

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 102.

Last time, we left off with Liu Bei declaring himself emperor after the Han emperor was officially deposed by Cao Pi. As his first imperial act, Liu Bei was going to attack Dongwu to make them pay for killing his brother Guan Yu, but a number of his officials were against it. However, his third brother, Zhang Fei, heard about this and personally headed to the Shu capital Chengdu to make sure Liu Bei did not waver in his conviction for war with Dongwu.

At this time, Liu Bei was personally drilling his troops every day in preparation for the campaign, but many of his officials were still hoping to talk him out of it. A bunch of them went to see Zhuge Liang and said, "His highness has only just recently ascended to the imperial throne and now he wants to personally lead an expedition. His priorities are misplaced. Prime minister, you hold an influential position. Can you not talk him out of it?"

"I have already tried time and again," Zhuge Liang said, "but he would not listen. Today, why don't you all go with me to the training grounds to offer our counsel?"

So they all followed Zhuge Liang to see Liu Bei and told him, "Your highness has just ascended to the throne. The only time when it would be appropriate for you to personally command an army is if you are marching north to bring the usurpers to justice. If you want to attack Dongwu, then you should just appoint a top general to lead in your place. There is no need for you to go personally."

Being leaned on so hard by Zhuge Liang and others, Liu Bei was starting to sway, but just then, Zhang Fei arrived. Liu Bei summoned him immediately, and Zhang Fei came in and threw himself onto the ground. He clutched Liu Bei's foot and wept, which made Liu Bei cry as well.

"Your highness is now the emperor, and you have forgotten the oath in the peach orchard!" Zhang Fei said. "Why are you not avenging brother Guan's death?!"

"Many officials oppose such an action, so I haven't dared to move rashly," Liu Bei said.

“How can other people understand our pledge?!” Zhang Fei said. “If your highness will not go, then I will forfeit my life to avenge brother Guan! If I do not succeed, then I would rather die than to face you!”

Well, so much for all the hard work that Zhuge Liang and company had done in trying to dissuade Liu Bei from his invasion. A few words from Zhang Fei made up his mind.

“I will go with you,” Liu Bei said to Zhang Fei. “Lead the troops under your command and move out. I will meet up with you with crack troops so that we may attack Dongwu together and seek vengeance!”

So it was decided. Liu Bei and Zhang Fei were going out on a quest for revenge. Before Zhang Fei took his leave, Liu Bei reminded him, “I know that when you drink, you tend to get angry and whip your soldiers, but then you keep them around you. That is a recipe for disaster. From now on, you must change your ways and be more lenient.”

Zhang Fei agreed and took his leave. The next day, Liu Bei was about to mobilize his army, but the scholar Qin (2) Mi (4) again spoke up against it.

“For your majesty to risk your precious self over a trifling point of honor is a course that no ancient sage would approve of,” Qin (2) Mi (4) said. “I hope you will reconsider.”

But boy was that the wrong thing to say to Liu Bei.

“Brother Guan and I are like one body,” Liu Bei said. How can I forget the obligation of that sacred bond?!”

But Qin Mi would not let it go. He dropped to the ground and refused to get up.

“If your highness does not heed my words, I fear you will fail!”

But now, Liu Bei had finally heard enough.

“I am just about to mobilize my troops. How dare you speak such unlucky words?!”

Liu Bei now ordered the guards to take Qin Mi outside for execution. Qin Mi's face showed no fear. Instead, he turned to look at Liu Bei and laughed.

"Your servant will die without regret, but pity your enterprise, so newly established, will collapse again!"

And now, all the other officials interceded and begged Liu Bei to show mercy. Liu Bei relented and told the guards to throw Qin Min in prison for now, and Liu Bei would deal with him after he returns from his victorious campaign. When Zhuge Liang got word of this, he petitioned Liu Bei, asking him to spare Qin Mi and to reconsider his course of action. The petition said:

"It is my earnest belief that the treachery of the Southlands led to the disaster in Jing Province. We lost our leading star. Our pillar of Heaven was broken. But however keen our grief, however unforgettable, we must also remember that the crime of usurping the Han rose from Cao Cao. The displacement of the House of Liu was not Sun Quan's fault. If the traitors of the Wei are removed, then the Southlands will submit to us on its own accord. I implore you to accept the precious advice of Qin Mi and grow the strength of our army for other worthwhile purposes. It would be a great fortune to our shrines and our realm."

