

Welcome to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. This is episode 141.

Last time, Sima Shi had sniffed out a conspiracy to move against him and his brother, and he promptly purged all the officials involved, but he didn't stop there. He also deposed the Wei emperor who authorized the plot, replacing him with a new puppet. Well, such actions were bound to have consequences, and one of those consequences was brewing in Yang (2) Province along the southeastern borders of the kingdom.

The commander of the troops in Yang Province, a man named Wu (2) Qiujiang (1,3), decided that he could not abide by Sima Shi's actions. So he consulted with the imperial protector of the province, a man named Wen (2) Qin (1). He invited Wen Qin (1) to a banquet in his private quarters. As they were exchanging chit chat, Wu Qiujiang (1,3) began weeping nonstop, prompting Wen Qin to ask what was up.

"Sima Shi has usurped power and deposed our lord," Wu Qiujiang said. "Heaven and earth have been turned upside down. How can I not be heartbroken?!"

Well, he was talking to the right guy. This Wen Qin's former master was Cao Shuang, the guy that Sima Shi's father Sima Yi had executed on trumped-up treason charges in a power grab. So Wen Qin was all too happy for an opportunity to stick it to the Sima clan. He said to Wu Qiujiang, "Commander, if you are going to wage war on the traitors in the name of honor, then I shall risk my life to help you. My middle son Wen Yang (1) has unrivaled valor and has often wanted to kill the Sima brothers to avenge Cao Shuang. He can serve as the vanguard."

Delighted, Wu Qiujiang swore an oath with Wen Qin. The two then concocted a justification for their uprising, claiming that the empress dowager had sent them a secret decree. With that excuse, they summoned all the officers in the region to Shouchun, the main city in the area. They erected an altar, where they slaughtered a white horse and swore an oath on its blood, declaring that Sima Shi was a traitor and that they were answering a secret decree from the empress dowager by mobilizing all the forces of the region to bring the traitors to justice. All those present swore their allegiance. Wu Qiujiang

then mobilized 60,000 men and occupied the city of Xiangcheng (4,2), while Wen Qin led a roaming army of 20,000 to serve as reinforcement. They also sent word to the surrounding counties, ordering them to send troops to help the cause.

Word of this rebellion soon reached the Wei capital Luoyang, and it came at a rather inopportune time for Sima Shi. He had developed a tumor in his left eye, and it would hurt off and on, so he consulted a physician and decided to have the tumor removed. After the surgery, they sealed up his left eye with medicine and he was recuperating at home when he got news of the rebellion. Sima Shi consulted with Wang (2) Su (4), the grand commandant.

Wang Su (4) said to Sima Shi, "Back when Guan Yu was at the height of his prowess, Sun Quan ordered Lü Meng to launch a sneak attack on Jing Province. Lü Meng treated the families of Guan Yu's soldiers very well, and that caused Guan Yu's army to dissolve. Right now, the families of the men in the rebel army are all in the Heartlands. We should set their minds at ease immediately, and then send troops to cut off the rebels' line of retreat. That will cause the rebels to disintegrate into chaos."

"Your words are wise," Sima Shi said, "but I just had a tumor in my eye removed and cannot go in person. And I don't feel comfortable sending someone else."

While they were speaking, the officer Zhong (1) Hui (4) was also present. Remember that a few episodes back, the renegade general Xiahou Ba had told the Shu commander Jiang Wei that this Zhong Hui was one of two up-and-comers that he should really watch out for. Zhong Hui now said to Sima Shi, "The rebel army is strong and well-trained. It would be difficult to send someone to lead troops to repel them. Any slip-up would cost us everything."

Hearing this, Sima Shi leaped to his feet and declared, "Unless I go myself, we cannot defeat the rebels!"

So it was settled. Sima Shi left his younger brother Sima Zhao (1) in charge of the capital, while he himself led the army on an eastern expedition to put down the rebellion, even if it meant having to travel in a carriage because of his condition. He ordered the general Zhuge Dan (4), who commanded the army in Yu (4) Province, to lead the troops under his command and go lay siege on the city of Shouchun. He then ordered the general Hu (2) Zun (1), who was commanding troops in Qing (1) Province, to go cut off the rebels' path of retreat. Finally, he ordered Wang (2) Ji (1), the imperial protector of Jing Province, to lead the front column to go occupy the southeastern region of the kingdom.

