

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 152.

Last time, we left off with the kingdom of Jin (4), aka the kingdom formerly known as Wei, sizing up the kingdom of Wu with hungry eyes. But far from worried, the tyrant of Wu (2), Sun Hao (4), was entertaining fantasies of conquering the empire. So both sides garrisoned troops in the area around the city of Xiangyang (1,2) in Jing Province. The Jin troops were led by the commander Yang (2) Hu (4), while the Wu forces were under the command of Lu (4) Kang (4). Both commanders were aware of the other's talent, so the two sides remained in a stalemate.

One day, Yang Hu (4) and his officers went hunting, and as luck would have it, so did Lu Kang and his entourage. Instead of letting this turn into some kind of skirmish, Yang Hu ordered his men to stay on their side of the border, and so they did, never once setting foot on Wu territory while they hunted. When Lu Kang saw this from a distance, he sighed and said, "General Yang is disciplined. We must not encroach."

At the end of the day, Yang Hu returned to his base and tallied up the day's catch. Among them were some game that had been shot by the Wu hunting party, and Yang Hu ordered all those animals be returned to the Wu camp. The Wu soldiers were delighted and reported this to Lu Kang. Lu Kang summoned the courier and asked him, "Can your commander hold his liquor?"

The courier replied, "If it's good wine, he will drink."

Laughing, Lu Kang said, "I have a gallon of wine that I have stashed away for a long time. Take it and present it to your commander. I personally brewed this wine for my own use. I am offering some to him as a thank-you for what he did at yesterday's hunt."

After the courier left with the wine, Lu Kang's officers all asked him what he meant by giving the wine to Yang Hu. Lu Kang simply replied, "Since he did right by me, how can I not return the favor?"

Oh, ok. His officers were all kind of surprised. I mean, Yang Hu WAS commanding our enemy's army after all. We just thought you were playing some four-dimensional chess here, but ok sure.

Meanwhile, the Jin courier returned to base and told Yang Hu that Lu Kang had sent him some wine. Yang Hu laughed and said, "So, he also knows about my capacity for drink!" And he immediately ordered the wine be opened and served. One of his lieutenants said, "This could be a trick. Commander, don't be too quick to drink it."

But Yang Hu laughed and said, "Lu Kang is not one to resort to poison. There is no need for suspicion."

Yang Hu then tipped the wine jug and drank straight from it. From that day forth, he and Lu Kang maintained regular correspondences to see how each other was doing. It's almost like they weren't enemies or something.

One day, Yang Hu received a messenger from Lu Kang and asked him how his commander was doing. The messenger told him, "My commander has been bed-ridden for a few days with an illness."

"I suspect he has the same illness that I had," Yang Hu said. "Here, I have some pre-made medicine. Let him have it."

So the messenger returned and presented the medicine to Lu Kang. Lu Kang's men said, "Yang Hu is our enemy. This cannot be good medicine."

But Lu Kang said, "Yang Hu would not give me tainted drugs. Don't worry."

So he took the medicine, and what do you know? He was back on his feet the next day. When his officers came to congratulate him on his recovery, Lu Kang said, "If their methods are virtuous and ours cruel, then they will subdue us without a fight. Right now, we should stick to our borders rather than going after trifling gains."

His officers accepted this order, but just then, an envoy from the Wu emperor Sun Hao (4) arrived. This envoy said to Lu Kang, "His majesty has commanded that you must attack quickly and not allow the enemy to encroach on our territory first."

“You may return; I will send a memorial to his majesty shortly,” Lu Kang told the envoy.

The envoy left, and true to his word, Lu Kang sent along a memorial for Sun Hao. It said that it was not yet the right time to invade Jin and advised Sun Hao to work on building his virtue, be judicious in doling out punishments, and focus on internal stability rather than military adventures.

Aaaand that went over about as well as you would imagine. Sun Hao was enraged upon reading this memorial.

“I had heard that Lu Kang was corresponding with the enemy on the border. Looks like that’s true!” he fumed.

