

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Podcast. This is episode 135.

Last time, the kingdom of Shu was in trouble. Its indispensable man, Zhuge Liang, had died. And what's more, its most fierce warrior, the general Wei Yan, had started a rebellion. But when Wei Yan confronted a detachment of the Shu army, most of his own men quickly deserted, since they were in no mood to fight their own countrymen. They all just wanted to go home. Wei Yan tried yelling at them, and he tried chasing them, and then he tried killing a few of them. But nothing worked, and his army dissipated.

But there was one unit that did not budge. It was the 300 men under the command of the general Ma Dai, who had been serving in Wei Yan's unit when Wei Yan decided to rebel.

"Sir," Wei Yan said to Ma Dai, "if you are sincere about helping me, then when I succeed, I will not forget you."

Ma Dai said yeah ok, that sounds good. By this time, the Shu forces that confronted them had retreated, so the two of them regrouped what was left of their army and tried to figure out their next move.

"How about we go serve the kingdom of Wei?" Wei Yan suggested.

"General, that is not a good idea," Ma Dai said. "Why should a true man subjugate himself to the service of another instead of seeking his own empire? In my view, you possess valor and cunning. Who in the Riverlands would dare to oppose you? I swear that I shall join you. Let's first take Hanzhong, and then invade the Riverlands."

Wei Yan was delighted with this idea, so they led their forces toward Nanzheng (2,4), the key city in the region of Hanzhong. Now Nanzheng was where the main Shu army was garrisoned, led by the senior adviser Yang Yi and the general Jiang Wei. When they saw Wei Yan's forces approaching with a head of steam, Jiang Wei quickly ordered the drawbridge be pulled up.

Wei Yan and Ma Dai now shouted from the foot of the city, demanding that the troops inside surrender. Jiang Wei asked Yang Yi, "Wei Yan is ferocious, and now he has Ma Dai helping him. Even though they don't have a lot of men, how should we fend them off?"

Yang Yi replied, "Before his excellency died, he left me a silk pouch and said that if Wei Yan rebels, I am to open the pouch when we are facing him on the field of battle, and a scheme to kill Wei Yan will present itself. We should look at it now."

So he took out the pouch. On the outside, it said, "Do not open until you are on your horse, across from Wei Yan on the field of battle."

That was good enough for Jiang Wei.

"Since his excellency had left specific instructions, you should hold on to the pouch for now," he told Yang Yi. "I will lead our troops outside and line up for battle. Then you can come out."

So Jiang Wei donned his armor, grabbed his spear, and led 3,000 men outside. Backed by rolling drums, they lined up in battle formation. Jiang Wei sat atop his horse under the main banner and shouted, "Wei Yan you traitor! The prime minister treated you well. Why are you rebelling?"

Gripping his saber and his reins, Wei Yan shouted back, "This has nothing to do with you! Tell Yang Yi to come out!"

During this exchange, Yang Yi was hiding out behind the main banner. He now opened the pouch and read the message inside. A moment later, he rode out from his lines, pointed a finger at Wei Yan, and laughed.

"When the prime minister was alive, he always knew you would rebel one day, so he told me to be prepared. And now, you have proven him correct. If you have the courage to shout, "Who dares to kill me" three times from your saddle, then you are a real man, and I will hand over Hanzhong to you."

Wei Yan laughed back and said, “Yang Yi, you scoundrel. Listen up! When Zhuge Liang was alive, I did fear him a little bit. But now that he is dead, who in the empire dares to face me? I would have no problem shouting those words 30,000 times, much less three!”

So, Wei Yan held his saber and gripped his reins. Then, from his saddle, he let out a mighty roar.

“Who dares to kill me?!”

“I do!”

A voice rang out from behind Wei Yan before he had finished speaking, and in the blink of an eye, a saber flashed, and something hit the ground with a thud. That something was Wei Yan’s lifeless body, and the man who had slain him was the general Ma Dai, his supposed comrade.

So, if you back up a couple episodes to when Zhuge Liang was lying on his deathbed, he was handing out instructions to a bunch of people. One of those people was Ma Dai. We didn’t know at the time what he had told Ma Dai, but now, we do. The message in the silk pouch told Yang Yi that Ma Dai was a plant, so Yang Yi carried out the scheme as instructed, and sure enough, Zhuge Liang had reached from beyond the grave to take Wei Yan with him.

