

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

So from time to time, listeners would write in and ask if I can do a supplemental episode on this or that side character. Alas, the answer in most cases is that I just don't have enough historical material about those characters, or their historical lives do not differ enough from their characters in the novel, for me to do a whole supplemental episode on any one of them. But, now that the show is winding down, I would like to use this episode to do a rapid-fire look at a number of side characters. But instead of doing their life stories, I'm going to do is to give just one interesting tidbit about each of these characters.

So let's start with the characters in the kingdom of Wei, and I'm going to expand this to include people served under Cao Cao, which was technically before the founding of the Wei, and people who served in the successor kingdom of Jin, which seized power from the Wei in the final pages of the novel.

Alright, here we go. First up is **Xiahou Dun**, Cao Cao's kinsman and veteran general who lost an eye in a battle and proceeded to swallow that eyeball. Not surprisingly, he was very sensitive about having just one eye. He got saddled with the nickname "blind Xiahou," and it's said that whenever he looked in a mirror, he would become so displeased with his cyclopic countenance that he would push the mirror over. So, keep your mirrors away from Xiahou Dun.

Next, we have **Xiahou Yuan**, who was also Cao Cao's kinsman and a trusted general under Cao Cao. Now, remember that he got chopped in two by the Shu general Huang Zhong in a showdown at Dingjun (4,1) Mountain in the region of Hanzhong. In the novel, Huang Zhong had laid a clever trap, luring Xiahou Yuan into complacency before charging down the mountain to catch him off guard for the easy kill.

In real life, however, Xiahou Yuan's death went a bit differently. He and his comrade Zhang He were attacking Shu camps at Dingjun Mountain. He and Zhang He were each defending one end of their

camps. Liu Bei devised a scheme where he had his men burn the barricade of brambles that defended Xiahou Yuan's camp and then attacked Zhang He's side of the camps, putting him in some danger. Xiahou Yuan responded by sending part of his troops to help Zhang He. Meanwhile, Xiahou Yuan personally led the clean-up effort over at his own camp. But while he was busy helping to rebuild the barricades, the Shu general Huang Zhong attacked, caught Xiahou Yuan isolated and flat-footed, and killed him.

When Cao Cao got word of Xiahou Yuan's death, he lamented how Xiahou Yuan was always personally sharing his soldiers' burdens by doing basically grunt work alongside the rank-and-file troops. In fact, Cao Cao said, "As a commander, you should not even personally go fight, much less go help rebuild the barricade."

And there's also an interesting postscript here. After he was killed, Xiahou Yuan got a proper burial, not from Cao Cao, but from Liu Bei. Remember that in the supplemental episode about Zhang Fei, we mentioned how Zhang Fei abducted Xiahou Yuan's niece for his wife. That niece now went to beg Liu Bei to give her uncle some dignity in death, and Liu Bei concurred.

Moving on, we come to the general **Xu Huang**, the guy who wielded a big battle axe. In real life, much like in the novel, he was one of Cao Cao's best generals and was responsible for many victories. However, he was apparently also a very humble man who rarely asked for rewards after a victory. He would often say, "The ancients were always worried about not meeting a worthy liege. I am fortunate to have found mine, so I should render service and repay him. I'm not doing this for personal glory."

Next, we have **Xu Chu**, aka Mad Tiger. In the novel, he was a ferocious warrior and a trusted bodyguard for Cao Cao. And in real life, he saved Cao Cao more than once. One story that the novel did not cover happened when Cao Cao was facing off against Yuan Shao at the Battle of Guandu. Some of

Cao Cao's conspired to assassinate him, but could never find the opportunity with Xu Chu around. Eventually, they found a brief opening when Xu Chu stepped away to take a rest. The conspirators sneaked into Cao Cao's tent with knives, ready to stab him. But lo and behold, there was Xu Chu standing right next to Cao Cao. Turns out Xu Chu felt restless and uneasy at home, so he returned immediately to Cao Cao. When he saw these men enter the tent and panic at the sight of him, he knew something was up. Before long, all the conspirators laid dead, and from that moment on, Cao Cao trusted Xu Chu even more and always brought Mad Tiger along wherever he went.