But when Liu Bei was done reading this petition, he threw it to the ground.

"My mind is made up! No more petitions!"

Welp, so that's that. Liu Bei was heading out, and he was leaving Zhuge Liang behind to mind the shop with his heir apparent while he's gone. Now, it could be that Liu Bei genuinely felt it was important to have the stabilizing and loyal influence of Zhuge Liang in the capital while he's gone, but you also get the feeling that maybe Zhuge Liang was kind of in Liu Bei's doghouse after that petition. Liu Bei also ordered the generals Ma Chao, Ma Dai, and Wei Yan to oversee the defense of the region of Hanzhong (4,1), just in case the kingdom of Wei decided to try its luck while he's down south.

Now, as for who was going with Liu Bei on his campaign, the general Zhao Yun was assigned to the rear to lead the reinforcements. Remember that Zhao Yun was among the first to speak out against this campaign, and now he's been sent to the back of the line. So again, maybe Liu Bei just has it out right now for anyone who wasn't totally on board with his plan. Leading the vanguard was the old general Huang Zhong. Aside from them, Liu Bei brought along 750,000 troops, a few hundred officers from the Riverlands, and a number of officers from the ethnic minority tribes from whom Liu Bei borrowed some troops. This impressive army set out in the seventh month of the year 221.

Let's leave Liu Bei on the march for now and check in with Zhang Fei. Upon returning to his base at Langzhong (2,1), Zhang Fei told his troops that they had three days to prepare white banners and white armor so that the whole army could march south donning the color of mourning. But the next day, two of his officers, Fan (4) Jiang (1) and Zhang (1) Da (2), came to see him with a problem.

"We cannot finish the white banners and white armor before the deadline," they told him. "Please give us an extension."

But Zhang Fei was not one for extensions.

"I am in a hurry for revenge," he said angrily. "I only regret that I cannot arrive in the traitors' territory tomorrow. How dare you disobey my order?!"

And when Zhang Fei got angry, the whip came out. He had the two officers tied to trees and gave them 50 lashes on their backs, all for just daring to tell him that his deadline was unreasonable. And when the whipping was done, Zhang Fei pointed at them and said, "Everything must be ready by tomorrow! If not, then I will kill the two of you as a warning!"

Fan (4) Jiang (1) and Zhang (1) Da (2) were bleeding from the mouth, and many other places, after that beating. After they staggered back to their own tent, they huddled.

“After today’s beating, how can we do any work?” Fan Jiang said. “That man has a fiery temper. If we don’t finish by tomorrow, you and I are done for!”

“Then why don’t we kill him before he kills us?” Zhang Da said.

“But how can we get anywhere near him?” Fan Jiang replied.

“If it is not our fate to die, then tonight he will be passed out drunk on his bed,” Zhang Da said. “If we are destined to die, then he will not be drunk.”

That night, while he sat in his tent, Zhang Fei was feeling anxious and restless. He asked his officers why he might be feeling that way, and they told him that it’s just because he’s thinking about Guan Yu. To deal with this, Zhang Fei ordered his men to bring wine, which he shared with his officers. And before you know it, Zhang Fei was passed out drunk in his tent.

Word of this soon got back to Fan (4) Jiang (1) and Zhang (1) Da (2). Around 7 o’clock that night, they stashed short daggers under their clothes and sneaked into Zhang Fei’s tent on the pretense of reporting some secret intel. As they approached Zhang Fei’s bed, however, they were startled to see that his eyes were wide open! They froze in their tracks.

But then, they heard the loud snoring coming from Zhang Fei. It turns out that Zhang Fei never closes his eyes even while he’s asleep. And on this night, even though his eyes were wide open, he was indeed passed out. Working up the courage to approach his bed, the two assassins stepped forward and plunged their daggers into Zhang Fei’s belly. There was a loud cry, and then ... nothing. Zhang Fei was dead, at the age of 55.