Sun Hao immediately relieved Lu Kang of his military command and demoted him. Sun Ji (4), the General of the Left, was appointed to take over Lu Kang’s army, and nobody at court dared to say anything, given all the heads that Sun Hao had already lopped off.

For the next several years, Sun Hao continued his reckless ways, exhausting his military strength policing the borders and drawing the disapproval of all the officials. His prime minister, one of his top generals, and his minister of agriculture all tried to advise him to change his ways ... and soon found their own heads hanging from the city gates. They were hardly alone, though. Over the course of the first 10-plus years of his reign, Sun Hao executed 40-some loyal officials who tried to talk sense into him. He also took to traveling with 50,000 armored cavalry. All the court officials who had not yet been executed were frightened into silence.

On the other side of the borders, Yang Hu had gotten word that Lu Kang had been relieved of command and that Sun Hao was digging himself into a deeper hole on a daily basis. Yang Hu had been in the region since 269, and it was now around the year 272, so he had been waiting for three years for the status quo to change. Sensing an opportunity, he now sent a message to the Jin capital Luoyang to request permission to launch an invasion of Wu. His message said:

“Heaven may ordain, but men must achieve. The Great River is far less of an obstacle than the Saber Pass. The brutality of Sun Hao surpasses that of Liu Shan’s. The Southlands’ problems are far worse than those of the Riverlands’, and the forces of the Jin are now mightier than back then. Our reign will not long endure unless we restore order throughout the realm at this critical hour, for to allow the confrontation of armies to go on, taxing the empire with endless campaigns, will quickly lead us from prosperity to ruin.”

The Jin emperor Sima Yan (2) was delighted when he read this memorial and was all gung ho about a southern campaign. But three of his most senior advisers, led by Jia Chong (1), were not feeling it. They all said this would not do, and in the end, they prevailed and Sima Yan rejected Yang Hu’s recommendation to invade Wu.

When Yang Hu got the word, he lamented, “How rarely things go one’s way in this world! A heaven-sent opportunity will pass untaken. What could be more lamentable?”

And so a few more years passed, and we are now in the year 278. By now, Yang Hu was 57 years old and ailing, and he went to the capital to tender his resignation so that he may return home. Sima Yan asked him, “Do you have any advice for me for ensuring peace in the realm?”

To this, Yang Hu replied, “Sun Hao is cruel in the extreme. We can defeat him without a fight. But if he should die and be succeeded by a virtuous ruler, then the kingdom of Wu will have slipped from your grasp.”

This brought Sima Yan to his senses, and he said, “What if you led an army to invade them now?”

“I am old and sick, so I am not up to the job,” Yang Hu said. “Your majesty should select some other wise and valiant man for the task.” And with that, Yang Hu said his goodbye and returned to his hometown.

By November that year, Yang Hu was on his deathbed. Sima Yan personally went to see him. With his lord sitting by his bedside, Yang Hu wept and said, "Your servant can never repay your majesty, not even with 10,000 deaths!"

Also weeping, Sima Yan said, "I deeply regret not taking your advice on invading Wu. Who is fit to finish your work?"

Choking back tears, Yang Hu replied, "As death approaches, I must fulfill my duty to you. The General of the Right, Du (4) Yu (4), is the man for the job. He is the one to lead the invasion of Wu."

Sima Yan now asked Yang Hu, "Recommending talented men is a good thing, so why do you always burn your recommendations afterward and not tell anyone?"

"I choose to avoid recommending someone in open court just so that they can thank me in private later," Yang Hu explained. And with that, he shuffled off the mortal coil.

Weeping all the home, Sima Yan bestowed posthumous honors and titles upon Yang Hu. The civilians in the southern region of the kingdom all closed their markets and mourned when they heard the news of Yang Hu's death. And the soldiers defending the borders with the Southlands also wept. The people of Xiangyang erected a temple and a tablet in honor of Yang Hu on a hill that he frequented when he was defending their city. Whenever someone passed the tablet, the inscription would move them to tears, so that tablet became known as the Tablet of Tears.