Next up, the general **Zhang He**. In the novel, he was known for his valor, but not his smarts. In real life, though, he actually showed that he was quite savvy. In fact, he seems to have been the one who was primarily responsible for defeating Zhuge Liang's forces at Jieting (1,2) to halt one of Zhuge Liang's more successful incursions into the North. Later, in 228, when Zhuge Liang launched another invasion, the Wei emperor Cao Rui sent Zhang He to stop him. When Zhang He was setting out, the emperor asked him if he thought Zhuge Liang would have captured the location he was attacking by the time Zhang He got there. But Zhang He knew that Zhuge Liang was venturing deep into enemy territory without sufficient supplies, so he told the emperor that he thought Zhuge Liang would actually have retreated by the time he got there. And as soon as he arrived on the scene, Zhuge Liang was forced to retreat.

But poor Zhang He just couldn't catch a break in the novel. In fact, the cause of his own demise was flipped. In the novel, when Zhuge Liang was on the retreat, Zhang He insisted on giving chase despite Sima Yi's caution and ended up running into a trap and was killed by arrows. In real life, though, it was Sima Yi who insisted on chasing Zhuge Liang and Zhang He who preached caution. But Sima Yi outranked Zhang He, so Zhang He had no choice but to play the good soldier and give chase as he was ordered. And sure enough, he ran into an ambush and was killed by arrows.

Moving along, we come to the general **Yue Jin**. One fun fact about him is that he was apparently small but fierce. He had a short stature, but was always courageous on the battlefield.

Next up, **Li Dian**, another veteran officer who accompanied Cao Cao on many of his campaigns. Interestingly enough, when he was young Li Dian was actually into books, not war, but something obviously changed along the way. He cut his teeth on helping to put down the Yellow Turban Rebellion and later served Cao Cao.

Because of his book-learning, Li Dian was apparently very big on propriety and never bickered with other officers about who would get the credit. He also showed great respect for scholars and civil officials. Sadly, the good died young. Li Dian passed away when he was just 36.

Next, let's talk about **Yu Jin**, the guy who was one of Cao Cao's old reliables for many years but then surrendered to Guan Yu after being defeated in battle. He later returned to Wei after Guan Yu was captured and executed by Sun Quan, but the Wei emperor Cao Pi despised him for surrendering, so Cao Pi humiliated Yu Jin with a painting of his cowardly act, and Yu Jin got so mad that he died.

The one anecdote I have on Yu Jin comes well before his downfall. In the year 206, one of Cao Cao's officers rebelled while Cao Cao was off campaigning against pirates. Yu Jin helped lead the army that put down this rebellion. The rebellious officer was an old friend of Yu Jin's, so he surrendered to Yu Jin, hoping for leniency. All the other officers figured that since this guy surrendered, he should be handed over to Cao Cao to decide his fate. But Yu Jin said, "Do you all not know Lord Cao's command? Those who surrender only after they have been surrounded by our army are not to be shown any mercy. It is our duty to strictly follow our lord's orders. This guy may be my old friend, but I cannot allow him to make me forget my duty!" So Yu Jin had his old friend executed.

So Yu Jin, Yue Jin, Zhang He, and Xu Huang were four members of a five-some who were singled out for distinction among the officers of Wei. The lead member of that five-some is **Zhang Liao**. Now, if you remember, when Guan Yu was briefly serving Cao Cao, Zhang Liao was his best friend. Cao Cao was always worried that Guan Yu would leave him if he found out where Liu Bei was, so he sent Zhang Liao to test out Guan Yu. Guan Yu told Zhang Liao straight up that, yeah, as soon as I find out where my brother is, I'm out of here.

So then Zhang Liao faced a dilemma. If he told Cao Cao what Guan Yu said, then there's a chance Cao Cao would have Guan Yu killed. But if he did not, then he would be betraying his liege. After some deliberation, Zhang Liao said, "Lord Cao is my liege; his relationship to me is like that of a father, while Guan Yu is merely my brother." So he opted to tell Cao Cao. This has been held up by posterity as something praiseworthy, because it showed that Zhang Liao understood the proper place for a vassal.

Now let's talk about a few of Cao Cao's kinsmen, starting with the general **Cao Hong**. While he was certainly an accomplished warrior, Cao Hong also apparently had a reputation as a real tightwad. In fact, that led to some trouble for him later in life. Once upon a time, Cao Cao's son Cao Pi asked Cao Hong to lend him some money, but Cao Hong refused. Well, Cao Pi never forgot that slight. Decades later, when Cao Pi became emperor of Wei, he found some flimsy excuse to get back at Cao Hong. Accusing one of Cao Hong's retainers of breaking the law, he had Cao Hong jailed to await execution. Many court officials pleaded for Cao Hong's life, but to no avail. It wasn't until Cao Pi's own mother intervened on Cao Hong's behalf that Cao Pi relented. He released Cao Hong but stripped him of his rank and slapped him down to a lowly commoner. Eventually, when Cao Rui came to the throne, Cao Hong was rehabilitated and given a rank again.

