them, “General Guan is truly a god!”

And now, the envoy from Dongwu told Cao Cao that, oh by the way, Guan Yu’s spirit crashed our party, possessed the body of Lü Meng, roughed up Sun Quan, and then sent Lü Meng to a rather gruesome death. I guess maybe I should’ve mentioned that earlier. This made Cao Cao even more spooked, and he set about appeasing Guan Yu’s spirit by giving him a funeral befitting a nobleman, burying his head and wooden body outside the south gate of Luoyang. All the officials were required to attend. Cao Cao personally bowed and mourned Guan Yu, declared him the King of Jing (1), and appointed someone to watch over his grave. All this done, Cao Cao sent the envoy back to Dongwu.

So for the last few episodes, we’ve been pretty focused on what’s been going on in the South, and we haven’t mentioned Liu Bei at all. So let’s go west and see what he has been up to while his brother was meeting his untimely end.

So while Guan Yu was busy losing his territory and his head, Liu Bei was busy getting married. Remember that the two wives he had once upon a time had both died years ago. He then married Sun Quan’s baby sister, but she was smuggled back to the Southlands by her brother while Liu Bei was busy conquering the Riverlands. His adviser Fa (3) Zheng (4) now told him that he should remarry, and suggested that he hook up with the widow of one of Liu Zhang’s brothers. So that would make this woman the sister-in-law of the guy that Liu Bei had deposed to build his empire, Liu Bei wasn’t too sure about this, since this woman was married to another member of the House of Liu. But Fa Zheng just said, nah, it’s all good. And Liu Bei said, ok, sure. And so he married the widow of his kinsman, and she would later bear him two sons.

At this moment, the Riverlands were thriving. The people were prosperous and the harvests were good. But storm clouds began to gather when a messenger from Jing Province told Liu Bei how Guan Yu had undiplomatically rejected Sun Quan's marriage proposal.

"Jing Province is in danger," Zhuge Liang said when he heard the news. "We should send someone to take over for General Guan."

While they were discussing this, however, more news streamed in from Jing Province. Within a day, Guan Yu's second son, Guan Xing (4), arrived with the report that his father had drowned the army led by Yu Jin. This was followed by news that Guan Yu had built a series of watchtowers to keep a close eye on movements from Dongwu. This intel set Liu Bei's mind at ease a little bit.

But one day, Liu Bei suddenly felt restless and uneasy. That night, he had trouble sleeping, so he sat up in his room to read by the candlelight. After a while, he began to drift off and fell asleep while hunched over his desk. Suddenly, a cold gust of wind swept through his room. The candle flickered off and then back on again. When Liu Bei lifted his head, he noticed someone standing nearby.

"Who are you? What are you doing in my bedchamber at night?" Liu Bei asked.

The figure gave no reply.

Liu Bei became even more suspicious, so he got up to take a closer look. In the dim candlelight, he could make out his brother Guan Yu in the shadows, seemingly evading the light.

"Brother, how have you been?!" Liu Bei asked. "There must be something important to bring you here at this hour. We're brothers. Why are you avoiding me?"

"Brother," the figure said in tears. "Please mobilize your forces and avenge me!"

And with that, another gust of chilling wind swept through the room, and Guan Yu disappeared. In that moment, Liu Bei startled awake and realized that it was all a dream ... or was it? Apparently accepting karma also does not preclude you from visiting your bro and demanding he avenge you.

It was now the middle of the night, and Liu Bei was very uneasy. He hurriedly invited Zhuge Liang over and told him what happened.

“Your highness had this dream because you’ve been thinking about General Guan,” Zhuge Liang said. “There is no need to be worried.”

But Liu Bei could not stop worrying. Zhuge Liang tried to put his mind at ease before taking his leave. As Zhuge Liang was leaving the palace, he ran into Xu (3) Jing (4), a high-ranking official.

“I just went to your residence to report a top secret,” Xu (3) Jing (4) said. “But they told me you had gone to the palace, so I’ve come here to find you.”

“What’s the secret?”

“I heard a rumor that Dongwu, under Lü Meng’s direction, has taken Jing Province, and that General Guan is dead! That’s why I have come to see you.”

“I was observing the night sky and saw a general’s star fall toward the ground in Jing Province, so I already knew that General Guan must have met his demise,” Zhuge Liang said. “But I was afraid of upsetting his highness, so I haven’t said anything yet.”

But just then, another man approached them, grabbed Zhuge Liang by the sleeve, and said, “How can you keep such horrible news from?!”

It was none other than Liu Bei. Zhuge Liang and Xu Jing now both told him, “All we have are just rumors that cannot be trusted. Please don’t get too worried.”