So yeah, the hits just keep on coming, don’t they? First Guan Yu, then Cao Cao, and now Zhang Fei. The number of supplemental episodes that I’ll have to do to send off major characters is ticking up quickly. For now, let’s bid goodbye to Zhang Fei with this poem:

At Anxi he flogged the state inspector  
And aided the Liu in clearing out the Yellow Turbans.  
At Hulao (3,2) Pass his voice rang clear and loud;  
By Changban (2,3) Bridge he turned back Cao Cao's horde.  
His release of Yan (2) Yan (2) secured the Riverlands;  
He tricked Zhang (1) He (2) and gave Liu Bei Hanzhong.  
But by dying before the Southland could be won,  
He left a lasting sadness in Langzhong (2,1).

Now that they had assassinated Zhang Fei, Fan (4) Jiang (1) and Zhang (1) Da (2) weren't quite done yet. They cut off Zhang Fei's head and rode off with a few dozen men to seek refuge in Dongwu. By the time Zhang Fei's men discovered what had happened the next morning, it was too late to catch the assassins. One of Zhang Fei's officers, Wu (2) Ban (1), wrote a letter to notify Liu Bei of the tragedy. He then told Zhang Fei's eldest son, Zhang Bao (1), to prepare his father's coffin and bring the bad news to Liu Bei, while the second son, Zhang Shao (4), was left to defend the base at Langzhong (2,1).

At this time, Liu Bei had already set out from the capital Chengdu. All the officials who weren't going followed Zhuge Liang as they went several miles outside the city to see Liu Bei off. Upon returning to Chengdu, Zhuge Liang said unhappily to the other officials, "If Fa (3) Zheng (4) was still alive, he would surely be able to talk our lord out of this campaign." And remember that Fa Zheng was one of the original Riverlands officials who helped Liu Bei take over the region. This statement by Zhuge Liang shows how high Fa Zheng had risen in Liu Bei's estimation before dying off-screen.

Anyway, back to Liu Bei. That night, he was feeling anxious and restless, which seems to be the telltale sign in this novel that something is amiss. He stepped outside his tent and looked up at the

night sky. There, he noticed a giant star in the northwest plunging to the ground. This made Liu Bei uneasy, and he sent a messenger that very night to ask Zhuge Liang what this might mean. Word came back from Zhuge Liang that this portended the loss of a top general and that the news will arrive within three days.

With this ominous omen hanging over him, Liu Bei decided to hold his troops in place for now. Suddenly, his attendant reported that Zhang Fei's subordinate Wu (2) Ban (1) had sent a messenger.

"No! Brother Zhang is no more!" Liu Bei moaned as he stamped his foot.

Sure enough, the messenger confirmed his suspicions, and Liu Bei wept so bitterly that he passed out on the ground. His officials frantically tended to him and brought him back around.

The next day, word came that a squad of soldiers were heading this way. Liu Bei went out to see who they were. He saw a young general clad in white robes and a suit of silver armor. This young man hopped off his horse, kneeled on the ground, and wept. It was Zhang Fei's son, Zhang Bao (1).

"Fan (4) Jiang (1) and Zhang Da (2) killed my father and fled to Dongwu with his head!" Zhang Bao said.

This latest tragedy aggrieved Liu Bei such that he stopped eating or drinking. His officials had to remind him that he needed to take care of himself if he wanted to avenge his brothers. Only then did he resume taking sustenance and turn his thoughts to the next step, which was to march on Dongwu and open up a can of whup-ass on anyone and everyone there who had ever wronged him.

But first, Liu Bei needed a replacement for Zhang Fei. He said to Zhang Bao, "Do you and Wu (2) Ban (1) dare to lead the troops under your command to serve as the vanguard and avenge your father?"

"For my country and for my father, I shall never refuse!" replied Zhang Bao, who was every bit his father's son.

Liu Bei was just about to send Zhang Bao off when word came that another squad of troops had arrived. Soon, attendants brought in another young general, also clad in white robes and silver armor, who also kneeled and wept. This was Guan Yu's second son, Guan Xing (4). The sight of this nephew reminded Liu Bei of Guan Yu, and he began to cry loudly again, and everybody probably thought, oh great, here we go again. Get the smelling salt ready.

"I remember when I was just a commoner and I swore the oath of brotherhood with Guan Yu and Zhang Fei and pledged to live and die together," Liu Bei said. "Now, I am emperor and I was just about to share my wealth and prestige with my brothers. But they have both met violent ends! The sight of my two nephews breaks my heart!"

