

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 103.

Last time, Liu Bei was marching a huge army toward the Southlands, hell-bent on exacting a heavy dose of revenge against Sun Quan and company for the death of his two sworn brothers. Sun Quan sent the adviser Zhuge Jin, the elder brother of Zhuge Liang, to try to convince Liu Bei to call off the attack.

Zhuce Jin met Liu Bei at the city of Baidi (2,4). Upon being summoned, Zhuge Jin prostrated on the ground to pay his respects to the newly self-declared emperor Liu Bei.

“Sir, for what business have you come such a long way?” Liu Bei asked.

“My brother has long served your highness,” Zhuge Jin answered, “so I have risked my life to come explain what happened in Jing Province. First, when Lord Guan was at Jing Province, my master tried several times to form a marriage alliance with him, but Lord Guan refused. Then, after Lord Guan conquered the city of Xiangyang (1,2), Cao Cao sent one letter after another to my master, ordering him to attack Jing Province. My lord did not want to, but his general Lü Meng had a grudge against Lord Guan, so Lü Meng took matters into his own hands and launched an attack, causing a disaster. My master deeply regrets what happened, but the fault lies with Lü Meng, not my master. Now, Lü Meng is dead, and with him should our quarrel rest.

“Also, your wife Lady Sun has been longing to return to your side. My master has sent me as envoy to inform you that he is willing to return to you Lady Sun, the officers who defected from your ranks, and Jing Province so that we may form an everlasting alliance and work together to bring Cao Pi to justice for his crime of usurpation.”

So if you do the math, Sun Quan is offering a really good deal here. Without firing a single arrow, Liu Bei would get back all the territory that Guan Yu lost, the two guys who assassinated Zhang Fei,

and the wife he hadn't seen in almost a decade since Sun Quan smuggled her back to the Southlands. And yeah, Sun Quan is kind of passing the buck here, pinning all the blame on the dead guy Lü Meng, but hey that's what you get for being dead.

But Liu Bei angrily swatted down this juicy offer.

"You all killed my brothers. How dare you now come speak such deceitful words?!"

"Your highness," Zhuge Jin replied, "Allow me to discuss the matter of priorities: Your highness is the imperial uncle of the Han Dynasty, and the Han emperor has been deposed by Cao Pi. Yet, instead of trying to exterminate the usurper, you are compromising your imperial dignity for the sake of a brother who doesn't even share your family name. That is forsaking a sacred obligation for a lesser one. The northern Heartlands is the core of the realm, and the cities of Chang'an and Luoyang are the capitals of the Han. Yet, instead of setting your sights on those territories, you are coming after Jing Province. That is forsaking what is important to pursue what is petty. The people of the land all expected that once you ascended to the throne, you would surely revitalize the House of Han and reclaim its territories. Yet now, your highness is ignoring the Wei and attacking Dongwu. I must advise your highness against it."

But Liu Bei did not appreciate this little piece of unsolicited critique of his foreign policies.

"The murder of my brothers must be avenged!" he said angrily. "You want me to call off my army? Over my dead body! If not for your brother's sake, I would cut off your head! I will spare you for now, so that you may go back and tell Sun Quan to wash his neck for the executioner's blade!"

So ... that didn't go too well. Zhuge Jin had no choice but to scurry back to the Southlands to tell Sun Quan, umm yeah, we're still in BIG trouble. But while Zhuge Jin was gone on his mission, somebody at Sun Quan's court was badmouthing him behind his back. It was the senior adviser Zhang Zhao, who told Sun Quan:

“Zhuge Jin saw how strong the Shu army is, so he concocted an excuse to get away and defect to Shu. He will not be back.”

Sun Quan, however, was having none of that.

“There is a bond between Zhuge Jin and me that transcends life and death,” Sun Quan said. “I will not wrong him, and he will not wrong me. Back when his brother Zhuge Liang first came to Dongwu, I sent Zhuge Jin to try to convince him to stay and serve me. Zhuge Jin told me, ‘My brother is already serving Liu Bei, and his honor does not allow him to serve another. He could no more remain with us than I could go join them.’ Such words even the gods could hear. Zhuge Jin would never surrender to Shu. My sacred friendship with him stands proof against subversion by outsiders.”

Just as they were talking, word came that Zhuge Jin had indeed returned.