Sima Yan now followed Yang Hu's dying advice and appointed the General of the Right, Du (4) Yu (4), as the Queller of the South and put him in charge of affairs in Jing Province to prepare for an invasion. This Du Yu was prudent, experienced, and worldly. He never tired of learning and often enjoyed curling up with a particular commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals. He would always make sure one of his men brought a copy along when he traveled.

By this point, things had gotten even worse in the Southlands. Both the veteran general Ding Feng and the former commander Lu Kang had died. As for Sun Hao, he continued to rock and roll all night and party every day, always ending up in a drunken stupor. He also gave 10 eunuchs of the Inner Bureau the power to impeach court officials, and after every banquet, these eunuchs would accuse this or that official of some transgression. The unlucky accused would face such pleasant punishments as having the skin peeled from their faces or having their eyes gouged out. Yeah, good times.

Getting word of how bad things were in Wu, the Jin official Wang Jun (4), the imperial protector of Yi (4) Province, sent a memorial requesting permission to invade. His request said, “Sun Hao’s wild depravity and vicious perversity demand swift punishment. If he should die and be succeeded by a virtuous ruler, then Wu would become a strong foe. Your servant has been constructing ships for seven years, and the ships have begun to rot. I am 70 and could die any day. Should any one of those three things happen, it would foil our plans. I hope your majesty will not miss this opportunity.”

Upon reading Wang Jun’s memorial, Sima Yan said to his court officials, “Wang Jun’s words coincide with Yang Hu’s. My mind is made up.”

One of his officials now said, “I have heard that Sun Hao intends to march North and that his army is already prepared and have a full head of steam. It will be difficult to contend with them. We should delay a year so that they will be exhausted. Then we will succeed.”

So Sima Yan took this advice and once again put the invasion of Wu on hold. When he returned to his private quarters that day, he was playing board games with Zhang Hua (2), the deputy of the Household Secretariat. While they were playing, a report from the borders arrived. It was a letter from Du (4) Yu (4) in Jing Province. It said, “In the past, Yang Hu failed to consult widely with the court and instead only planned with your majesty in secret. That is why now there is no consensus at court. The merits of every decision must be debated fully. In my judgment, the benefits of a southern offensive

outweigh the drawbacks by a ratio of eight or nine to one, while the only danger is failing to accomplish our goal. Since autumn, it has become increasingly clear that we will have to conduct a punitive expedition against the South. If we delay now, midway in our course, Sun Hao will have been sufficiently alarmed to shift the capital to the city Wuchang (3,1) and to fortify the towns along the Great River and transfer their populations elsewhere. If the Southern river towns are fortified and the countryside offers nothing to plunder, then a year's delay would be too long."

No sooner had Sima Yan finished reading the letter did Zhang Hua (2) rise to his feet, push the game board aside, and said with hands clenched, "Your majesty is wise in military affairs, our kingdom is wealthy, our people are strong. The Lord of Wu is depraved, his kingdom is weak and his people anxious. If you invade now, you can succeed without much effort. Please do not have any doubts."

"Your penetrating insight has banished all doubt," Sima Yan said. He then returned to the court and decreed that Du Yu shall be the grand commander and lead 100,000 troops toward the Wu city of Jiangling (1,2), along with four other detachments of 50,000 men each at his disposal. He then ordered Wang Jun to sail east from Yi Province with 200,000-some troops and tens of thousands of warships.

Word of these movements reached the Wu capital at the city of Jianye (4,4) and sent Sun Hao into a panic. He immediately summoned his senior officials to discuss how to repel the invasion. His prime minister Zhang Ti (4) said, "You can appoint Wu (3) Yan (2), the General of Chariots and Cavalry, to lead an army to Jiangling (1,2) to face Du (4) Yu (4). Send general Sun Xin (4) to counter the enemy forces around Xiakou (4,3). I will serve as the director general and lead 100,000 men with the Generals of the Left and Right to serve as reinforcement."