Now, I should pause here and say that Wei Yan is a character who may have gotten a bit of a raw deal with his treatment in the novel. It was planted way back in the novel that he was always a traitor at heart, a fact that Zhuge Liang saw from the beginning. Suffice it to say, real history was a little more complicated. I’ll do a short supplemental episode about that at some point.

But for now, let’s move on to the aftermath. So in the last episode, the Shu emperor had sent a court official to go pretend to make peace between Wei Yan and Yang Yi, so as to make Wei Yan complacent. But by the time this guy arrived at the city of Nanzheng (2,4), Wei Yan was already dead, and the Shu army was made whole once more. Yang Yi now sent an urgent dispatch to the emperor,

telling him what happened. The emperor Liu Shan decreed that because of the service that Wei Yan had rendered to the state, he would receive a funeral.

Yang Yi and company now returned to the capital Chengdu with Zhuge Liang's coffin. Liu Shan and all the court officials donned mourning clothes and went 7 miles outside the city to receive the coffin. Liu Shan wailed out loud, and everyone else, from the highest ministers to the lowliest peasants, also did the same. Their wails were so loud that they shook the ground. Liu Shan now ordered that the coffin be brought into the city and put in state at Zhuge Liang's residence, where Zhuge Liang's son kept watch.

When Liu Shan returned to court, Yang Yi now came to see him. Yang Yi had himself bound and asked to be punished for his offense. Of course, this was all just an act, since quite the opposite, Liu Shan was going to reward him for putting down Wei Yan's little uprising and getting the army back home in one piece. For his good work carrying out the instructions Zhuge Liang had left him, Yang Yi was promoted to Director General of the Center. Ma Dai, for killing Wei Yan while his back was turned, got to assume Wei Yan's former position.

Next, Yang Yi offered up Zhuge Liang's final memorial to the emperor, and his words reduced Liu Shan to tears and more loud wailing. Liu Shan now ordered a plot of land to be chosen for Zhuge Liang's final resting place, but, the senior official Fei (4) Yi (1) said, "Before he died, his excellency left instructions that he was to be buried on Dingjun (4,1) Mountain. He also said that we must not waste bricks or stones to construct his grave, and that there should be no sacrificial items."

Liu Shan honored those last wishes. In the 10th month of the year 234, Liu Shan personally escorted Zhuge Liang's coffin to Dingjun (4,1) Mountain for burial. Liu Shan decreed that Zhuge Liang was to be posthumously named the Marquis of Zhongwu (1,3), or translated as the Loyal and Martial Marquis. A temple in his honor was to be constructed at Mianyang (3,2) and constantly kept furnished with sacrifices.

And of course, we can't say farewell to Zhuge Liang without a couple poems. For this occasion, we have two from the great Tang Dynasty poet Du (4) Fu (3), who has just made a career out of serenading Zhuge Liang. The first one goes:

His Excellency's shrine, where would it be found?
Outside Chengdu's walls, where cypresses abound.
Along the steps thereto new grass do spring,
Veiled by the leaves, the orioles do sing.
Thrice to him Liu Bei came, keen to rule the realm.
Two generations Zhuge Liang did serve -- that steady old heart.
To die, his host afield, the victory herald yet to come --
Weep, O heroes! Drench your lapel, now and evermore.

And here's the second poem:

Zhuge's mighty name hangs proudly on the upper sphere;
Stern and grand, the royal liege man's likeness claims respect.
In the tri-part world below he spun deep schemes.
In the age-old realm of cloud, one single plume unites our gaze.
Who rank his peers? Yi (1) Yin (3) and Jiang (1) Ziya;
In command he was more sure than Xiao (1) He (2) or Cao (2) Shen (1).
But the stars had turned; he could not save the Han's reign.
Toiling to the end, body broken, but will unbroke.

After the funeral, Liu Shan returned to the capital, whereupon a nasty surprise awaited him. His officials informed him, "A message has arrived from the border. The kingdom of Wu has sent the officer Quan (2) Cong (2) at the head of tens of thousands of troops, and they are garrisoned on the border with no indication of their intentions."

Well, that's not good. What should we do? Let's ask Zhuge Liang ... oh right. Well, sooo ... what DO we do now?

The senior court official Jiang (2) Wan (3) said, "I recommend that we send the generals Wang Ping and Zhang Yi (2) to lead several tens of thousands of men to defend the key city of Baidi (2,4), just in case. Then, your highness should send an envoy to the kingdom of Wu to let them know of the prime minister's passing and feel them out."