Sima Shi himself garrisoned his main army at the city of Xiangyang (1,2) in Jing Province and assembled his staff to discuss how to proceed. One of his officials said, "Wu Qiujiang likes to scheme but is indecisive, while Wen Qin is brave but witless. Right now, the enemy has a full head of steam and must not be underestimated. The best course of action is to fortify our defenses and wear down the enemy. That is a plan for the long run."

But Wang Ji (1) disagreed. "We cannot do that," he said. "This uprising did not come about because the soldiers or civilians of this region wanted to rebel. They were forced into rebellion by threats from Wu Qiujian. As soon as our army approaches, the rebel forces will dissolve."

Sima Shi agreed with Wang Ji and ordered his troops to advance to the River Yin (3) and occupy the bridge there. Wang Ji now suggested that they should make a lightning strike on the nearby city of Nandun (2,4), which would make a good place to garrison troops, and beat Wu Qiujian to the punch. Sima Shi agreed and sent Wang Ji on that mission.

Meanwhile, Wu Qiujian was based at Xiangcheng (4,2). When he heard that Sima Shi had arrived in the region, he gathered his officers to discuss their approach. His vanguard general suggested that, hey, you know what would be a great place to garrison troops? The city of Nandun! We should go there at

once! Wu Qiuqian agreed and led his army that way. But lo and behold, before he got there, his scouts reported back that the enemy had already set up camp at Nandun. Wu Qiuqian refused to believe it, but when he went to the front of the column to take a look, sure enough, the enemy's flags and organized camps covered the fields. Umm, ok, so ... now what?

Well, now Wu Qiuqian got more bad news. A sudden report arrived, telling him that Sun Jun (4), the prime minister of the kingdom of Wu, was crossing the river with an army to attack the city of Shouchun. Now, Shouchun was Wu Qiuqian's home base, so he immediately led his troops back to Xiangcheng to plan how to deal with this unexpected complication.

When Sima Shi saw that Wu Qiuqian and his army had fallen back, he asked his advisers for ideas. One official said, "Wu Qiuqian is retreating because he is worried about Dongwu attacking Shouchun. He will no doubt return to Xiangcheng and split his army to defend both cities. You should send one army to attack the city of Lejia (4,1), one army to attack Xiangcheng, and a third to attack Shouchun. That will force the rebel army to fall back. Deng (4) Ai (4), the imperial protector of Yan (3) Province, is full of strategies. If you send him to attack Lejia (4,1) and reinforce him with a large army, it will not be difficult to defeat the rebels."

Sima Shi agreed, so he sent an urgent dispatch to Yan (3) Province, ordering Deng Ai to attack Lejia, and Sima Shi would rendezvous with him to provide backup. And remember that this Deng Ai was the other up-and-comer in the kingdom of Wei, and this is the first time we'll see him in action.

On the other side, Wu Qiuqian was presently in Xiangcheng, sending out frequent scouts to go check on the city of Lejia because he was, rightfully, worried about an attack there. When he consulted with Wen Qin (1), the latter told him, "No need to worry. My son Wen Yang (1) and I need just 5,000 men to protect Lejia." So Wu Qiuqian sent them over to Lejia. As they were approaching, the front column

reported that they had spotted about 10,000 Wei troops on the west side of the city. They noticed some fancy regalia, which meant Sima Shi must be with that army. Furthermore, the Wei forces were still in the middle of setting up camp.

Wen Qin's son Wen Yang was present when this intel arrived. This Wen Yang was just 18 years old, but he struck an imposing figure and was skilled with both a spear and a short iron staff. When he heard the report, he said to his father, "Let's split up and attack them from both flanks before they finish setting up camp, and total victory will be ours."

"When should we attack?" Wen Qin asked.

"Father, at dusk this evening, you can lead 2,500 men and attack from the south of the city. I will lead 2,500 men and attack from the north side. We will converge at the Wei camp at midnight."

On the other side, Sima Shi and his army had arrived at Lejia before Deng Ai, so he ordered his troops to start setting up camp. That night, Sima Shi's wound from his recent operation was flaring up, and he was lying in his tent, suffering from the pain while being guarded by a few hundred armored soldiers.