“What do you have to say now?” Sun Quan asked Zhang Zhao, who could say nothing and slinked away humiliated. But the good vibes didn’t last long for Sun Quan, as he soon learned from Zhuge Jin that Liu Bei was in no mood to talk peace.

“If that’s the case, then the Southlands are doomed!” Sun Quan said with alarm.

But just then, the adviser Zhao (4) Zi (1) offered up an idea.

“Your lordship can write a memorial and I will serve as your envoy to go see Cao Pi, the emperor of Wei. I will convince him to attack Liu Bei’s territory in Hanzhong (4,1), which will threaten the Shu army.”

“That is a great idea,” Sun Quan said. “But when you go to Wei, you must not make Dongwu look bad.”

“If I slip up in the slightest, I shall throw myself into the river., for I would not be able to face the talented men of the Southlands!” Zhao Zi (1) reassured him.

So Sun Quan did as Zhao Zi suggested and sent him off to the Wei capital of Xuchang, where he first met with various officials to make his case. The next morning at court, one of the top ministers, Jia Xu, informed Cao Pi that Zhao Zi was there to submit a memorial from Dongwu.

“He is here to ask for help with the Shu army,” Cao Pi said with a smile. He then summoned Zhao Zi, who prostrated on the floor and offered up the memorial.

Upon reading the memorial, Cao Pi asked Zhao Zi, “What sort of man is Lord Sun?”

“A man of understanding and insight, humanity and wisdom, valor and military judgment,” was Zhao Zi’s answer.

“Maybe you are exaggerating,” a skeptical Cao Pi said with a laugh.

“Not so,” Zhao Zi retorted. “My lord took into his confidence Lu (3) Su (4), a man of ordinary rank, thus showing his understanding. He raised up Lü Meng from the ranks of the army, thus showing his insight. He came into possession of your general Yu (1) Jin (4) but did not harm him, thus showing his humanity. He took Jing Province without bloodshed, thus showing his wisdom. He perches over the realm of the three rivers and holds the empire in awe, thus showing his valor. And now he submits to your majesty’s authority, thus showing his judgment. Is he then not a man of understanding and insight, humanity and wisdom, valor and judgment?”

“Is he also a man of learning?” Cao Pi asked.

“My master has a fleet of 10,000 ships and a million men under arms,” Zhao Zi said. “The men serving him are honest and able. He concerns himself with administrative order. Whatever leisure time he has, he spends it reading the classics and commentaries and studying historical records, extracting their main ideas. He never follows the trifling example of pedantic scholars.”

Cao Pi was not quite done with his questions, though. Next, he asked, “I intend to invade Dongwu. What do you think of that?”

“If your large kingdom has an invasion force, our smaller kingdom has strategies to counter the threat.”

“Does Dongwu fear Wei?”

“We have millions of soldiers and the great river as our moat. What reason do we have for fear?”

“How many people are there like you in Dongwu?”

“We have 80 or 90 men of insight, vision, and accomplishment. As for the likes of me, we have them by the cartloads, too numerous to count.”

Thoroughly impressed by Zhao Zi’s dignified answers, Cao Pi told him, “You, sir, embody the saying, ‘Wherever you send him around the land, he never fails his king’s command.’ ”

And so Cao Pi issued an edict and sent his Master of Ceremonies, Xing (2) Zhen (1), to deliver documents recognizing Sun Quan as the King of Wu. So up to this point, Sun Quan, even though he was the de facto ruler of the Southlands, had been nothing more than a general in the Han court. But now, he takes a big step up, at least in the eyes of the new court of Wei. But note that even now, Wu was still not an official kingdom unto itself. That would come later.

Now, one of Cao Pi’s senior advisers, Liu Ye (4), took issue with him accepting Sun Quan’s submission.

“Sun Quan is submitting to us out of fear of the Shu invasion,” Liu Ye (4) said to Cao Pi. “In my unworthy opinion, if Shu and Dongwu go to war, it is heaven’s will to destroy them. If your highness send a top general to lead several tens of thousands of troops to cross the river and launch a sneak attack from inside Dongwu’s territory, coupled with the external siege from Shu, Dongwu will fall within 10 days. Once Dongwu falls, Shu will be alone. You should make your move soon.”

But to this, Cao Pi said, “Sun Quan has submitted. To attack him now will discourage others from following his example. It is better to accept his surrender.”