Liu Shan said, "We must send someone who is adept at oratory."

And with that, one man stepped forth and volunteered. It was an adviser named Zong (1) Yu (4). So Liu Shan sent him on his way to the Wu capital Jianye (4,4). Upon paying his respects to the Wu emperor Sun Quan, Zong (1) Yu (4) looked up and saw that the attendants were all wearing the color of mourning.

Sun Quan now put on an unhappy face and asked Zong Yu, "Your kingdom and mine are now one family. So why has your master garrisoned more troops at Baidi (2,4)?"

Zong Yu replied, "In my opinion, both your garrisoning of troops on our borders and our stationing of soldiers at Baidi are perfectly reasonable measures given the circumstances. There is no need to inquire about either."

That brought a smirk to Sun Quan's face, and he said, "Your talent is no less than that of Deng (4) Zhi's (1)."

So, a quick refresher: Deng Zhi was the Shu envoy that Zhuge Liang had sent to make peace with Wu after Liu Bei's death. He greatly impressed Sun Quan and convinced Sun Quan to ally with Shu instead of Wei. So Sun Quan was heaping praise on Zong Yu with that comparison.

Sun Quan now told Zong Yu, "Ever since I heard about Prime Minister Zhuge's passing, I have been weeping every day and ordered my officials to go into mourning. I was worried that the kingdom of Wei would use this opportunity to invade Shu, so I stationed 10,000 men on our borders to provide aid. That was all."

Zong Yu bowed and expressed his gratitude for Sun Quan's ... umm ... concern. Sun Quan then added, "Since I have already sworn an oath of alliance with your liege, how can I break my word?"

In fact, to prove his sincerity, Sun Quan now took a gold-tipped arrow and snapped it in two, pledging, "If I go back on my former oath, may my family line go extinct."

He then sent an envoy to the Riverlands with silk and incense to other ceremonial items to convey his sympathies. The envoy returned to the Shu capital Chengdu with Zong Yu and told the Shu emperor Liu Shan, "When the Lord of Wu heard about the prime minister's death, he, too, cried and went into mourning with all of his officials. He only stationed troops on the borders to guard against an invasion by Wei, nothing else. He has sworn on a broken arrow to never break our oath."

Liu Shan was greatly delighted and relieved to hear this. He rewarded Zong Yu handsomely, gave the Wu envoy a nice tip and sent him on his way. Next, it was time to put his own court in order. Just as Zhuge Liang instructed on his deathbed, Liu Shan appointed Jiang Wan as prime minister, regent marshal, and director of the Secretariat, making him the most powerful minister at court. Fei Yi was named chief of the secretariat and executive to the prime minister. Wu Yi (4) was appointed General of Chariot and Cavalry and given imperial authority over the region of Hanzhong. Jiang Wei was named the General who Upholds the Han and the Marquis of Pingxiang (2,1). He was put in charge of the forces

stationed throughout the kingdom and was ordered to take up position in Hanzhong to help Wu Yi defend against the Wei. All the other officers remained in their old posts.

These new appointments did not sit well with Yang Yi. He figured that being a veteran aide to Zhuge Liang and having rendered great service after Zhuge Liang's death, he was in for a huge promotion. He did get a promotion, but it was not quite as high as he had hoped for. What's more, he watched as Jiang Wan, who had a shorter service record than he did, received the top post in court. So Yang Yi was rather disgruntled, and he grumbled about it to Fei Yi.

"To think, if I had taken the whole army and submitted to Wei after the prime minister's death, I would not have suffered such neglect."

Well, Yang Yi grumbled to the wrong guy. Fei Yi promptly ratted him out to the emperor, and Liu Shan was enraged. He had Yang Yi thrown into jail and interrogated, and was ready to execute him. Jiang Wan, however, advised that Yang Yi's life be spared on account of his former service. Liu Shan consented, so Yang Yi was stripped of his rank and sent into exile. In the end, though, Yang Yi was so ashamed of his own words that he slit his own throat.

So, we are now in the year 235, a good 50 years after the outbreak of the Yellow Turban Rebellion, the event that really set us on the course to where we are now. All the principal characters who dominated the novel thus far have now passed from the stage. But guess what, we still have a good 45 years left in the era of the Three Kingdoms. Alas, we do not have another 135 episodes left in this podcast. The rest of the novel really becomes compressed. And as you can imagine, we are going to see a host of new characters come and go, so just be warned that you'll be wrestling with some new names in the episodes to come.