Around midnight, loud cries suddenly rose up outside his camp and the Wei forces fell into disarray. Sima Shi hurriedly asked what was going on, and his men reported that an enemy battalion had stormed into the camp from the north and that the general at their head was unstoppable. This shocked Sima Shi, and he felt a rush of fever shoot through him. And then something shot out of him. In that moment, his left eyeball popped out from the incision from his eye surgery, and his blood covered the ground. As you can imagine, Sima Shi was in tremendous pain, but he dared not cry out, lest it demoralize his men further. So instead, he bit down on his bedsheets so hard that they were all chewed up.

Meanwhile, here's what was going on in Sima Shi's camp. Wen Yang had arrived before his father, and instead of waiting, he and his army just crashed into the camp and started wreaking havoc.

Wherever he went, no one dared to stand in Wen Yang's way, as his spear and iron staff left a trail of bodies in his wake.

But here's the problem: Wen Yang crashed into the camp expecting that his father would show up soon with reinforcements, but as time went on, there was still no sign of dear ol' dad.

Lacking reinforcements, Wen Yang was unable to fight his way into the center of the camp, where Sima Shi was located. The several times he tried, he was forced back by torrents of arrows. The fighting continued until dawn, when suddenly, Wen Yang heard the sound of drums and horns blaring from the north.

"Why is my father coming from the north instead of the south like he's supposed to?" Wen Yang asked one of his men. But when he went to take a look, he saw that it actually wasn't his father at all. A Wei army was charging this way with a full head of steam, and at their head was the general Deng Ai, who wielded a saber and shouted, "Rebels, stop!"

An angry Wen Yang rode forth to take on Deng Ai, and the two fought for 50 bouts without a winner. While they were duking it out, the Wei reinforcements swept in, and now Wen Yang and his men were sandwiched between enemy forces. Wen Yang's soldiers all scattered and fled, leaving him all alone. But no matter, Wen Yang simply cut his way through the enemy ranks and ran toward the south. Behind him came a few hundred enemy officers in hot pursuit.

As they approached the city of Lejia, it looked like the Wei officers were gaining ground on their prey. But suddenly, Wen Yang turned around, let out a loud roar, and charged into their midst. Wherever he swung his iron staff, enemy officers fell to the ground, and the rest retreated. Wen Yang now resumed his retreat at a casual pace.

While he was slowly getting away, the Wei officers regrouped and were like, wait, did that guy fight us off all by himself? Surely not! We can't just let him go like this!

So about a hundred of them resumed their chase. When Wen Yang saw them, he flew into a rage. “So you vermin WANT to die?!” he shouted as he wielded his iron staff and galloped back into the midst of his pursuers. He killed a bunch of enemies, sent the rest scurrying, and then resumed his casual retreat. Well, these Wei officers were a hard-headed bunch, because they came back four or five times, and Wen Yang whupped them every time. This feat was so impressive that a later poet commemorated it with these lines:

Alone at Changban Hill holding Cao Cao off,  
Zhao Yun came to fame, a prodigy of war.  
Now, Wen Yang crossing points at Lejia town,  
Shows courage worthy of comparison.

So while his son was doing deeds worthy of poems, where the heck was Wen Qin? Well, as it turns out, he and his army got lost along the winding mountain paths. It took them the better part of the night to find their way out of the valley, and by then, it was already first light. They didn’t know what had become of Wen Yang. All they saw was that the Wei forces had triumphed, so Wen Qin decided to fall back without engaging the enemy. The Wei forces now gave chase, and Wen Qin and his men fell back toward the city of Shouchun.

Now, within the ranks of the Wei army was an officer named Yin (3) Damu (4,4). He used to be one of Cao Shuang’s confidants, before Cao Shuang lost his head. Yin (3) Damu (4,4) had often harbored thoughts of killing Sima Shi to avenge his former master. He was also good friends with Wen Qin. So on this day, Yin Damu knew that Sima Shi’s eyeball had popped out and that he was immobilized. So he went to Sima Shi’s tent and said, “Wen Qin didn’t really want to rebel; he was forced into it by Wu Qiu Jian. If I go talk to him, he will surely come surrender.”

Sima Shi gave him the go-ahead, so Yin Damu donned his armor and caught up with Wen Qin. As he drew closer to Wen Qin, Yin Damu shouted, "My friend, do you see me? It's me, Yin Damu!"

When Wen Qin turned his head to take a look, Yin Damu took off his helmet, placed it on his saddle, pointed at Wen Qin with his whip, and shouted, "Can you abide a few more days?"