Sun Hao consented, and Zhang Ti (4) left to mobilize the forces. Sun Hao then retired to his private quarters and was looking rather uneasy. One of his eunuch attendants asked him what was wrong, and Sun Hao said, "The Jin forces are coming en masse. We have sent troops to counter their various land

armies, but the enemy commander Wang Jun is sailing down the river with tens of thousands of troops. They are coming in force. That is why I am worried.”

But this eunuch said, “I have a plan that can turn Wang Jun’s ships to dust.”

Oh? Do tell, Sun Hao said. So this eunuch explained, “The Southlands are rich in iron. Let’s make 100-some iron chains, each several hundred spans long and with each link weighing some 30 pounds. Stretch the chains across key points along the river. Then, make tens of thousands of iron stakes, and plant them in the water. If the enemy ships are sailing with the wind, they will hit the stakes and break apart. How will they traverse the river then?”

Delighted with this idea, Sun Hao immediately deployed blacksmiths to the bank of the river to work nonstop on the iron chains and stakes.

While Wu was busy deploying its defenses, the Jin commander Du Yu was marching on the key city of Jiangling (1,2). He sent a lieutenant to lead 800 sailors on some small ships to sneak across the river. This vanguard force would then set up banners in the hills and woods at Ba (1) Mountain. During the day, they were to set off explosives and bang drums. At night, they were to light torches everywhere.

The next day, Du Yu lead his army and advanced on land and water. His scouts reported that three Wu armies were coming to take him on, but Du Yu kept advancing. The first resistance he met was a vanguard navy led by the Wu general Sun Xin (4). As soon as the two sides engaged each other, Du Yu ordered his forces to retreat, and that lured Sun Xin and his men onto land to give chase. But their pursuit had only gone for a few miles when suddenly, with the sound of an explosive, Jin forces appeared from everywhere, and Du Yu turned and attacked. Countless Wu soldiers were slaughtered, and Sun Xin (4) scrambled back toward the city of Jiangling (1,2) for refuge.

What he did not realize, though, was that the 800-men vanguard force that Du Yu had snuck across the river the night before was now mixed in with his tattered troops. The Jin soldiers now started a fire

atop the city's walls, prompting a stunned Sun Xin (4) to wonder out loud, "Did the Northern troops fly across the river?" Before he could retreat, he was already cut down by the Jin lieutenant leading the vanguard.

While Sun Xin (4) met his end, his commander, Lu (4) Jing (4), who by the way was a son of Lu Kang's, saw everything from his ship. Shocked by this surprise, he tried to flee on land but was soon cut down. The commander of the third Wu army that came to stop Du Yu, the general Wu (3) Yan (2), abandoned the city and tried to run as well, but he was captured by an ambush. When they brought him in front of Du Yu, Du Yu said, "There's no point in keeping him around," and so Wu Yan was beheaded, and the city of Jiangling belonged to the Jin forces.

After that resounding victory, all the other towns and cities in the region surrendered to Du Yu when he showed up on their doorstep. Du Yu made sure to put the people's minds at ease and kept his troops on a tight leash so that they didn't bother the civilians. He now turned his forces toward the stronghold of Wuchang (3,1), which was where Sun Hao was living the highlife for a while, and Wuchang also promptly surrendered.

With his army rolling along, Du Yu now assembled his officers to discuss how to take the Wu capital Jianye (4,4). But one of his generals said, "Those who have long been rebels are unlikely to submit fully. Right now, the spring floods are at their height, and it will be difficult to stay here for long. We can wait until next spring before making a big move."

But Du Yu said, "In ancient times, the great strategist Yue (4) Yi (4) annexed the mighty state of Qi (2) in one battle. Right now, our army's might is surging, and we will take the south like cutting through bamboo. Once we cut through a few sections, the whole bamboo comes apart as soon as it meets the blade until there is nothing left to deal with."