The year 235 was one of those rare years during this era when there wasn't a war going on somewhere in the empire. None of the three kingdoms was engaged in military action. So let's go over to the kingdom of Wei to see what they're doing with so much peace breaking out.

The Wei emperor Cao Rui had appointed Sima Yi as grand commandant and put him in charge of the army and tasked him with ensuring peace along the borders. Sima Yi returned to the capital Luoyang (4,2) to take up his post.

As for Cao Rui, now that there was finally peace on the borders, he decided to treat himself to a couple fancy new palaces, one in Luoyang, and the other in the former capital city of Xuchang (3,1). These palaces, by all accounts, were gorgeous, magnificent works of architecture, exuding elegance and beauty. But, such glorious creations did not come cheap, or easily. To build these palaces, Cao Rui conscripted more than 30,000 craftsmen from his kingdom, as well as another 30-some thousand laborers. These conscripts were to put to work day and night. So, the citizenry was being worked to exhaustion and complained incessantly.

Now you figured that maybe, with his popularity tanking and his people grumbling loudly, Cao Rui would ease off on the construction projects. But no. Instead, he next decreed that he was going to build something called the Fragrant Forest Park. To help build this garden, even the court officials were obliged to help carry soil and plant trees.

Well, that was the final straw for one court official, and he wrote a memorial to Cao Rui. It said:

"The wars of recent years have broken some families and extinguished others, leaving in their wake only orphans, the elderly, and the feeble. Even if your majesty had deemed the imperial quarters too confining and wanted to enlarge them, it still would have been appropriate to schedule the work to avoid interfering with agriculture. It is all the more so for work on unnecessary construction!

“Your majesty has honored your courtiers by distinguishing them with splendid headgear, clothing them in finery, transporting them in elegant carriages -- all to separate them from those of no consequence. Yet today, these same courtiers have been put to work lugging wood and earth until their bodies are drenched and their feet soiled. It detracts from the glory of the kingdom to give such importance to the irrelevant. The park is indefensible. As Confucius said, ‘The lord employs the vassal according to ritual formality; the vassal serves the lord with loyalty.’ How is the kingdom to stand with neither formality nor loyalty?”

“Your servant knows full well that to speak thusly is to die. But my worth amounts to but one hair from an ox’s hide. If one’s life is useless, can death be a loss? Writing brush in hand, I let tears flow, in my heart bidding farewell to this world. My eight sons might become a burden to your majesty after my death. Overcome with anxiety, I await your command.”

Incredibly, though, this guy did not get the death he was expecting. Of course, Cao Rui was totally ticked off when he read the memorial, and his attendants suggested that he should execute this guy. But Cao Rui said, “No, he has always been loyal and honorable. I will just strip him of his rank. But if anyone else dares to oppose my plans, they will be executed.”

Well, it turns out that somebody else had a death wish. A member of the crown prince’s entourage had also seen enough. I mean, all this getting down in the mud with the peasants was so undignified for the 1 percenters, you know? So he wrote a memorial to Cao Rui as well. This time, Cao Rui did not hesitate to call for the executioners.

Now that he had made an example of this guy and silenced dissent, Cao Rui summoned a court official named Ma (3) Jun (1) and asked him, “I wish to build a tall terrace so that I may commune with immortal beings and asked them for the secret of eternal life and youth.”

So, if your boss came to you and said, “Tell me how to find a way to live forever,” what are you going to say? Now, keep in mind that this boss had just literally axed somebody who told him his plan was nuts, so yeah, choose your words carefully. Here’s what Ma Jun (1) told Cao Rui.

“Of the 24 emperors of the Han Dynasty, the Emperor Wu (3) enjoyed the longest reign and the longest lifespan. His longevity is no doubt due to his having consumed the essence of the sun and the aura of the moon. In the palace in the city of Chang’an, he built the Cypress Beam Terrace. On the terrace, they erected a bronze statue. This statue held a bowl with both hands. It was called the Bowl for Receiving Dew. It caught the congealed mist called Heaven’s Ambrosia or the Sweet Dew, which fell from the Northern Dipper in the middle of the night. If this liquid is combined with ground-up fine jade and consumed, it can reverse aging and restore youth.”