Now, Yin Damu was trying to be intentionally vague in the presence of others. What he meant by his statement was that, hey man, Sima Shi is going to die soon, so you know, stick around for a bit and you'll have your opportunity. But all of that just whooshed over Wen Qin's head. Wen Qin cursed Yin Damu aloud and even got his bow out to take a shot at Yin Damu. This misunderstanding made Yin Damu weep out loud, and he had no choice but to turn back and return to camp.

Meanwhile, when Wen Qin and his defeated troops arrived outside the city of Shouchun, they discovered that it had already been taken by the Wei general Zhuge Dan (4). Wen Qin was just about to try to take the city back, but then three Wei armies all arrived, led by the generals Hu Zun, Wang Ji (1), and Deng Ai. Facing dire straits, Wen Qin fled to the kingdom of Wu to seek refuge, and his son would later join him.

Wen Qin's debacle meant that his comrade Wu Qiuqian was now left all alone inside the city of Xiangcheng. When he heard that Shouchun had been lost, Wen Qin had been defeated, and that three enemy armies were knocking on his doorstep, Wu Qiuqian decided to make a last stand. He mobilized all the troops in the city and brought them outside for a fight. They ran into Deng Ai. Wu Qiuqian sent his vanguard general out to face Deng Ai, but that guy didn't even last a bout before Deng Ai cut him down. Wu Qiuqian put up a dogged fight, but the other Wei armies showed up and attacked him from all sides, and his troops fell apart.

With his army gone, Wu Qiuqian now fled with about a dozen men. They did manage to get away from the battle and ran to a nearby city. The governor of the city welcomed him in with open arms and held a feast in his honor. At this feast, Wu Qiuqian drank his fill and fell sound asleep. Well, let this be a



lesson to you: Never drink when you're on the run. Wu Qiuqian never woke up from his drunken stupor, as the governor of the city had him assassinated in his sleep and presented his head to the Wei army. And with that, the rebellion was snuffed out.

But Sima Shi was now bedridden after losing an eye overnight. He summoned the general Zhuge Dan (4), gave him a promotion, and named him commander of the armies of Yang Province, replacing Wu Qiuqian. Sima Shi then went to the city of Xuchang to recover, but there was no recovering from what ailed him. His eye hurt constantly, and at night, he was haunted by visions of the three officials he had executed for plotting against him. And you know that whenever a character starts seeing dead people in this novel, that character would soon shuffle off the mortal coil. Sima Shi knew this as well, so he sent for his younger brother Sima Zhao.

Sima Zhao rushed to his brother's bedside and prostrated on the ground. With his dying breath, Sima Shi told him, "I hold too much power to divest myself of it, even if I wish to. When you succeed me, you must not entrust important matters to others lightly, or you would bring extermination upon our clan."

As he spoke, Sima Shi handed Sima Zhao his seal of command while tears flowed down his face. Sima Zhao was just about to ask where the keys to the chariot were, but Sima Shi let out a loud cry as his eye once again burst from its socket and he breathed his last.

So we're now in the second month of the year 255, and Sima Zhao had just inherited his brother's powers. He sent word of his brother's death back to the capital. The emperor Cao Mao (2) then sent an envoy to the city of Xuchang, ordering Sima Zhao to temporarily stay there with his army so as to guard against any encroachment by the kingdom of Wu. But Sima Zhao was not so sure about this, and the officer Zhong Hui said, "Your brother just passed away, and people are unsettled. If you stay here, you will regret it if there's a coup at court."

So Sima Zhao said the heck with imperial edicts, I'm going back to the capital. This news shocked the emperor Cao Mao (2). Luckily for him, the grand commandant Wang (2) Su (4) knew exactly how he could resolve this situation.

"Sima Zhao has inherited his brother's great powers," Wang Su said. "Your majesty should promote him in order to secure his loyalty."

So Cao Mao promoted Sima Zhao to regent marshal and director of the Secretariat. Sima Zhao then went to court to thank the emperor for his generosity, and from that point on, Sima Zhao became the holder of supreme power in the Wei court.

When word of Sima Shi's death trickled into the Shu capital Chengdu, the Shu commander Jiang Wei told his emperor Liu Shan, "Sima Shi has recently died. Sima Zhao just inherited immense power; he will not dare to leave the capital lightly. Your servant would like your permission to invade Wei and reclaim the Heartlands."