And then there is **Cao Ren**, another member of the Cao clan who was a longtime warhorse for Cao Cao. And unfortunately I did not find anything interesting about him. Seriously, he fought a bunch of battles, was a trusted and reliable commander, and that was about it.

Moving on, let's talk about **Cao Zhen**, who commanded the Wei army after the old generation of Cao Cao's commanders had grown old or died. In the novel, Cao Zhen was made to serve as the victim of many of Zhuge Liang's schemes and had to get bailed out by Sima Yi. But in reality, he actually was pretty effective in fending off Zhuge Liang's various incursions into the North. He's also reputed to be very strong and fierce. One time he was out hunting, and tiger chased his horse from behind. So Cao Zhen turned around and shot the tiger with an arrow, and he shot it so hard that the tiger collapsed at the twang of his bow, and this impressed Cao Cao greatly.

A not so flattering tale about Cao Zhen, however, said that he was also rather chubby. One time, at a feast, one of the emperor Cao Pi's officials decided to provide some entertainment by having actors portray the chubby Cao Zhen and another officer who was very skinny. Cao Zhen did not take kindly to this, and he and the official who planned the show almost came to blows with swords.

Now that we've covered Cao Cao's generals, let's talk about a few of his advisers. First up is **Xun (2) Yu (4)**. Aside from being very smart and capable, he was apparently quite a looker, too. I guess if there was a boy band back in the Three Kingdoms era, Xun Yu would be in it.

Xun Yu's nephew **Xun You (1)** was also one of Cao Cao's top advisers. And the novel did not mention this, but Xun You was part of a conspiracy to assassinate Dong Zhuo. But the conspiracy was leaked and all of his accomplices committed suicide while he was thrown into prison. While in prison, he acted as though nothing had happened. When Dong Zhuo saw this, he decided that maybe Xun You did not have anything to do with the plot and spared his life. He later got out of prison after Dong Zhuo was killed.

Another of Cao Cao's advisers was **Cheng Yu**. Now, Cheng Yu was apparently a rather vain and cranky old guy. He was given an important position late in his life, but let it go to his head and acted with such airs that his main political rival criticized him to Cao Cao, which prompted Cao Cao to strip him of his rank. Eventually, when Cao Pi came to the throne, he reinstated Cheng Yu to office.

And then we have **Guo Jia**, arguably Cao Cao's favorite adviser before he died at a young age. He was extremely talented, but was not one for following rules of propriety. That actually prompted one of Cao Cao's officials to criticize him to Cao Cao, but Cao Cao loved Guo Jia's talent so much that he just ignored the complaints.

The last of Cao Cao's advisers that we'll mention is **Jia (2) Xu (3)**. He was a bit of a late comer to Cao Cao's staff, but ended up being an important adviser late in Cao Cao's life. In fact, when Cao Cao's sons were competing for the title of heir apparent, Jia Xu gave Cao Pi some good advice that helped him win out. While that rivalry was going on, though, Jia Xu was careful to keep a low profile because he knew that he didn't have the seniority that some other officials in Cao Cao's service did. He didn't want others to get jealous or suspicious of him, so he didn't really fraternize with his colleagues outside of work, and he made sure that none of his children married people from influential families.

Alright, let's shift gears and talk about some members of the Sima clan. Let's start with **Sima Shi** and **Sima Zhao**, the sons of Sima Yi. Now, Sima Shi had a very calm demeanor, while Sima Zhao, not so much. When Sima Yi told his sons about his plan to stage a coup while his rival Cao Shuang was out of the capital, Sima Zhao tossed and turned all night, but Sima Shi slept soundly.

Oh and while we are talking about Sima Zhao, when his men killed the emperor Cao Mao (2), it actually wasn't in the palace. So the novel made it sound like Sima Zhao sent his men into the palace to put down the emperor. In reality, though, Cao Mao was attacking Sima Zhao's residence, and Sima Zhao's men were afraid to fight back until the official Jia Chong told them hey this is what Sima Zhao

pays you guys for. So they fought back, and Cao Mao got killed. So yeah it may be a small thing since Cao Mao still got killed either way, but at least in real life, Sima Zhao could claim he was doing it in self-defense.

