

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 138.

Last time, after laying low for a decade, Sima Yi staged a stunning coup to grab the reins of power in the court of the kingdom of Wei. In the process, he exterminated a significant portion of the Cao clan. But then one day, Sima Yi suddenly remembered that he had not quite exterminated ALL of Cao Shuang's relations. There was a certain general named Xiahou Xuan (2) who remained in control of Yong (1) Province, and he was a kinsman of Cao Shuang's. So Sima Yi invited this Xiahou Xuan (2) to the capital for ... umm ... tea. Well, actually for the time being he just gave Xiahou Xuan a position at court to keep an eye on him rather than leaving him out in the provinces where it would be easy for him to start trouble.

Now, we'll hear from Xiahou Xuan (2) a little further down the road. But another member of his clan made some immediate noise. Xiahou Xuan's uncle, Xiahou Ba (4), found out that his nephew had been summoned to the capital, and his spidey sense began to tingle. Remember that Xiahou Ba (4) was a veteran general who had accompanied Sima Yi on many campaigns, but he could see the writing on the wall and figured Sima Yi would be coming for him sooner or later. So Xiahou Ba immediately led the 3,000 men under his command in open rebellion in Yong (1) Province.

But, before Xiahou Ba's rebellion could get very far, he ran into Guo (1) Huai (2), the old warhorse who was now imperial protector of Yong (1) Province. They faced off on the battlefield, and Guo Huai lured Xiahou Ba into a trap, sandwiching him between two forces. Xiahou Ba managed to escape, but his army was decimated.

With no other option left, Xiahou Ba decided to seek refuge in the kingdom of Shu. Now, remember that Xiahou Ba had long been an enemy of Shu, what with all those battles he fought against Zhuge Liang under Sima Yi's command. Will he find a receptive audience? Let's find out.

Xiahou Ba went to the region of Hanzhong to see Jiang Wei, who had been commanding the Shu forces since Zhuge Liang's death. Jiang Wei was understandably skeptical about this defection, so he had

his men go check things out before letting Xiahou Ba into the city. Once summoned, Xiahou Ba entered, kneeled, and wept as he recounted what happened.

Trying to console Xiahou Ba, Jiang Wei told him, “In ancient times, Wei (1) Zi (3) joined the Zhou (1) and made an everlasting name for himself. Sir, if you can help restore the house of Han, you will do the ancients proud.”

Ok, so a quick aside about this Wei Zi that Jiang Wei just name dropped. He was a historical figure from the end of the Shang Dynasty, so he was living a good 1,300 years before this point in the novel. He was a son of the Shang emperor. He saw his kingdom going downhill fast, but his old man would not listen to his advice. Eventually, Wei Zi decided to leave the kingdom of Shang. He later came into the service of the House of Zhou, the dynasty that ended up supplanting the Shang. He served the Zhou capably and made a name for himself. So Jiang Wei was telling Xiahou Ba there’s no shame in turning against your own kingdom.

So anyway, back to the present. After consoling Xiahou Ba, Jiang Wei threw a feast to welcome him. During the banquet, Jiang Wei asked Xiahou Ba, “Now that Sima Yi and his sons are wielding power, do they have any designs on my kingdom?”

To this, Xiahou Ba replied, “That old traitor is busy plotting usurpation, so he’s not yet paying attention to matters outside his domain. But the kingdom of Wei has two new faces who are in their prime. If they are put in charge of the Wei forces, then they would be trouble for the kingdoms of Shu and Wu.”

Jiang Wei asked who these up-and-comers were, and Xiahou Ba told him, “One of them is currently assigned to the palace library. His name is Zhong (1) Hui (4). His father was the former imperial guardian. Zhong Hui was smart and bold as a child. One time, his father brought him and his older brother to see the Wei emperor. At that time, Zhong Hui was only 7, and his brother was just 8. When his brother saw

the emperor, he was so intimidated that he was covered in sweat. The emperor asked his brother, 'Why are you sweating?' The brother answered, 'From fear and trembling, my sweat pours forth like juice.' The emperor then asked Zhong Hui, 'And why are you NOT sweating?' To this, Zhong Hui answered, 'From fear and trembling, my sweat does not dare to come forth.' This left the emperor amazed at Zhong Hui's talent. When Zhong Hui became a little older, he loved reading military texts and developed a deep understanding of strategy. Sima Yi and the senior official Jiang (3) Ji (4) both were amazed by his talent.