And then he began to cry again. His officials had to tell Guan Xing and Zhang Bao to take a hike for a bit so that Liu Bei could get a little rest.

"Your highness is past 60," Liu Bei's attendants told him. "You must not get too depressed."

"My two brothers are dead; how can I bear to go on alone?!" Liu Bei said as he banged his head on the ground and wept some more.

Well, this is certainly no way to run a military campaign, and Liu Bei's officials discussed amongst themselves what they might do to help Liu Bei snap out of it. One of them, Chen (2) Zhen (4), said, "I have heard that in the mountains outside Chengdu there resides a recluse named Li (3) Yi (4). People say he has lived for 300-some years and can foretell one's fortune. He is a god among mortals. Why don't we ask his highness to summon this sage and ask him about the future. That would be better than anything we can say."

So they went to see Liu Bei and said, hey we know this 300-year-old fortune-teller you might want to see, and Liu Bei, apparently not second-guessing the 300-year-old part at all, sent Chen Zhen to summon this guy. So Chen Zhen set off for the mountains immediately, following the locals' directions



as he made his way deep into the valley, where, in the distance, he spotted the recluse's residence, shaded by clouds and marked by a magical aura, whatever that means.

Just then, a kid came up to him. "Sir, are you Chen Zhen?" the kid asked.

"Divine acolyte, how do you know my name?!" Chen Zhen said in astonishment.

"My master told me yesterday that an edict from the emperor will be arriving today, and that the envoy would be Chen Zhen."

"He is truly an immortal! What they say about him is true!" Chen Zhen said.

So Chen Zhen followed the kid to the house, where he paid his respects to the recluse Li (3) Yi (4) and read aloud the summon from Liu Bei. But Li Yi tried to beg off on account of old age. I'm 300 years old, you know.

"His highness urgently desires to meet you, divine elder," Chen Zhen pressed. "I hope you will honor us with your presence."

After repeated entreaties, Li Yi relented and accompanied Chen Zhen back to camp to meet Liu Bei. Liu Bei saw that Li Yi had white hair like a crane, the youthful complexion of a child, green eyes and broad pupils that glistened with an inner light, and a figure that resembled an old cypress tree. This appearance told Liu Bei that this was no ordinary man, so he welcomed Li Yi with the sincerest cordiality.

"I am but an old man from a remote mountain village, lacking both knowledge and wisdom," Li Yi said. "What prompted your highness to summon me?"

"I swore an oath with my brothers Guan Yu and Zhang Fei to live and die together," Liu Bei replied. "We fulfilled that pledge for 30-some years, but now both of my brothers have been killed. I am personally leading an army to avenge them, but I don't know what the outcome would be. I've

long heard that you, divine elder, understand the mysterious workings of fate, so I hope to receive your guidance.”

“This is the will of heaven, not something that I can know,” Li Yi said.

But Liu Bei pressed him time and again for something, anything. So Li Yi asked for brush and paper, whereupon he drew 40-some pictures of troops, horses, and military equipment, and then tore them all up. Next, he drew a giant sleeping face up on the ground. Next to the giant, he drew a person digging a grave to bury him. At the top of this drawing, he wrote the character “Bai” (2), or white. All this done, he kowtowed respectfully and took his leave.

“He is a crazy old man,” a displeased Liu Bei said to his officials. “Pay him no mind.”

And then Liu Bei had all the drawings burned. So that whole “summon the recluse to cheer up our lord” plan didn’t work out so well, but it did get Liu Bei on his feet again, as he ordered his troops to resume their advance.

As the army prepared to march again, Zhang Fei’s son, Zhang Bao, came to see Liu Bei.

“The officer Wu (2) Ban (1) has arrived with the troops under our command,” Zhang Bao said. “I would like to volunteer to be the vanguard.”

Touched by the young man’s enthusiasm, Liu Bei granted his request and was just about to place the seal of command in Zhang Bao’s hands when suddenly another young man stepped forward and shouted, “Leave the seal for me!”

This was Guan Xing, Guan Yu’s second son.

“But I’ve already claimed the assignment,” Zhang Bao said.

“What skills do you have that makes you qualified for the job?” Guan Xing shot back.

“I have been learning how to fight since my youth, and my arrows never miss,” Zhang Bao boasted.