Liu Shan consented, so Jiang Wei returned to his base in Hanzhong and began organizing his troops. But one of his top generals, Zhang Yi (4), wasn't so sure about this.

"The Riverlands have neither the depth of territories nor the resources in cash and grain to support such a distant campaign," he said. "Why don't we instead defend the key passes, protect our army, and cherish the people? That is the way to preserve our kingdom."

"Not so," Jiang Wei said. "Our late prime minister foresaw the three-way division of the realm before he even left his thatched cottage. He made six expeditions from Qi (2) Mountain, but unfortunately he died before he could succeed. He entrusted me with his dying breath, so I must give everything I have to repay the state and continue his work. I would die without regret. Right now, we have an opportunity. If we don't attack now, then when?"

The general Xiahou Ba agreed and said, “You’re quite right. We should first send light cavalry out to Baohan (1,3). If we can take the city of Nan’an (2,1), then the other nearby counties would be within reach.”

Zhang Yi chimed in with his own suggestion: “We failed in the past because we were late in mobilizing the army. As the art of war says, ‘Attack when the enemy is unprepared.’ If we advance quickly right now, the enemy will be caught off guard, and total victory will be ours.”

So Jiang Wei mobilized 50,000 men and marched toward the city of Baohan (1,3). As they approached the River Tao (2), the Wei soldiers on the opposite bank quickly sent word to the two guys in charge of defending this region: Wang (2) Jing (1), the imperial protector of Yong (1) Province, and the general Chen Tai (4). Wang Jing was the first to respond, as he rounded up 70,000 troops to come face Jiang Wei near the river. Seeing this, Jiang Wei sent the generals Zhang Yi (4) and Xiahou Ba (4) off with instructions, and then personally marched his troops across the river and set up battle formation with their backs against the river, which was usually a major faux pas in military strategy.

On the other side of the lines, Wang Jing rode out with a few officers and said to Jiang Wei, “The three-way division among Wei, Shu, and Wu has already been established. So why do you keep encroaching on our territory?”

Jiang Wei replied, “Sima Shi deposed his own lord without cause. As your neighbors, even friendly kingdoms should hold him to account, much less rival kingdoms.”

Yeah, I’m sure the kingdom of Shu was totally broken up about Cao Fang getting kicked off his throne. But whatever. We’re here and there’s gonna be a fight today, however flimsy the justification. Wang Jing now said to four of his officers, “The enemy is lined up with their backs to the river. If we push them back, they will all perish in the water. Jiang Wei is very brave. The four of you should take him on together. If they begin to fall back, then we should give chase.”

So the four officers rode out to take on Jiang Wei. After a few bouts, Jiang Wei turned and rode back into his own lines, and Wang Jing ordered his troops to sweep forward. Jiang Wei and his men fell back toward the river. As they approached the bank, Jiang Wei shouted to his men, “The situation is dire! Let’s hold nothing back!”

Hearing that, his troops turned and threw everything they’ve got at the enemy, routing the Wei forces. At that moment, the Shu generals Zhang Yi (4) and Xiahou Ba appeared with more troops behind the Wei lines and sandwiched the enemy. Jiang Wei led the assault, charging to and fro within the enemy ranks. The Wei soldiers were in disarray and many were trampled to death by their own men, while countless others were pushed into the river. All in all, the Shu forces killed more than 10,000 enemies, and their bodies were strewn across the ground for miles. Wang Jing, accompanied by about a hundred riders, broke out and fled into the city of Didao (2,4).

After this resounding victory, Jiang Wei rewarded his troops and was just about to march on to the city of Didao (2,4), but the general Zhang Yi (4) was once again being a wet blanket.

“General, you have already triumphed and your prestige is felt everywhere; we should stop now,” Zhang Yi said. “If we keep pressing forward and something goes wrong, it would be a case of ruining a picture of a snake by adding feet.”

So Zhang Yi was citing a well-known idiom here. As the story goes, there was a guy who was very good at drawing snakes. During a competition with other artists to see who could draw the best snake, he finished first. But while waiting for the other artists to finish, he just couldn’t leave well enough alone and decided to add more flourishes to his picture, including adding feet to his snake. And of course, that ruined the picture, and he lost the contest.

So will Jiang Wei stop while he’s ahead? Find out on the next episode of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms Podcast. Thanks for listening!