"The other man is presently a lower official. His name is Deng (4) Ai (4). He lost his father when he was young, but he always harbored great ambitions. Whenever he saw mountains or valleys, he would instinctively point out the best places to station troops, store grain, or stage an ambush. Everyone else laughed at him, but Sima Yi appreciated his talent and came to include him when discussing military strategy. Deng Ai has a speech defect. He always stutters when he's trying to speak. Sima Yi once teased him about it, asking him, "You're always saying 'Ai Ai.' How many Ai's are there?"

"But Deng Ai immediately replied, 'They say O Phoenix, O Phoenix, when there's only one phoenix.' From this, you can see that he has a quick and alert mind. You must watch out for these two people."

Ok, so that O phoenix thing is another one of those play on words. It takes too long to explain, so just trust me, in Chinese, that joke totally kills.

But Jiang Wei was like, dude, a librarian and a stuttering low-level grunt? Puh-leeze. He simply waved off those two guys, but WE should not, because we will be hearing a lot more about them going forward.

Anyway, satisfied that Xiahou Ba was sincere in his desire to defect, Jiang Wei now brought him to the Shu capital and introduced him to the emperor Liu Shan. Jiang Wei said to Liu Shan, "Sima Yi plotted the death of Cao Shuang and then went after Xiahou Ba, so Xiahou Ba has defected to us. Right now,

Sima Yi and his sons are wielding power while Cao Fang is feeble. The kingdom of Wei is teetering. Your servant has been in Hanzhong for many years. Our troops are well-trained and our provisions are plentiful. I would like to lead your majesty's army, have Xiahou Ba serve as my guide, and conquer the Heartlands and resurrect the house of Han in order to repay your majesty's kindness and fulfill the late prime minister's wish."

But the senior court official Fei Yi interjected and said, "Recently, the officials Jiang Wan and Dong (2) Yun (3) died one after the other. There is a void in the court. General Jiang, you should bide your time instead of making rash moves."

"Not so," Jiang Wei countered. "Life passes more swiftly than a galloping stallion glimpsed through a crack. If we drag our feet like this, when will we ever reclaim the Heartlands?"

But Fei Yi said, "As the great military strategist Sun Zi said, 'When you know yourself and your enemy, victory is guaranteed. We are not as farsighted as the late prime minister, and even he could not reclaim the Heartlands, much less us.'"

Jiang Wei now tried a different tact. He said, "I have long lived in the region of Longshang (3,4) and have a deep understanding of the Qiang tribes who live there. If we form an alliance with the Qiang and have them provide reinforcement, even if we cannot reclaim the Heartlands yet, the region to the west of Longshang (3,4) would easily be ours."

Liu Shan was touched by Jiang Wei's eagerness, so he gave his commander the go-ahead. Jiang Wei and Xiahou Ba then returned to Hanzhong to plan their campaign.

"We should first send a messenger to work out a treaty with the Qiang people," Jiang Wei said. "Then, we march through the region around Xiping (1,2) and make for Yong (1) Province. We will build two forts at the foot of Mount Qu (1) and station troops there to set up a pincer formation. We will move all the provisions to the border of the Riverlands. We will follow the late prime minister's strategy and advance our troops in stages."

So, in the eighth month of the year 249, Jiang Wei dispatched two officers, named Ju (4) An (1) and Li (3) Xin (1), to lead 15,000 men to go build and garrison two forts at the foot of Mount Qu (1). Ju (4) An (1) watched over the fort on the east side, while Li (3) Xin (1) commanded the western fort.

Word of this quickly reached Yong (1) Province, where the veteran Wei general Guo Huai was serving as imperial protector. Guo Huai immediately sent this intel to the capital and sent his second-in-command, the general Chen (2) Tai (4), at the head of 50,000 men to go take on the encroaching Shu forces.

When Chen Tai arrived at Mount Qu (1), the troops in both Shu forts came out to face him, but quickly fell back into the forts because they were badly outnumbered. Chen Tai now ordered his men to lay siege to the forts from all sides while cutting off the Shu forces' supply route. And just like that, the Shu forces in the forts were facing starvation.