Well, this gave Liu Bei an idea.

“Let my worthy nephews show off their skills, and we will choose between them,” he said.

So Zhang Bao told the guards to erect a banner 100 paces away and draw bullseye on the banner. He then fired three straight arrows, all of which struck the bullseye, drawing praise from all those present.

Guan Xing, however, took out his bow and scoffed, “What’s the big deal about hitting the bullseye?”

As he spoke, he noticed a flock of geese flying overhead in a line.

“Watch me shoot the third goose,” Guan Xing said. He then took aim and fired, and sure enough, the poor third goose in the line dropped at the twang of the bowstring.

This impressive display of marksmanship drew loud cheers from all the officials and officers, but it also showed up Zhang Bao, who flashed his father’s temper. Zhang Bao hopped onto his horse, hoisted his father’s spear, and shouted to Guan Xing, “Do you dare to test your fighting skills against mine?!”

Guan Xing was not about to back down, so he grabbed a knife passed down from his father, climbed onto his horse, and declared, “I am as handy with my knife as you are with your spear!”

The two of them were just about to go at it, but Liu Bei broke up the ruckus.

“Behave yourselves!” Liu Bei shouted, whereupon point Guan Xing and Zhang Bao hurriedly dismounted, tossed aside their weapons, and bowed to apologize for their offense.

“Ever since I swore the oath of brotherhood with your fathers, even though we were of different family names, we have been as kinsmen,” Liu Bei told the two. “Now, you two are also brothers, so you should join together and be of one mind to avenge your fathers. Why do you then fight amongst

yourselves and neglect the greater duty?! Your fathers have only recently died, and you're already behaving thus. How bad will it get down the road?!"

Looking like a couple of little kids who just got scolded, Guan Xing and Zhang Bao bowed again in apology. Liu Bei then asked which one was older, and it turns out that Zhang Bao was the elder by a year, so Liu Bei ordered Guan Xing to honor Zhang Bao as his older brother. The two of them then snapped an arrow right then and there as a symbol of their oath, pledging to always help and protect each other.

This done, Liu Bei further averted squabbling among his nephews by making neither the vanguard. Instead, that honor went to the officer Wu Ban. Zhang Bao and Guan Xing were ordered to serve as Liu Bei's personal bodyguards. With that settled, the huge army got back on the move and marched toward Dongwu, ready to dish out some retribution.

Meanwhile in Dongwu, Fan (4) Jiang (1) and Zhang (1) Da (2), the two guys who assassinated Zhang Fei, went to see Sun Quan and told him what they had done. Upon hearing their story, Sun Quan took them in. He then said to his court, "Liu Bei has declared himself emperor and is personally leading a mighty army of more than 700,000 to attack us. What should we do?"

The officials in his court turned pale when they heard this, and they just looked at each other with trepidation. After a brief silence, one man stepped forth and said, "I have long enjoyed your lordship's benevolence without any way to repay you. I am willing to risk my life to go meet Liu Bei and explain to him the folly of his actions so that our two states may join together to bring Cao Pi to justice."

The man who had spoken was Zhuge Jin, the older brother of Zhuge Liang. So really, he was probably fairly certain Liu Bei wasn't going to cut off his head in a fit of anger, a fate all too common

to messengers between warring factions, as we have seen repeatedly in this novel. Sun Quan was delighted and sent Zhuge Jin on his way.

So it was now the eighth month of the year 221, and Liu Bei's army had arrived at Kui (2) Pass and set up camp at the city of Baidi (2,4), or the City of the White Emperor, while the vanguard had already crossed over the border and left the territory of the Riverlands. While camped out at Baidi (2,4), Liu Bei got word that Zhuge Jin was there to see him.

Now, Liu Bei initially didn't want to even let Zhuge Jin in the city, but the official Huang (2) Quan (2) said, "Zhuge Jin's younger brother is currently our prime minister, so he must be coming on important business. Why does your highness refuse him? Summon him in and see what he has to say. If it's something we can agree to, then do so; if not, then you can use him to send a message back to Sun Quan that we intend to make him answer for his crime."

So Liu Bei relented and summoned Zhuge Jin into the city. To see if Zhuge Jin has any luck in changing Liu Bei's mind, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!