Liu Ye now took issue with something else. “But even though Sun Quan is brave and capable, under the fallen Han, he was just a cavalry general and a minor lord. His offices were lowly and his influence limited, and yet the North stood in awe of him. If you make him a king, he would be a mere step below your highness. To put your faith in this fake surrender and to give him titles and fiefs is to give a tiger wings.”

“Not so,” Cao Pi disagreed. “I will not help Dongwu, nor will I help Shu. I will just watch them fight each other. If one kingdom falls and the other remains, then it would be easy to eliminate the survivor. My mind is made up; say no more.”

Back in Dongwu, Sun Quan was meeting with his court about how to counter the imminent attack from Shu when he got word that Cao Pi had sent an envoy to bestow a kingship upon him. As Sun Quan prepared to welcome the envoy, his adviser Gu (4) Yong (1) said to him, “Your lordship should declare yourself commander-in-chief and lord of the nine districts of the Southlands rather than accepting a title from the Emperor of Wei.

“Even the Supreme Ancestor once accepted a kingship from his rival Xiang (4) Yu (3),” Sun Quan said. “It was the right thing to do at the time. So why should I refuse this honor?”

And so Sun Quan led his court out of the city to welcome the envoy Xing (2) Zhen (1). Now, this Xing (2) Zhen (1) was feeling high and mighty, being an envoy from the larger kingdom, so he did not dismount from his carriage when it entered the city, which was a rather big faux pas. Sun Quan’s senior adviser, Zhang Zhao, was enraged and let Xing (2) Zhen (1) hear about it.

“There can be no disrespect in ceremonies or levity in protocols!” Zhang Zhao shouted sternly. “You, sir, think too highly of yourself! Do not think the Southlands is a kingdom without swords!”

This little lecture had the desired effect, and Xing Zhen quickly dismounted and exchanged greetings with Sun Quan and then they rode into the city side by side. Suddenly, a man behind the

carriage began to cry, shouting, "O Shame! To allow our lord to accept rank and title from another when we should rouse ourselves and lay down our lives to annex both the kingdoms of Shu and Wei!"

This was the general Xu (2) Sheng (4), and his words impressed Xing (2) Zhen (1), who sighed and said, "With such generals and ministers, the Southlands will not remain subjugated for long."

But that was a concern for another day. On this day, Sun Quan accepted his new title and received congratulations from his court. He then sent some nice gifts to Cao Pi to express his gratitude.

So being named king was nice and all, but it didn't do much to address the immediate concern of that giant army that Liu Bei was marching toward Dongwu. Seeing that Cao Pi was not going to be sending any military aid, Sun Quan now turned to his court and asked them for ideas. But he was met with silence, which prompted a lament from the newly crowned king.

"After Zhou Yu, there was Lu Su, and after Lu Su, there was Lü Meng. Now, Lü Meng is dead, and there is no one to help me share my trials."

That lament spurred someone to come forward. A young general who boldly stepped up, kneeled, and said, "Even though I am young, I have thoroughly studied military texts. I would like to ask for several tens of thousands of troops to repel the enemy."

This volunteer was Sun Huan (2). His father was originally not a member of the Sun family, but Sun Quan took a strong liking to him and bestowed upon him the honor of adopting the Sun family name. So this Sun Huan (2), the eldest of his father's four sons, was considered Sun Quan's nephew. He was well-versed in archery and horsemanship, often followed Sun Quan on campaign, and had earned numerous merits. For his service, he had been appointed commander of the military guard, and all this at the tender age of 25.

"What plan do you have for victory?" Sun Quan asked.

“I have two excellent generals,” Sun Huan (2) answered. “One is named Li (3) Yi (4), and the other is named Xie (4) Jing (1). They are both the equal of 10,000 men. I would like to borrow several tens of thousands of troops to go capture Liu Bei.”

“My nephew,” Sun Quan said, “though you are brave, you’re still young. You must have someone to help you.”

At that, the general Zhu (1) Ran (2) stepped forward and volunteered to tag along. So Sun Quan gave them 50,000 men, divided among the navy and the army. He appointed Sun Huan and Zhu Ran as co-commanders and sent them off that day. Scouts reported that Shu troops was camped at the location of Yidu (4,1), so Sun Huan led 25,000 troops to the border of Yidu (4,1) and set up three camps to repel the enemy.