So Du Yu commanded the various Jin forces to advance together on the Wu capital Jianye.

So the land invasion was going smoothly. What about the Jin navy? Their commander, Wang Jun, was sailing down river when his scouts reported that the Southlands had laid out giant iron chains and stakes across the water as a defense. But Wang Jun simply laughed. He ordered his men to construct dozens of large rafts. On the rafts, they tied bundles of straw and put armor on them to make them look like soldiers. This done, they released the rafts with the current. As these rafts sailed down river, they were spotted by the Wu forces. The Wu soldiers thought these were real troops, and they promptly ran away. As the rafts floated across the water, they struck all the stakes, pulled them out of the riverbed, and took them for a ride down river. So, so much for that defense.

Next, Wang Jun placed giant torches on some rafts, soaked them with oil, and sailed them down river. Whenever they came across one of those iron chains, he would light torches, which then burned the chain until it snapped. Oh well, at least that whole iron chain across the river idea sounded good on paper.

With those obstacles easily removed, Du Yu and Wang Jun cruised on land and water, accepting surrenders from the locals wherever they went. Soon, they ran into the backup Wu army led by the prime minister Zhang Ti, the General of the Left Chen (2) Ying (2), and the General of the Right Zhuge Jing (4). This Zhuge Jing (4), by the way, was the youngest son of the former Wei general Zhuge Dan (4), who was killed by Sima Zhao's forces after an unsuccessful insurrection. After his father died, Zhuge Jing (4) found refuge in the Southlands, and now, he was helping to lead a desperate last stand against the descendants of the men who killed his father.

As the two Wu generals huddled before they encountered the enemy, Chen (2) Ying (2) said, "Our forces upriver were unprepared, so I'm guessing the enemy must be approaching this location. We must fight them with everything we have. If we are fortunate enough to win, then the Southlands will be safe. If we lose, then all is lost."

“You are quite right,” Zhuge Jing (4) said.

Just then, word came that the Jin forces were sailing down river and were unstoppable. Both generals were stunned and rushed to confer with the prime minister Zhang Ti (4). Zhuge Jing (4) said, “Dongwu is in danger; let’s flee.”

But Zhang Ti (4) wept and said, “Everyone knows that Wu is doomed. But how embarrassing would it be if the lord and all the officials all surrender and no one dies for the kingdom in its final hour?!”

Those words made Zhuge Jing (4) weep as well, but he had no wish to be the guy that dies in the kingdom’s final hour, so he fled. Zhang Ti and Chen Ying (2) then led their forces to take on the enemy. The Jin army quickly surrounded them and stormed into their camp. Both Zhang Ti and Chen Ying were killed in the fighting, and their troops scattered. Later, a poet praised Zhang Ti thus:

As Du Yu’s banner flew atop Ba (1) Hill,
Zhang Ti of the South died for his liege.
The realm was now bereft of kingly guise,
And yet Zhang Ti refused to compromise.

While the Jin forces were getting ever deeper into Wu territory, word of their success flew back to the Jin capital, and Sima Yan was delighted. But the senior official Jia Chong said, “Our troops have been in the field in a foreign land for a long time. They are unaccustomed to the local climate, so they will no doubt be stricken by pestilence. We should recall the army and make other plans.”

But the official Zhang Hua, whose words had convinced Sima Yan to launch the invasion, was like, uhh, you have got to be kidding me. “Our massive army has penetrated the enemy’s nest,” he said. “The people of Wu have lost their courage. Within a month, Sun Hao will be captured. If we recall our forces lightly, then all our labor so far would be for naught. That would be truly regrettable.”

Before Sima Yan could say anything, Jia Chong scolded Zhang Hua: “You do not recognize the time or setting. You would ruin our soldiers in a wanton quest for glory! Even if we execute you, it would not be enough to appease the realm!”

So once again, the Jin court is in disagreement about whether to finish off the kingdom of Wu. To see if the Southlands will get a last-minute reprieve, tune in to the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!