

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 104.

Last time, the forces of Liu Bei and Sun Quan clashed, and Liu Bei won an easy victory, putting Sun Quan's commander and kinsman Sun Huan (2) to flight and then trapping him inside the city of Yiling (2,2). Shaken, but not beaten, Sun Quan then marched out the big guns, sending a relief force of 100,000 and many of his best generals. One of those generals, Gan Ning, one of the Southlands' top warriors, was suffering from dysentery at the moment, but he soldiered on and headed out with the relief force.

Meanwhile, Liu Bei was putting the might of his army on full display. He built a string of 40-some camps, running from the location of Jianping (4,2) all the way to the borders of the city of Yiling (2,2), where the defeated Dongwu commander Sun Huan was presently holed up. This impressive line of camps covered 200-some miles.

Sitting inside one of his camps, Liu Bei, thinking about all the recent accomplishments by his two young nephews Guan Xing and Zhang Bao, could not help but sigh.

"[Sigh] All the generals who followed me back in the day are now old and useless. But with such heroes as my two nephews, what need have I to be concerned with Sun Quan?"

Just then, word came that Dongwu was sending a relief force led by the generals Han Dang and Zhou Tai. Liu Bei was just about to send a general to go face them when his attendants told him, "The old general Huang Zhong has gone off with a few men to defect to Dongwu."

But to this, Liu Bei simply smiled and said, "General Huang is no traitor. I misspoke and said that old people were useless. General Huang has never been one to give in to his age, so he must have gone off to the front."

Liu Bei then summoned Guan Xing and Zhang Bao and told them, "Something is bound to happen to General Huang this time. Do not shirk hardship; please go help him. As soon as he achieves some small victory, bring him back. Keep him safe."

Guan Xing and Zhang Bao accepted their orders, took their leave, and went to catch up to Huang Zhong. So let us catch up to Huang Zhong as well. Just as Liu Bei suspected, the old war horse overheard Liu Bei talking about how the old generals were all useless, and so he stormed off in a huff with just five or six personal guards. He headed straight for the camp at Yiling, where he was greeted by the officers Wu Ban, Zhang (1) Nan (2), and Feng (2) Xi (2), and they asked him what he was doing there.

"I have accomplished much since joining his highness at the city of Changsha (2,1)," Huang Zhong said. "Even though I am past 70, I can still eat plenty of meat. My arms can still wield a strong bow, and I can still ride a fast horse. I'm not old yet. Yesterday, his highness was talking about how we are all old and useless, so I have come to fight against Dongwu. Watch me cut down their generals, and then tell me if I'm old!"

And yeah, that was a pretty old-man thing to say, but just then word came that the Dongwu relief force was approaching, so Huang Zhong immediately hopped on his horse. The other officers tried to talk him out of it, but Huang Zhong basically told them "I was cutting off heads and taking names while you guys were still wearing split-bottom pants," and then rode off. Wu Ban quickly ordered Feng Xi to lead some troops to back him up.

When the two sides met up, Huang Zhong challenged the Dongwu vanguard general Pan Zhang for combat. Pan Zhang first sent out a lieutenant. This lieutenant scoffed at Huang Zhong's age and rode out to meet him. But yeah, Huang Zhong may be old, but this other guy is not even getting his

name mentioned in the podcast, so what does that tell you? After less than three bouts, the lieutenant lay dead on the ground.

Enraged at his lieutenant's death, Pan Zhang now personally came to fight Huang Zhong, wielding the Green Dragon Saber that he had claimed for himself after Guan Yu was killed. The two fought for a while, and even though neither had the upperhand, Huang Zhong was throwing all his might at Pan Zhang, and Pan Zhang figured he was not going to be able to hold out much longer, so he turned and ran. Huang Zhong gave chase for a bit and returned victorious.

On his way back, Huang Zhong ran into Guan Xing and Zhang Bao.

"His highness sent us to assist you, old general," Guan Xing said. "Since you have already won, let's return to camp at once."

Huang Zhong, however, was just getting started, and he was in no mood to get off the front lines until he had made his point. The next day, Pan Zhang returned to pick a fight, and Huang Zhong quickly hopped on his horse to go meet him. Guan Xing and Zhang Bao offered to help, but Huang Zhong said no. The vanguard general Wu Ban then offered to help, and Huang Zhong said no again. Instead, he only took 5,000 soldiers with him.