Guo Huai now arrived on the scene with Wei reinforcements, and he was delighted with his side's geographical advantage. He told Chen Tai, "The enemy's forts are located on high ground in hilly terrain where water is scarce. They must come out of the fort to fetch water. If we cut off the water upstream, they will all die of thirst."

And so they sent their men to dig a trench upstream to cut off the water supply, and sure enough, now the Shu forces were suffering from thirst as well as starvation. When the Shu general Li (3) Xin (1) tried to come out of his fort to get water, he found the fort surrounded by enemy soldiers and he could not break through, so he had to fall back into the fort. Then, the two forts combined their forces and tried to stage one big break out, but once again they were beaten back after a long fight.

Facing desperation, the two Shu generals were wondering where the heck Jiang Wei was with the main army. Eventually, Li Xin volunteered to fight his way out to bring reinforcements. Accompanied by a few dozen riders, he dashed out of his fort. The Wei forces surrounded him and his men. After a

dogged struggle, Li Xin alone was able to break out, but at a heavy price. All of his men were killed, and Li Xin himself suffered serious injuries.

But that very night, the Shu forces inside the forts caught a break. The weather suddenly turned windy and cold, and a heavy snow fell, giving the Shu soldiers at least some temporary relief from their thirst, as they melted the snow for water.

As for Li Xin, he headed west along the backroads for a couple days before running into Jiang Wei and the main army. Kneeling on the ground, Li Xin said, "Our two forts at Mount Qu (1) have been surrounded by the enemy, and our water supply was cut off. Fortunately, heaven granted us snow, and my men are surviving on meltwater. They are in dire straits."

Jiang Wei replied, "It's not that I'm late, but we are still waiting for the Qiang tribes to join us, hence the delay."

Umm, Jiang Wei, that pretty much sounds like you were late, but ok, whatever. In any case, Jiang Wei sent Li Xin back to the Riverlands to recover from his injuries and met with Xiahou Ba about what to do. Xiahou Ba said, "If we wait for the Qiang tribes, the two forts will surely be lost. I expect that all the enemy forces in Yong (1) Province have been deployed to attack the forts. That means the province itself will be vulnerable. You should lead the army through Ox Head Mountain to attack Yong Province from the rear. Guo Huai and Chen Tai will then have to fall back to save the province, and the siege on our forts will be lifted."

Jiang Wei agreed and immediately moved his army toward Ox Head Mountain.

Meanwhile, in the Wei camp, after Li Xin managed to break out, the Wei general Chen Tai told his commander Guo Huai, "Li Xin is no doubt reporting this urgent situation to Jiang Wei. Jiang Wei will figure that our entire army is here, so he will try to sneak up on us from behind by going through Ox head Mountain. You should lead an army to take the Yao (2) River and cut off the enemy's supply route.

I will lead half of my men to attack them at Ox Head Mountain. When the enemy finds out that their supply route is cut, they will naturally fall back.”

And sure enough, Jiang Wei was heading toward Ox Head Mountain, but when he got there, the front column reported that there were enemy forces blocking their way. Jiang Wei rushed to the front to see for himself, and there, Chen Tai shouted to him, “You are trying to launch a sneak attack on Yong Province, but I have long been waiting here for you!”

An angry Jiang Wei now rode straight at Chen Tai, and the two traded blows. Within three bouts, Chen Tai turned and fled, and Jiang Wei directed his men to charge. The Wei troops fell back and held the peak of the mountain, while Jiang Wei set up camp at the foot of the mountain.

After that, Jiang Wei and his men went out every day to fight, but they were not able to make much progress. After a while, Xiahou Ba told him, “This is no place for a long stay. We have been fighting to a stalemate for days. The enemy is trying to keep us occupied. They must have an ulterior motive. We should fall back for now and make other plans.”

Just then, though, that ulterior motive was revealed. An urgent dispatch arrived, saying that Guo Huai was attacking the Yao (2) River. Jiang Wei was stunned and immediately ordered Xiahou Ba to lead the retreat while he himself brought up the rear.

When Chen Tai saw that Jiang Wei was retreating, he divided his forces into five battalions and gave chase along five routes. Jiang Wei staked out the point where all five routes converged to fend off the pursuit. Chen Tai and his men, however, had the high ground and they rained down arrows and boulders. Jiang Wei was forced to fall back to the Yao River, but there, he was cut off by Guo Huai and his army. Jiang Wei and his troops tried to break through, but the enemy refused to budge.