On the other side of this conflict, the Shu vanguard, led by the general Wu Ban, had found nothing but smooth sailing since leaving the Riverlands. Wherever they went, the locals submitted without a fight, and they just cruised to Yidu (4,1). There, Wu Ban’s scouts discovered Sun Huan’s camps, and Wu Ban quickly sent word to Liu Bei, who had arrived in the city of Zigui (3,1).

“How dare that young punk stand in my way?!” Liu Bei said angrily.

His bodyguard and nephew Guan Xing said, “Since Sun Quan has appointed this punk as his commander, there is no need for your highness to send a top general. I am willing to go capture him.”

“I’ve been wanting to see your valor,” Liu Bei said as he commanded Guan Xing to go forth.

Just as Guan Xing was preparing to leave, however, his recently sworn brother Zhang Bao said, hey I want to go too.

“It would be perfect if you two went together,” Liu Bei said. “But you must be careful and not act rashly.”

So Guan Xing and Zhang Bao headed off to meet up with the vanguard and advance together. When Sun Huan heard that the enemy had arrived in force, he mobilized his troops to counter. The two sides lined up. On one side, Sun Huan stood under his banner, flanked by his two generals, Li (3) Yi (4) and Xie (4) Jing (1). On the other side, two generals emerged from the ranks, both clad in silver armor, riding white horses, and surrounded by white banners. One was Zhang Bao, hoisting his father's trademark spear. The other was Guan Xing, wielding his knife.

"Sun Huan, you little scamp!" Zhang Bao cursed. "Your death is at hand, and yet you still dare to resist heaven's ordained army?!"

But Sun Huan shot back, "Your father is already a headless ghost, and now you're dumb enough to come seek death, too?!"

And that was it for the talking. An enraged Zhang Bao rode straight for Sun Huan, but Sun Huan's general Xie (4) Jing (1) came forth to meet him. After the two fought for 30-some bouts, Xie Jing could not hold his own and turned and fled. Zhang Bao gave chase, but was picked up by Xie Jing's comrade, Li Yi. Zhang Bao and Li Yi then fought for 20-some bouts with neither gaining the upperhand.

While this was going on, an officer in the Dongwu army decided to get sneaky and take a cheap shot at Zhang Bao with an arrow. The shot struck Zhang Bao's horse in the head, and the horse staggered back toward its own lines in pain. But before it could reach its own lines, the horse crumbled, sending Zhang Bao to the ground as well.

Seeing his opportunity, Li Yi quickly rode forth, ready to bring his battle axe down on Zhang Bao's head. But just then came a flash of red, followed by Li Yi's head hitting the ground. This was courtesy of Guan Xing. When he saw Zhang Bao's horse heading back this way, Guan Xing was already riding out to back up his brother. When he saw Zhang Bao tumbling to the ground and Li Yi going in for the kill, Guan Xing let out a loud roar and cut down Li Yi to rescue Zhang Bao. The Shu troops seized on the momentum and charged, putting Sun Huan to flight before both sides called it a day.

The next day, Sun Huan came back to pick another fight, and Zhang Bao and Guan Xing again went out to answer the call. This time, Guan Xing rode out to challenge Sun Huan to combat, and Sun Huan answered the challenge. But after 30-some bouts, Sun Huan began to falter and fell back into his own lines in defeat. Guan Xing and Zhang Bao used the opportunity to charge into Sun Huan's camps and wreak havoc, while their comrade Wu Ban, along with his lieutenant Zhang (1) Nan (2), led troops in support.

With a full head of steam, Zhang Bao dove into the Dongwu ranks. There, he ran into Sun Huan's remaining general, Xie Jing, and Zhang Bao made short work of him, stabbing him to death with one thrust of his spear and then scattering the Dongwu troops.

Having claimed victory again, the Shu army returned to camp. But there, they discovered that Guan Xing was nowhere to be found.

"If any harm comes to brother Guan, I cannot go on alone!" an alarmed Zhang Bao said. And so he wasted no time in going out to search for Guan Xing. After a few miles, he saw Guan Xing coming this way, with his knife in one hand and an enemy officer in the other.

"Who is that?" Zhang Bao asked.

"I ran into this foe in the melee," Guan Xing said with a smile, "so I captured him alive."

Zhang Bao recognized the prisoner as the Dongwu officer who took the cheap shot at him the previous day. Delighted, the two brothers returned to camp, where they beheaded their prisoner and offered his blood as a sacrifice to Zhang Bao's slain horse. They then sent word of their victory to Liu Bei.