“Brother Guan and I swore to live and die together,” Liu Bei said. “If something happens to him, how can I go on?!”

Just as Zhuge Liang and Xu Jing were trying to comfort Liu Bei, attendants reported that the officials Ma Liang and Yi (1) Ji (2) had arrived from Jing Province. Liu Bei summoned them immediately, and they confirmed part of the bombshell: Jing Province had indeed been lost. Guan Yu



had been defeated and needed help. They then presented the letter from Guan Yu, but before Liu Bei could even open it, attendants reported that the general Liao Hua had also arrived from Jing Province, so Liu Bei called him in as well. When he entered, Liao Hua wept and kneeled on the ground as he relayed the story of how the officers Liu Feng and Meng Da refused to dispatch troops to save Guan Yu.

“If that is the case, my brother is done for!” a stunned Liu Bei said.

“How dare Liu Feng and Meng Da act so disrespectfully?!” Zhuge Liang said. “Their crime must be punished! My lord, don’t worry. I will personally lead an army to go save Jing Province.”

“If brother Guan dies, then I cannot endure alone either!” Liu Bei said as he wept. “Tomorrow, I will personally lead an army to go save him!”

So Liu Bei quickly sent word to his brother Zhang Fei, who was stationed in the outpost of Langzhong (2,1). Meanwhile, he also ordered his men to assemble the troops.

But alas, it was all for naught. Before the sun rose, more messengers arrived, and the news got worse and worse. Eventually, word came that Guan Yu had tried to make a night-time escape but fell into the hands of Dongwu. He refused to surrender, and both he and his son Guan Ping were executed.

When Liu Bei heard this, he let out a loud cry and passed out. His staff hurriedly tended to him and brought him around after a while. They then helped him into his bedchamber.

“Your highness, please try to stay calm,” Zhuge Liang said. “As the old saying goes, ‘Life and death are preordained.’ General Guan had always been too proud, and now it has led to his downfall. Please take good care of yourself, and then we can think about revenge.”

“When I swore the oath with my brothers in the peach orchard, we pledged to live and die together,” Liu Bei said, repeating the same line that everybody in the episode has said. “Now, brother Guan is dead. How can I enjoy my wealth and fortune alone?”

Before he had finished speaking, he saw Guan Yu’s second son Guan Xing approaching. The sight of the wailing young man caused Liu Bei to let out another loud cry as he collapsed to the ground again in tears. And so everyone tended to him again to bring him around again. This happened several times that day, and for three days, Liu Bei would neither eat nor drink anything. He just cried and cried and cried, until his clothes were soaked with tears and dotted with flecks of blood. Zhuge Liang and the other officials tried time and again to console him, but with little success.

“I swear that I shall not share the same sun and moon as Dongwu!” Liu Bei declared.

Zhuce Liang told him, “I have heard that Dongwu has sent General Guan’s head to Cao Cao, and Cao Cao has buried him according to customs fit for a nobleman.”

“What’s the meaning behind that?” Liu Bei asked.

“This is Dongwu’s attempt to shift the blame to Cao Cao,” Zhuge Liang explained. “But Cao Cao saw through the scheme and thus buried General Guan with honors so that your highness would redirect your fury at Dongwu.”

“I shall mobilize the troops immediately to punish Dongwu and avenge my brother!” Liu Bei said.

“You must not,” Zhuge Liang objected. “Right now, Dongwu is trying to goad us into attacking Wei, and Wei is trying to get us to attack Dongwu. They are both waiting for an opportunity to make their move. You must not mobilize your troops. We should focus on funeral services for General Guan and wait until Dongwu and Wei are at odds with each other before we attack.”

The other officials chimed in in agreement, and Liu Bei relented. He then ordered all the officers and soldiers to don mourning clothes. He personally went out to the south gate to perform the funeral, and he spent his days crying nonstop.

As for Cao Cao, he was still in the city of Luoyang. Ever since he buried Guan Yu, whenever he went to sleep at night, he would see Guan Yu in his dreams. Spooked, he asked his officials about this, and they told him that the old palace at Luoyang must be haunted, and he should construct a new one. They also recommended a talented local architect for the job. The architect came and drew up some plans for the new palace, named Foundation Hall, and they met with Cao Cao's approval.

The only thing was that to build a large, important structure like palace, it was very crucial to have strong main beams, and Cao Cao was fretting that he couldn't find a good, sturdy tree to cut down for this purpose. But the architect had a suggestion.

"Ten miles from the city, there is a pond called Vaulting Dragon Pond," the architect told Cao Cao. "In front of the pond is a temple, called Vaulting Dragon Temple. By the temple, there is a huge pear tree that's 100-some-feet tall. It's perfect for the main beams."