Cao Rui believed this. In fact, he was delighted. So he immediately dispatched Ma Jun with 10,000 men to go to Chang’an. Their job? Move that bronze statue into this new park that Cao Rui was building. So yes, Ma Jun just got put in charge of his own cockamamory idea.

So, Ma Jun and his 10,000 men arrived at the terrace in Chang’an and they started building a scaffolding so that they could climb to the top of that terrace. The terrace was a good 15 feet tall, and the bronze column on top was 10 arm-lengths around.

First, Ma Jun ordered his men to take down the bronze statue. It took a bunch of guys, but they did manage to remove the statue from the top of the column. But when they brought the statue down, however, they were astonished to see tears in its eyes. Just as they were getting freaked out, a sudden violent gale kicked up, sweeping up a hailstorm of sand and pebbles. That was followed by a deafening roar, which sounded like the heaven collapsing or the earth opening up. In that moment, the terrace collapsed, and the column fell over, killing more than a thousand men.

Shrug. Plenty more where those came from. The more important thing was that Ma Jun now had the golden bowl in his possession. His men rushed their prize back to the capital Luoyang and presented the

bowl and the statue to Cao Rui. Now, you figure Cao Rui would at least give them a pat on the back, but his first question was, “Where’s the bronze column?”

Ma Jun replied, “That column weighs a million pounds. We can’t move it.”

Cao Rui was like, c’mon man, I pay you to think outside the box. Here’s what you do: Go break that column into a million pieces and bring those pieces to the capital. Ok, so that was done. But what was he going to do with a million little pieces of a bronze column? Well, Cao Rui had the pieces all melted down and recast into two bronze human statues, a bronze dragon, and a bronze phoenix. The human statues were placed outside the gates of a mansion. The dragon and phoenix were placed in front of the court. He then proceeded to fill his park with exotic fauna of plants and animals, sparing no expenses.

At this point, another court official wrote to Cao Rui and said, you know, maybe you should spare some expenses. After all, all the great sage kings of antiquity lived in humble dwellings, while all the dynasty-ending despots built lavish palaces and such. I mean, which one would you rather take after?

Alas, Cao Rui ignored this advice and continued with his building project. He had a tall terrace constructed, and on it he placed the bronze statue and golden bowl he had sharked from Chang’an. But that’s not the end of it. Now that the happiest place on earth had been constructed, Cao Rui decreed that it must be filled with beautiful women, so girls from throughout the realm were selected and basically conscripted into his harem, housed in a fancy new garden. More officials wrote to him to complain, but Cao Rui ignored them all.

At the same time he was making a mess of things on the public front, Cao Rui was also making a mess of things on the homefront. He has an empress, one Empress Mao (2). Before Cao Rui became emperor, they were a very loving couple, so after Cao Rui ascended to the throne, he named her his empress. But, after a while, Cao Rui’s eyes began straying in the direction of another woman, a Lady Guo (1). Of course, this was perfectly fine by the standards of the times, since every Chinese emperor was

expected to have a concubine or two or 50. This Lady Guo was both beautiful and intelligent, and Cao Rui adored her and spent every day enjoying her company. In fact, he enjoyed her company so much that he didn't set foot outside her palace for more than a month.

Then, one spring day, all the flowers in the garden were blooming, so Cao Rui and Lady Guo decided to move their party to the garden. While they were drinking and making merry, Lady Guo suggested, "Why don't we ask the empress to join us?"

But Cao Rui scoffed. "If she's around, I couldn't enjoy a drop of wine."

So Cao Rui ordered all the palace servant girls that they were not to tell the empress a word about this.

As luck would have it, Empress Mao was nearby. She had been bored out of her mind, since Cao Rui hadn't bothered to visit her in more than a month. So that day, she and about a dozen attendants took an outing to a terrace near the garden. While there, they heard the sound of music wafting through the air. When she asked where that music was coming from, one of her maids said, "His majesty and Lady Guo are drinking and enjoying the flowers in the garden."

That put a damper on the outing for Empress Mao, and she quickly returned to her own palace. The next day, she went out in a small carriage in search of more amusement. She ran into Cao Rui in a winding corridor.

"Your highness must have had a lot of fun yesterday at the north garden," she said to Cao Rui with a smile.

But that smile was met with an angry countenance. Cao Rui was not amused in the least that someone had defied his orders and told the empress what he was up to. There was going to be hell to pay. To find out what kind of hell that would be, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!