While the Shu army was busy with their blood sacrifices and equine-honoring ceremonies, their enemy Sun Huan found himself in a tight spot after losing so many of his officers and soldiers. So he sent word back to Dongwu asking for help.

Meanwhile, in the Shu camp, the officers Zhang (1) Nan (2) and Feng (2) Xi (2) suggested to their commander Wu Ban that they should stage a night raid while Dongwu was still licking its wounds.

“Even though Sun Huan has suffered many casualties, the other Dongwu commander Zhu Ran is leading the navy, which is currently camped out on the river and has not suffered any losses,” Wu Ban said. “If we go raid their camp and their navy comes ashore to cut off our return path, what then?”

“That’s easy,” Zhang Nan said. “We can have General Guan and General Zhang each lead 5,000 troops and hide in the canyon. If Zhu Ran comes to help, they can attack, and victory will be assured.”

Wu Ban liked that idea, but he also added one further twist.

“Let’s first send a soldier to pretend to defect and have him go tell Zhu Ran that we are planning to raid the Dongwu camp. That way, when he sees fire in his camp, he will no doubt go help, and then we can surprise him and secure victory.”

So on the river, aboard his flagship, Zhu Ran was prepping to go back up Sun Huan after hearing about his losses. Just then, his sentries brought on board a few foot soldiers who were defecting from Shu.

“We are from the unit commanded by Feng (2) Xi (2),” the defectors told Zhu Ran. “He is unjust in his rewards and punishments, so we have come to surrender and to bring you secret intel.”

“What is this intel?” Zhu Ran asked.

“Tonight, Feng (2) Xi (2) is going to raid General Sun’s camp, and he will use fire as the signal.”

When he heard this, Zhu Ran immediately dispatched a messenger to warn Sun Huan, but unbeknownst to him, that messenger never made it to Sun Huan. Instead, he was ambushed and killed by Guan Xing along the way.

Meanwhile, Zhu Ran was intending to personally go back up Sun Huan, but his lieutenant Cui advised against it.

“We must not put too much stock in the word of a lowly soldier,” the lieutenant said. “If something goes wrong, then both the army and the navy will be doomed. General, you should stay and secure the naval camp. I will go in your stead.”

Zhu Ran agreed and sent his lieutenant off with 10,000 men.

When night fell, the Shu officers Feng (2) Xi (2), Zhang Nan, and Wu Ban led three battalions and stormed into Sun Huan’s camp, setting it on fire and putting its occupants to flight. While this was going on, Zhu Ran’s lieutenant was en route to Sun Huan’s camp. He got word that uh oh, the camp was already on fire, so he hurried his troops along. But as soon as he went around a hill, the canyon trembled with the sound of drums as Guan Xing and Zhang Bao and 10,000 Shu soldiers stormed out from left and right. Zhu Ran’s lieutenant was stunned and tried to escape, but it was too late. He ran into Zhang Bao, who took him alive after just one bout.

When Zhu Ran got word of the dire situation, he ordered his fleet to fall back about 20 miles. Meanwhile on land, Sun Huan was looking for a place to run to after his camp went up in flames. Somebody suggested that they flee north to Yiling (2,2), and so off they went. They had barely entered the city and locked the gates behind them when the Shu troops showed up and surrounded the city, trapping Sun Huan inside.

After the battle, Guan Xing and Zhang Bao brought their prisoner to see Liu Bei. Liu Bei was delighted and ordered his men to execute the man and reward the army. With this string of victories,

word of the might of the Shu forces quickly spread, sending chills through all the officers of the Southlands.

When he received the plea for help from Sun Huan, Sun Quan was stunned and immediately assembled his court to pick their brains.

“Sun Huan is trapped inside Yiling (2,2), and Zhu Ran has been defeated on the river,” Sun Quan said. “The Shu troops are unstoppable. What should we do?”

To this, the senior adviser Zhang Zhao said, “Even though many of our generals have died, we still have more than a dozen, so there is no need to fear Liu Bei. We can appoint Han Dang as the commander, Zhou Tai as his second, Pan Zhang as the vanguard, and Ling Tong to bring up the rear, and Gan Ning as the backup, and mobilize 100,000 troops to repel the enemy.”

So it's worth pointing out here that even in this dire hour, the most that Sun Quan could muster was 100,000 men, which was 1/7th of what Liu Bei was bringing. But still, you go with what you've got. To see how round 2 between Liu Bei and Sun Quan will pan out, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!