Cao Cao was delighted and sent some workers to cut down this impressive tree, because environmental conservation is what again? The next day, though, they reported back that the tree was impervious to their saws and axes. Cao Cao, skeptical of this claim, personally led a few hundred riders to go check it out for himself.

When he arrived, he looked up at the tree. It soared straight up and spread out a leafy canopy that seemed to reach for the clouds. Impressed, Cao Cao ordered his men to cut down the tree. But a few elders who resided in the area now came forward and pleaded.

"This tree has lived for hundreds of years, and immortals have often lived in its canopy. It may not be wise to cut it down."

Cao Cao, however, was having none of this.

"I have traveled the realm for 40-some years. Everyone from emperor to commoner fears me. What spirit or demon dares to go against my will?!"

As he spoke, Cao Cao pulled out his sword and hacked at the tree. As the sword struck the trunk, there was metallic sound, and squirt of blood sprayed onto Cao Cao, covering him from head to toe. Cao Cao was greatly alarmed. He dropped his sword, hopped back on his horse, and hightailed it back to his palace.

That night, around 11 o'clock, Cao Cao was restless and could not sleep. So he sat up in his room and rested against a low table when suddenly, he saw a man with disheveled hair, dressed in black, and carrying sword. The figure walked over to Cao Cao, pointed at him, and said sternly, "I am the spirit of the pear tree. You want to build Foundation Hall and usurp the throne, and you had the audacity to come after my sacred wood! I know your time is up, so I have come to kill you!"

Panicked, Cao Cao shouted, "Where are my guards?!"

The figure in black drew his sword and swung at Cao Cao. Cao Cao let out a loud cry and suddenly found himself awake with a pounding, intolerable headache. He quickly sent his men to go find the best doctors, but no one could do anything about his condition, which left his officials very concerned.

The official Hua (2) Xin (1) now came to see Cao Cao and asked him, "Does your highness know of the miracle healer Hua (4) Tuo (2)?"

"The one who saved Zhou Tai of the Southlands?"

"That's him."

"I have heard of his name, but not of his skills," Cao Cao said.

"Hua Tuo possesses rare medical skills," Hua Xin said. "Whomever he treats, whatever the method, he delivers results right away."

Hua Xin then launches into an hourlong infomercial for Hua Tuo, and I will summarize a little bit here for you.

When Hua Tuo is treating someone with an internal illness that medicine cannot cure, he administers a narcotic potion that knocks the patient out. He then uses a sharp knife to cut open their belly, uses medicine to wash their internal organs. All the while, the patient feels no pain, so hey, Hua Tuo was apparently using some hospital-grade anesthesia in the third century. When he's done washing your organs, he would stitch you back up and apply some medicine to the incision. Then, within 20 to 30 days, the patient would be back to normal.

Hua Xin's endorsement also included a few stories about Hua Tuo. He once came across a man groaning on the side of the road. Hua Tuo diagnosed him with an inability to ingest food, and the treatment was to make him drink three pints of garlic and leek juice. Yum! After drinking this potion, the patient vomited up a two-foot-long worm, and after that, he was fine.

Another story had to do with Chen Deng (1), the governor of Guangling (3,2). Now Chen Deng was the guy who helped devise the schemes that betrayed the mighty Lü Bu into Cao Cao's hands, and he was given his governorship as a reward. But later on, he suffered from severe indigestion and inflamed complexion. Hua Tuo gave him some medicine, which induced vomiting. This time, he vomited three pints of worms with red heads and wriggling tails, which is just ... ewww. Hua Tuo diagnosed this as a result of eating too much fish, and he told Chen Deng that his illness will return in three years and when it does, there would be nothing that can be done about it. And sure enough, three years later, Chen Deng was dead. So all you seafood lovers out there, beware.

And then, we have a story of a guy with a tumor between his eyebrows. Hua Tuo took a look and said, "There's something that can fly in there." People mocked his diagnosis, but when he cut open the tumor with a knife, a little sparrow flew out, and the man was healed. Yeah, ok.

And finally, we have the story of a guy whose finger got bitten by a dog and developed two swellings. One hurt, and the other itched. Hua Tuo said, "The painful swelling contains 10 needles, while the itchy swelling contains two chess pieces, one black, one white." And of course no one

believed that. I mean, what kind of quack medicine is this?! Well, Hua Tuo cut open the swellings, and it was indeed as he said. Like I said, this is a novel, not history. Just roll with it.

So after hearing this glowing and frankly ridiculous description of Hua Tuo's skills, Cao Cao decided that yes, THIS is the guy I want to treat my headache. To see what perfectly sane, scientifically plausible diagnosis Hua Tuo gives him, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!