Eventually, Jiang Wei managed to punch his way through, but he lost most of his troops in the process. He now fled toward the key stronghold of Yangping (2,2) Pass, but he found his way blocked by another enemy force. The general at the head of this force wielded a saber. He had a round face, big

ears, a square mouth, and thick lips. Under his left eye was a black mole that had a few dozen strands of black hair. He was Sima Shi (1), Sima Yi's elder son and general of the Flying Cavalry. Sima Yi had received Guo Huai's message about the Shu invasion and sent Sima Shi at the head of 50,000 men to provide reinforcement. When Sima Shi arrived in the area, he got word that Guo Huai had already put the enemy to flight, so he decided to strike at Jiang Wei while the latter fled.

"You calf! How dare you block my way home?!" Jiang Wei cursed angrily. He rode forward and stabbed at Sima Shi with his spear. Within three bouts, Jiang Wei proved too much for Sima Shi, who fell back, allowing Jiang Wei to continue on his way. But no sooner had Jiang Wei entered Yangping Pass did Sima Shi return and begin to lay siege on the pass. But here, he was greeted with a deadly barrage of arrows and bolts from both flanks.

It turns out that on the flanks outside the pass, the Shu forces had set up more a hundred crossbows. These crossbows were crafted according to the designs that Zhuge Liang had left Jiang Wei on his deathbed. Each crossbow fired 10 bolts at once. What's more, the tips of all the bolts were coated with poison. These crossbows inflicted heavy casualties on Sima Shi's front column, and Sima Shi had to tuck tail and run.

But let's not lose sight of the big picture here. Jiang Wei's invasion had met a disastrous end. He lost most of his army, was sent fleeing back into his territory, and what's more, he lost the men that he had sent to build and garrison the forts near Mount Qu (1). Remember that Jiang Wei was on his way to relieve an enemy siege on those forts. Well, with his defeat, those forts were now on their own, and they weren't doing well to begin with. Ju (4) An (1), the Shu officer overseeing those forts, decided to surrender when he saw that no reinforcements were coming. In all, Jiang Wei lost several tens of thousands of men and limped back to his base in Hanzhong to regroup. Sima Shi, meanwhile, returned to the Wei capital Luoyang.



So all this happened in the year 249, and we now skip ahead to fall of the year 251. In the eighth month, Sima Yi, now aged 72, fell ill and it got worse and worse. Within a month, he was summoning his two sons to his bedside for final instructions. He told them, "I have served the Wei for years and rose to imperial guardian. I have reached the pinnacle of any official's career. To my great dismay, many suspect me of harboring ulterior motives. After I die, you two must take good care of the affairs of the state. Heed my words! Heed my words!"

And with that, Sima Yi breathed his last. And guess what? Sima Yi didn't even get a poem to go out on, which just seems rather odd. I swear, it feels like once Zhuge Liang died, Luo Guanzhong, the author of the novel, was just like, "Ok, let me just wrap up this thing as quickly as I can." Well, I think Sima Yi has certainly done enough to warrant a supplemental episode, so I'll do one, as soon as I catch up on that supplemental episode on Zhuge Liang and the other supplemental episodes I've promised recently.

In any case, Sima Yi's sons informed the Wei emperor Cao Fang of their father's passing, and Cao Fang decreed that Sima Yi would receive a fancy funeral and a spate of posthumous honors. And as for all the power that Sima Yi had accumulated, all of that passed into the hands of his two sons. Sima Shi, the elder son, was appointed regent marshal and authorized to advise on the Secretariat's most sensitive decisions. Sima Zhao, the second son, was appointed general of the Flying Cavalry, which was his older brother's former position.

As it turns out, Sima Yi was soon followed to the grave by another significant figure in our novel. This death came from the South. I'll give you one guess as to who. So, who is basically the last major leading character left from the first half of our novel that's still kicking? If you said Sun Quan, the emperor of the kingdom of Wu, then gold star for you.