After Huang Zhong and Pan Zhang traded a few blows, Pan Zhang turned and fled again. Huang Zhong spurred on his horse in pursuit, shouting all the while, "Scoundrel, stop! I shall avenge Lord Guan!"

The chase went on for about 10 miles when suddenly, loud cries rose up from all around and Dongwu troops sprang out of hiding, led by the generals Zhou Tai, Han Dang, Pan Zhang, and Ling Tong. Huang Zhong found himself trapped in the middle of this ambush. Just then, a strong wind kicked up, and Huang Zhong decided it was best to fall back. But it was too late. Another squad of Dongwu troops showed up on a hillside. Its leader was Ma Zhong, who was the officer that ambushed

and captured Guan Yu. Ma Zhong now let fly an arrow, and it struck Huang Zhong in the armpit, almost knocking him off his horse.

Seeing Huang Zhong wounded, the Dongwu troops closed in for the kill. But just then loud cries rose up from behind as two battalions swept in, scattering the Dongwu troops and rescuing Huang Zhong. These forces were led by Guan Xing and Zhang Bao, who then escorted Huang Zhong back to the royal camp.

And now, Huang Zhong's age finally caught up with him. Lacking the vigor of a younger man, he suffered greatly from the arrow wound, and soon his condition became critical, prompting a personal visit from Liu Bei.

Stroking Huang Zhong's back, Liu Bei lamented, "It was my fault that you were wounded!"

"Your servant is but a simple warrior," Huang Zhong replied. "I was fortunate to meet your highness. I am 75 years old. I've lived long enough. I hope your highness will take care of your health so that you may set your sights on the Heartlands!"

After those words, Huang Zhong slipped into unconsciousness. By nightfall, the old war horse was gone.

So yet another oldtimer, and yet another of Liu Bei's major generals, has bitten the dust. Huang Zhong will be remembered as the guy who played a key role in helping Liu Bei kick Cao Cao out of Hanzhong and claim the region for himself. Let's send him out with a poem:

Huang Zhong, veteran general par excellence.

Won vast renown in the Riverlands campaign.

He bore again his ringed and gilded mail;

His sturdy hands could strain a bow of steel.

Virile in war, he kept the north in fear,  
His prodigies subdued the western sphere.  
Though at the end his head was white as hoar,  
He showed himself a hero all the more.

Seeing Huang Zhong expire, Liu Bei fell into melancholy once again. He had a coffin prepared and sent the old general back to Chengdu for burial.

“Of the five Tiger Generals, three have been lost,” Liu Bei lamented. “It pains me that I still have not been able to avenge them!”

With the vengeance tab growing ever longer, Liu Bei assembled his officers, divided his troops into eight forces, and moved them forward on land and water. The adviser Huang Quan (2) was put in charge of the navy, while Liu Bei personally commanded the land forces. We are now in the second month of the year 222, so Liu Bei’s punitive campaign has been going on for about six months.

When Han Dang and Zhou Tai, the commanders of the Dongwu relief force, heard that Liu Bei was on the move, they led their troops to meet him. After the two sides lined up, Han Dang and Zhou Tai watched as the Shu banners parted and Liu Bei rode out to the front under a golden canopy, surrounded by imperial regalia.

“Your highness is the lord of Shu, why do you risk your person so lightly?” Han Dang shouted to Liu Bei. “If something should go wrong, it would be too late for regrets!”

Waving his whip, Liu Bei shouted back, “You dogs of Dongwu killed my brothers! I swear that I shall not share this heaven and earth with you!”

Han Dang turned and asked which of his officers wanted to go take a run at the enemy. A lieutenant rode out with spear in hand. Behind Liu Bei came Zhang Bao, wielding his own spear and letting out a mighty roar. That roar alone was enough to drain the courage from his enemy’s heart,

and the Dongwu lieutenant decided to tuck tail and run. At the same time, the younger brother of the Dongwu commander Zhou Tai rode out to his comrade's aid, but Guan Xing rode out and picked him up. A moment later, Zhang Bao let out another roar and stabbed his prey off his horse. The sight of that shocked Zhou Tai's little brother, and Guan Xing took advantage of his momentary lapse to cut him down as well.

Guan Xing and Zhang Bao now rode toward Han Dang and Zhou Tai. The two Dongwu commanders decided they did not want any piece of that, so they quickly fell back into their own lines. Seeing this, Liu Bei said, "Tigers beget tigers!" And with a wave of his whip, he directed his army forward. All eight battalions of Shu troops poured into the enemy, slaughtering them until the ground was littered with the bodies of Dongwu soldiers, and rivers of their blood flowed.

While this slaughter was going on, the Dongwu general Gan Ning was recovering from dysentery in his boat. When heard that the enemy was approaching, he hurriedly mounted his horse, just in time to encounter a squad of "barbarian" soldiers that Liu Bei had borrowed from the Qiang (1) people. Everyone in this group had their hair down and were barefoot, and they wielded bows, crossbows, spears, swords, shields, and battle axes. They were led by their king, Sha (1) Moke (2,1), who had a bloodshot complexion and bulging green eyes. He wielded a steel-spiked mace and wore two bows around his waist.

Intimidated by the striking appearance and overwhelming numbers of his foes, Gan Ning did not dare to fight them and instead turned and ran, but not before Sha (1) Moke (2,1) shot an arrow into his head. Gan Ning fled with the arrow with the arrow lodged in his skull. After a while, Gan Ning could go no farther, and he sat under a large tree and died. And to make things really spooky, hundreds of crows flew down from this tree and surrounded his corpse. Later, when Sun Quan heard

about Gan Ning's death, he was grief-stricken and buried him with honors while erecting a temple to him.

Meanwhile, Liu Bei seized the momentum of his victory and gave chase until he had taken the location of Xiaoting (1,2). With Dongwu troops scattered and fleeing, Liu Bei decided to call it a day, but then he realized that he couldn't find Guan Xing. And if you're keeping track, this is the second time on this campaign that Guan Xing had gone missing after a battle, so Liu Bei quickly sent Zhang Bao out to look for his brother.

So where did Guan Xing run off to this time? Well, he had charged into the Dongwu lines, where he ran into the general Pan Zhang. Remember that Pan Zhang was one of those guys within six degrees of being responsible for Guan Yu's death, so he was on Liu Bei's Most Wanted list, and definitely on Guan Xing's hit list. Guan Xing pursued Pan Zhang into a canyon, but then lost sight of him.

Guan Xing searched around for a while without success. By now, it was getting dark, and Guan Xing had gotten lost. Fortunately for him, the moon and the stars were pretty bright on this particular night, so he was able to see a little bit better as he continued his pursuit.

Around 9 o'clock that night, Guan Xing came upon a farmhouse and knocked. An old man came out to ask who he was.

"I am an officer," Guan Xing said. "I got lost and stumbled here. Might I beg you for a bowl of rice to sate my hunger?"

The old man said sure and led Guan Xing inside. The main hall was lit by bright candles. In the candlelight, Guan Xing noticed a painting hanging on the wall. It was a painting of his father, Guan Yu! The sight of his father's visage brought Guan Xing to tears as he prostrated in front of the painting.

"General, why are you crying?" the old man asked.

“That is my father!” Guan Xing replied.

When the old man heard, he, too, fell to his knees.

“Why do you worship my father?” Guan Xing inquired.

“Everyone in this area worships him,” the old man answered. “When your father was alive, we all revered him, and even more so now that he is a god. I just hope the Shu army will avenge him soon. It is our great fortune to have you here.”

The old man then treated Guan Xing to food and wine while giving his horse some hay.

Around midnight came another knock on the door. The old man went out to see who it was, and this turned out to be Pan Zhang, who was also looking for a place to spend the night. As soon as Pan Zhang set foot inside the hall, Guan Xing spotted his nemesis, grabbed his sword, and shouted, “Scoundrel! Stop where you are!”

Caught off guard, Pan Zhang turned and ran out the door, but suddenly standing in his path was a man with a face like a red date, the eyes of a phoenix, eyebrows like silkworms, and a long, beautiful beard, clad in a green robe and a golden suit of armor. As this figure approached with hand on sword, Pan Zhang recognized who it was. This was Guan Yu! Or I guess the spirit of Guan Yu.

Terrified by the appearance of his victim’s ghost, Pan Zhang let out a loud cry and was just about to turn around and run in the other direction. But by now, Guan Xing had caught up to him, and where Guan Xing’s sword fell, so did Pan Zhang. So I guess accepting karma doesn’t preclude Guan Yu from coming back from the dead to help his son hunt down one of his enemies.

Having slayed his foe, Guan Xing now cut out Pan Zhang’s heart and drained his blood, offering both up to the altar of Guan Yu so that his father’s murderous thirst for vengeance from beyond the grave could be temporarily sated. What’s more, Guan Xing now reclaimed his father’s Green Dragon Saber, which Pan Zhang had been using. He then cut off Pan Zhang’s head and hanged it under the



neck of Pan Zhang's horse. This bloody deed done, Guan Xing took his leave and headed back toward camp on Pan Zhang's horse, while the old man was left to drag Pan Zhang's body out back for cremation and to scrub all the blood off his floor.

Guan Xing had not gone far when he caught the sound of people and horses. Soon, a squad of enemy soldiers arrived on the scene, led by the officer Ma Zhong. Recognizing his commander's head hanging from Guan Xing's horse, and seeing Guan Xing wielding the Green Dragon Saber, Ma Zhong was incensed and rode straight toward Guan Xing. For his part, Guan Xing was all too happy to take a few hacks at the guy directly responsible for capturing his father. But this wasn't a one-on-one battle. The 300-some men under Ma Zhong's command surrounded Guan Xing, and soon he was in dire straits.

Just then, an army arrived from the northwest, led by Zhang Bao. The sight of this relief force was enough to send Ma Zhong scurrying. Guan Xing and Zhang Bao gave chase for a while and ran smack into Dongwu forces led by two more of the people on their Most Wanted list -- Fu (4) Shiren (4,2) and Mi (2) Fang (1) -- the two guys who betrayed Guan Yu and surrendered to Dongwu. The two sides scrummed for a while before Guan Xing and Zhang Bao decided to retreat since they were outnumbered.

Upon returning to camp at Xiaoting (1,2), Guan Xing and Zhang Bao showed Liu Bei the head of Pan Zhang and recounted how they obtained it. Liu Bei was amazed by the story and rewarded his troops for their victory the day before.

On the other side, Ma Zhong returned to the Dongwu camp to tell the commanders Han Dang and Zhou Tai that uh, Pan Zhang was now missing a head, a heart, and few pints of blood. They then

regrouped their tattered forces and set up their defenses. Countless of their soldiers had been wounded in the previous day's battle, and it was a truly pitiful sight.

Ma Zhong was assigned to a spit of land. In his detachment were the defectors Fu Shiren and Mi Fang. That night, around midnight, they could hear the wounded and demoralized soldiers weeping nonstop. But even more disturbing to Mi Fang were some of the idle chit chat going on among some of the men, which went something like this:

"We all used to be in the army of Jing Province. But then Lü Meng's scheme cost our general his life. Now, the imperial uncle is personally waging this war. Dongwu is done for; it's just a matter of time. The people I despise most are that Mi Fang and Fu Shiren. Why don't we kill those two traitors and go to the Shu camp and surrender? That would be a great service."

And then another man chimed in and said, "Don't be in a rush. Wait for an opportunity before we make our move."

Well, that's ... not good if you're Mi Fang. So Mi Fang quickly huddled with Fu Shiren and said, "The loyalty of the troops is swaying, and our lives are at risk. Ma Zhong is the one person that the Lord of Shu despises. Why don't we kill him and bring his head to the Lord of Shu and tell him that, 'We had no choice but to surrender to Dongwu. But when we heard that your highness was coming, we came to atone for our offense.' "

"No," Fu Shiren said. "If we go, we'll meet with calamity."

"Look, the Lord of Shu is generous, humane, and virtuous," Mi Fang said. "Besides, his heir apparent is my nephew. On account of me being a relative, he will not harm me."

This was enough to convince Fu Shiren, though I'm not sure why, since hey, Mi Fang might be related to Liu Bei, but Fu Shiren sure wasn't. But in any case, they settled on a plan and prepped their horses first. Around midnight, they sneaked into Ma Zhong's tent and made quick work of him. They

then cut off his head and rode toward Xiaoting with a few dozen personal guards. They ran into Liu Bei's pickets, who brought them to see the officers Zhang Nan and Feng Xi, and the two double-defectors explained what they were doing there.

The next day, Mi Fang and Fu Shiren were brought to the royal camp to see Liu Bei, whereupon they offered up Ma Zhong's head and wept.

"We really did not have any intention to betray you," they told Liu Bei. "But that Lü Meng deceived us, telling us that Lord Guan was already dead to trick us into opening our city gates. We had no choice but to surrender. But when we heard that your highness was coming, we killed this scoundrel to help you gain revenge. Please, forgive us!"

Forgive you? Forgive you?! Ha, that's a laugh.

"I set out from Chengdu long ago," Liu Bei said angrily. "Why did you not come to me earlier? It's only now that your situation is dire that you have come to try to save yourselves with your deceitful words! If I spare you, how can I face Lord Guan in the afterlife?!"

Welp, that was that. So the whole thing just blew up in the traitors' faces. Liu Bei now ordered Guan Xing to erect an altar to Guan Yu inside the royal tent. Liu Bei personally offered up Ma Zhong's head as a sacrifice. He then ordered Guan Xing to strip the two traitors and force them to kneel in front of the altar. Yeah, you can see where this is going. Guan Xing then proceeded to cut the two traitors open with a blade. I bet ghost Guan Yu was stroking his beautiful ghost beard with satisfaction.

At the conclusion of this gruesome ceremony, Zhang Bao suddenly fell to his knees in front of Liu Bei and wept.

"My uncle Guan Yu's enemies have all been exterminated, but when will I be able to avenge my father?!"

“Dear nephew, do not worry,” Liu Bei consoled him. “I shall flatten the Southlands, wipe out the dogs of Dongwu, capture the two traitors, and hand them over to you so that you may deal with them personally as an offering to your father.”

Satisfied at this promise of his own blood ceremony, Zhang Bao offered his teary gratitude and took his leave.

So now, after another round of resounding victories, Liu Bei was riding high, and the people of the Southlands were trembling in fear of his wrath, so much so that the days and nights were filled with sounds of people crying, dreading their impending doom. Han Dang and Zhou Tai informed Sun Quan of what happened to Ma Zhong, as well as his assassins. Concerned at Liu Bei’s determination to basically salt the earth of the Southlands, Sun Quan asked his staff for ideas.

The adviser Bu (4) Zhi (4) said, “The people that the Lord of Shu despises are Lü Meng, Pan Zhang, Ma Zhong, Mi Fang, and Fu Shiren. They’re all dead now. The only two left are Fan (4) Jiang (1) and Zhang (1) Da (2). They’re here in Dongwu right now. Why not arrest them and send them, along with Zhang Fei’s head, back to Liu Bei. Also, give him back Jing Province and Lady Sun. Then write him to seek a truce and renew our alliance to exterminate the Wei. That will send the Shu army away.”

So basically Bu Zhi was suggesting almost complete capitulation, but Sun Quan saw no other options, so he had a box made from fragrant wood for Zhang Fei’s head. He then had Zhang Fei’s two assassins arrested, bound, and thrown into prisoner carts. This done, he dispatched an envoy to bring these gifts, along with a letter, to Liu Bei’s camp.

At this time, Liu Bei was just about get back on the offensive when he heard that Dongwu had sent an envoy with Zhang Fei’s head and his assassins. Putting his hands to his head, Liu Bei said, “This is a gift from heaven, and the doing of brother Zhang’s spirit!”

So now it was Zhang Bao's turn to erect an altar for his father. Opening the box, Liu Bei saw that Zhang Fei's face still had not lost its color, and he began to weep. Remember here that Zhang Fei was assassinated about six months ago, so you do have to wonder about the actual state of his head. Also, where did Sun Quan keep a severed head for six months without the smell getting really bad?

And you can guess what happened next. Wielding a sharp blade, Zhang Bao personally executed the two assassins via the dreaded literal death by a thousand cuts, offering all the little bits and pieces to his father.

So Liu Bei has now killed most, if not all, the main players involved in the death of his brothers by bloody, gruesome means. And on top of that, Sun Quan is offering him back his wife, his territory, and an offer of everlasting friendship. So ... are we cool now? Please say we're cool now.

To see if we're cool now, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!