And as for Sima Zhao's son, **Sima Yan**, who went on to usurp the throne from Wei and founded the kingdom of Jin, well, he had a reputation for being fixated on women and feasting. When he conquered the kingdom of Wu, he absorbed the 5,000-some women from Sun Hao's palace into his own. One story about his appetite for women said that he had so many beauties in his palace that he didn't know which one to spend the night with each day. So he would ride around on a small cart pulled by goats, and wherever the goats stopped, that's where he would stop, too. So, to increase their chances of receiving his favor, the palace women would put bamboo leaves and salt outside their quarters in order to get the goats to stop there.

Ok, that's enough about characters from the kingdom of Wei and Jin. Let's go look at the other two kingdoms, starting with Shu. Let's start with **Zhao Yun**. A listener asked me if my favorite character had changed now that I've gone through the entire novel, and the answer is nope. Zhao Yun is still my favorite. The tidbit I want to share about him is that there's apparently some dispute about how prominent a rank he held in Liu Bei's army. In the novel, he was basically No. 3 behind Guan Yu and Zhang Fei and in practice was about as valued as they were. According to historical records, however, his rank was the General of the Assisting Army, a position that some believe is lower than those of Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, Ma Chao, and Huang Zhong, who were the Generals of the Front, Right, Left, and Rear, respectively. However, if you look at the responsibilities that Zhao Yun held, it appears that his actual authority may be greater than his title would indicate. Either way, he's awesome.

Next, let's talk about **Jiang Wei**. There's a story about him that was not covered in the novel. So remember that Jiang Wei surrendered to Zhuge Liang on one of the latter's Northern expeditions. Well,



when Zhuge Liang was forced to retreat on that incursion, Jiang Wei went with him. In the novel, when this happened, Zhuge Liang sent people to move Jiang Wei's mother to the Riverlands as well. But in real life, apparently that did not happen, and Jiang Wei and his mother were separated. Later, his mother wrote to him, imploring him to give up his military career and just return home to be a farmer. But Jiang Wei wrote back and said, "The fate of one stalk of grain matters not in a vast, fertile field, and when one's heart harbors great ambitions, he does not think of going home." So basically, he was telling mom that he was choosing loyalty to the state over filial piety.

Next, we shift gears from Zhuge Liang's favorite officer to Zhuge Liang's favorite punching bag among his own ranks, the general **Wei Yan**. Something that gets almost completely left out of the novel is that Wei Yan actually spent more than 15 years overseeing the defense of the key region of Hanzhong. When Liu Bei declared himself the King of Hanzhong and was moving to his capital of Chengdu, he needed someone to oversee the defense of that most important region. Everyone thought Zhang Fei was going to get that job, but Liu Bei unexpectedly tabbed Wei Yan for the task. When he gave Wei Yan that appointment, Liu Bei asked him in front of all the other officers how he would handle the job. Wei Yan said, "If Cao Cao leads all the troops of the realm to attack Hanzhong, then I will request that you allow me to repel them for you. If he sends an officer to lead 100,000 men to attack, then I request that you allow me to gobble them up for you." Liu Bei was impressed by that answer, as were the other officers.

Next let's talking about another Shu general, **Wang Ping**. He came from a humble background and had little education, so he was illiterate. Whenever he needed to write reports, a clerk would be tasked to do it for him. He was worried about being made fun of for his illiteracy, so he would often say that his job was to fight, not to write. Yet, despite his almost non-existent reading skills and totally non-existent writing skills, he loved listening to stories and was apparently quite good at narrating them. So, he would have been a good podcaster, if only, you know, he could read a script.

Next up, **Liao Hua**, who once served under Guan Yu until Guan Yu was captured and killed by Sun Quan. Liao Hua himself was a prisoner-of-war due to that defeat, but somehow, he faked his own death and tricked his captors and managed to escape. He then went and picked up his mother and fled back to Liu Bei's camp.

Now let's talk quickly about **Ma Chao**, one of Liu Bei's five Tiger Generals. So when Ma Chao first surrendered to Liu Bei, Liu Bei treated him quite well, and Ma Chao forgot his place and often addressed Liu Bei by his courtesy name, which was basically a second name that men assumed upon reaching adulthood. A vassal was never supposed to address his lord by his courtesy name, but Ma Chao was kind of oblivious to his offense. This really irked Guan Yu and Zhang Fei. Guan Yu was so mad that he wanted to kill Ma Chao for it, but Liu Bei and Zhang Fei restrained him. Instead, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei settled for another solution. One day, when Ma Chao arrived for a banquet with Liu Bei and company, he noticed that Guan Yu and Zhang Fei were not seated next to him. Instead, they were both standing next to Liu Bei with sword in hand. This put him on notice, and he never again referred to Liu Bei by his courtesy name.

Moving on to another of the Five Tiger Generals, here's an interesting tidbit about the old valiant general **Huang Zhong**. His final resting place was discovered in 1825. Some farmers discovered a tombstone outside of the city of Chengdu that bore his courtesy name. It contained a few bones, a sword, and a piece of jade. Now, the tombstone itself was not from the Three Kingdoms era, and people guessed that it was probably built in the Tang Dynasty, on the original location of his burial, to commemorate Huang Zhong. Upon this discovery, a local landlord donated some money to repair the gravesite and built a memorial. But alas, in 1965, due to construction of a road, the gravesite was dug up and the tree that had been planted on the site was cut down. And during the Cultural Revolution, the memorial to Huang Zhong was destroyed, including the statue of him. The only thing left of the site was an empty coffin. The site has been renovated in recent years, but it's nowhere near its former glory.

Ok, that does it for Shu officers. Let's go talk about some of the characters from the kingdom of Wu, starting with **Lu Su**, who in the novel was often depicted as a bit slow-witted and always trying playing catch up with the likes of Zhuge Liang and Zhou Yu. In reality, he actually was a talent himself. When he was young, though, that wasn't apparent to everyone. He was born into a well-to-do family, but his father died soon after his birth, so he was raised by his grandmother. He loved learning martial skills and gathering groups of young men, providing them with food and clothing, and taking them out to the hills. There, they were technically hunting, but he was also teaching them about military arts. To the people of his hometown, though, it looked he was just squandering his family's wealth, and they all said this reckless youth was the reason for the decline of his clan. But Lu Su didn't care. In fact, he just neglected the affairs of his home, sold his land, and used the money to help the poor and to make friends with other men of ambition.

Next we come to **Lü Meng**, the guy who followed Lu Su as commander of the Wu armies. When he was 16, he would often sneak into his brother-in-law's army when they went out to put down bandits and rebels. When his brother-in-law discovered this, he tried to lecture Lü Meng time and again, but time and again Lü Meng would sneak out into combat with his troops. Eventually, the brother-in-law informed Lü Meng's mother, and she was so mad that she wanted to punish her son. But Lü Meng told her that he was risking his life because he wanted to make something of himself, and that moved her to the point that she did not punish him.

While we are going through Southlands commanders, we might as well talk about **Lu Xun**, who succeeded Lü Meng. In the year 229, Sun Quan declared himself emperor and appointed Lu Xun to senior general-in-chief. Around that time, Sun Quan's second son was quite fond of duck fighting, so he built a small shed in front of the main hall of his home for duck fights. But Lu Xun was no fan of duck fighting, and he reprimanded this prince, telling him he should be spending his time reading the classics

and filling his head with knowledge rather than duck-fighting tactics. Ashamed, the prince tore down the shed.

Next, let's talk about one of the old-timers, one of the guys who were with the Sun family from the beginning of their rise, the general **Cheng Pu**. Now, he was the eldest of the military officers in Sun Quan's service, and his colleagues would often call him "Elder Cheng." He was also said to have enjoyed mingling with scholars, which was not exactly something one would expect of a military man. But lest you think he went soft in his old age, according to the Book of Wu, three months before his death, he killed hundreds of traitors and had their bodies thrown into a fire. So yeah, he went out strong.

Now let's talk about **Gan Ning**, one of the Southlands' top warriors. As you might expect from a ferocious warrior, Gan Ning had an ill temper. According to the Records of the Three Kingdoms, one of his kitchen servants once did something to offend him and was afraid of being punished, so this attendant fled and sought refuge with Gan Ning's comrade Lü Meng. Lü Meng was afraid Gan Ning would try to kill the guy, so he took the guy in.

Well, Gan Ning went to pay a visit to Lü Meng's other, lavished her with gifts, and made a promise that he would not kill the attendant. So Lü Meng returned the attendant to Gan Ning, but won't you know it, as soon as Gan Ning got his hands on the guy, he tied him to a tree and put an arrow through him. Lü Meng was naturally outraged and declared that he would kill Gan Ning for this. So Gan Ning hid out on his boat and refused to come out. Eventually, Lü Meng's mother had to intervene and try to make peace. Only then did Lü Meng relent, and Gan Ning apologized. Sucks to be that kitchen attendant though.

You know what? I think that's a pretty good story to go out on. Obviously there's no way we can cover every single character in this novel; otherwise I would be doing for another four years. So instead,

I'll wrap it up here. I hope you enjoyed this supplemental episode, and I'll see you next time on the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!