In the same month that Sima Yi died, a strong gale suddenly kicked up in the Southlands, blowing the rivers and the lakes into great billows and causing six-foot-deep floods across the flat plains. The

pine and cypress trees that had been planted at the Sun clan's ancestral shrine were uprooted and blown all the way to just outside the south gate of the Wu capital Jianye (4,4), where they were left strewn across the road.

All of this proved to be a great shock to Sun Quan, who was now 70 years old. He fell ill, and in the fourth month of the following year, the year 252, Sun Quan was on his deathbed, giving out final instructions.

Now, by this point, the two old guards at the Wu court, the commander Lu (4) Xun (4) and the adviser Zhuge Jin (3), had already died. So yeah, two more relatively significant characters, including the guy who fought off Liu Bei's attempt to flatten the Southlands, have been sent packing from the narrative unceremoniously. In any case, the affairs of the state were now basically being handled by Zhuge Jin's son, Zhuge Ke (4), someone we introduced in episode 126.

Old officials weren't the only ones dying in the Southlands. Sun Quan's heir apparents were also dying, too. His original heir apparent, his eldest son, had died a decade earlier. Sun Quan then elevated his second son to heir apparent. But that second son did not get along with one of Sun Quan's daughters, and she spread some vile rumors about him. That led Sun Quan to strip him of his heir apparent status, and this son eventually died from vexation. After that, Sun Quan elevated his third son, named Sun Liang (4).

So, in the year 252, the dying Sun Quan summoned Zhuge Ke, who was now the imperial guardian, and Lü (3) Dai (4), who was the commanding officer of the Wu forces. He instructed them to help his heir apparent Sun Liang (4), and then he died. He was 71 years old and had reigned as emperor of Wu for 24 years. But remember, he had been presiding over the Southlands long before he officially declared himself emperor. He had stepped into that role in the year 200, at the age of 18. So when you count it all up, he was in charge of the southeastern portion of the empire for more than 50 years, which

would make him the longest reigning head of state in our story. So, add another supplemental episode to my to-do list, and Sun Quan DOES get a poem to go out on:

The purple beard, the gem green eyes, hailed a hero true;

And Sun Quan's vassal-officers freely gave their love.

One score and four he reigned as king:

A dragon coiled, a tiger perched in the Southlands.

So, five episodes ago, we were still talking about Zhuge Liang and Sima Yi matching wits. And now, they're both dead, along with the last of the founding emperors of the Three Kingdoms. The saga now truly rests on the shoulders of a new generation.

Word of Sun Quan's death soon trickled into the Wei capital Luoyang, and Sima Shi decided that now would be a great time to invade the Southlands. But Fu (4) Gu (3), the Chief Secretary, advised against it.

"The Southlands have the barrier of the Yangzi River," Fu (4) Gu (3) said. "Our former emperor made multiple incursions but none succeeded. The best course of action is for each kingdom to stay within their own borders."

But Sima Shi disagreed. "The way of heaven brings great change every 30 years," he said. "How can this three-way division of the realm last forever? I intend to invade."

His brother, Sima Zhao, agreed. "With Sun Quan dead and the young and feeble Sun Liang on the throne, now is the perfect time to attack."

So Sima Shi mobilized 300,000 troops and put them under the command of three generals, Wang (2) Chang (3), Hu (2) Zun (1), and Wu (2) Qiu (1). Each general was to lead 100,000 men and attack a key

location in the kingdom of Wu. Sima Shi then named his brother Sima Zhao the supreme commander and put him in charge of all the forces.

In the 12th month of the year 252, Sima Zhao and his army arrived at the border of the Southlands. Here, he garrisoned his troops and summoned his three generals to discuss strategy. He told them, “Dongwu’s most crucial area is the district of Dongxing (1,4). There, they have erected a defensive barrier along the shore. They have also built two forts on both ends of the wall to protect Lake Chao (2) from an attack from the rear. You all must proceed carefully.”

Sima Zhao now ordered the generals Wang (2) Chang (3) and Wu (2) Qiu (1) to fan out with 10,000 men each. They were to wait until the main army had taken Dongxing (1,4) District before advancing together. Sima Zhao next ordered the general Hu (2) Zun (1) to serve as the vanguard and lead the three armies forward. His orders were to build a pontoon bridge to take Dongxing, focusing on the forts at both ends of the wall.

To see how the Southlands and their new leaders will counter this threat, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening.