

"I didn't know there had been so many exciting battles in ancient China, or that there were so many treacherous rulers!"
Chan-Mei, 11

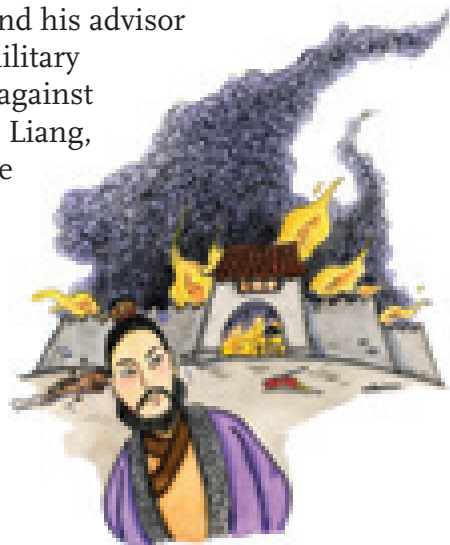


The great empire of China is in turmoil.

As the government becomes increasingly incompetent, warlords and nobles battle for power. In the north is the Kingdom of Wei, headed by cunning and manipulative Cao Cao. In the southeast is the Kingdom of Wu, ruled by masterful and charismatic Sun Quan. In the west is the Kingdom of Shu, commanded by kind-hearted and humble Liu Bei.

Cao has committed murder and betrayal on his way to glory, only to see his family's throne overthrown by other scheming crooks. Sun and his advisor Zhou Yu have established a military stronghold, but are no match against Liu's military strategist Zhuge Liang, who wisely advocates tolerance and mutual respect.

Full of thrilling action, sophisticated stratagems, passionate brotherhood and loyalty, *The Three Kingdoms* sums up all the most important lessons of history.



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THE THREE KINGDOMS Luo Guanzhong

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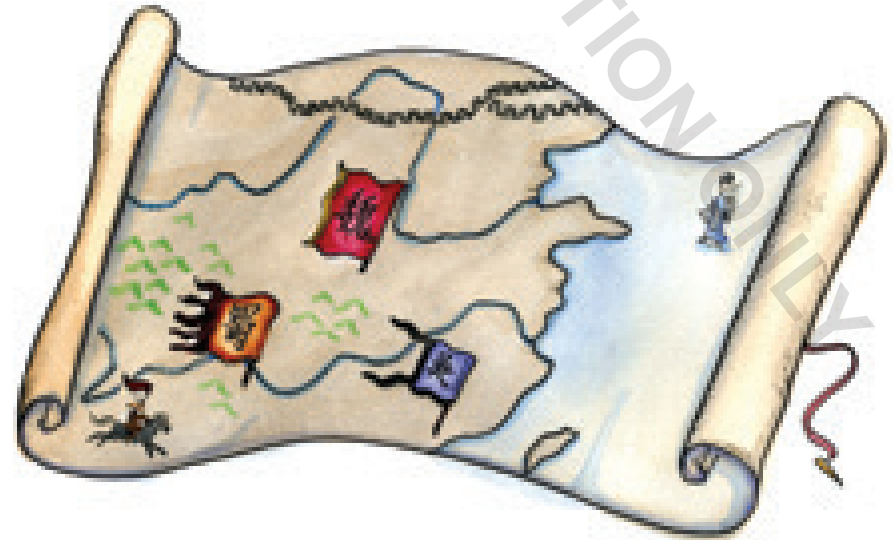
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THE CHARACTERS



Liu Bei, Zhang Fei
and Guan Yu

These three sworn brothers are committed to serving their country and people, but can they save the Han Empire from destruction?

Zhuge Liang

Zhuge's talents in politics, economics, diplomacy and military manipulation are peerless. Will his schemes to defeat the empire's enemies succeed?



Cao Cao

Military officer Cao is hard to trust and always seems ready to let his friends down. Can he really succeed in becoming the emperor?



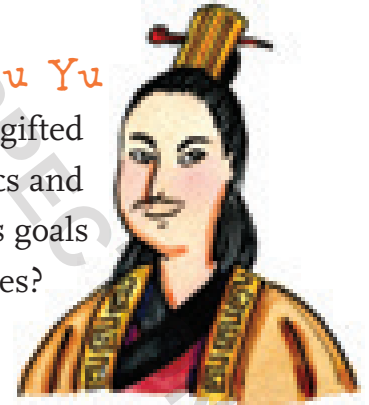
Sun Jian,
Sun Ce and
Sun Quan

Sun Jian and his sons are devoted to establishing their own empire. How are they going to compete against the other warlords?



Zhou Yu

A brilliant scholar, Zhou is gifted in music, literature, politics and military strategies. Can his goals be achieved before he dies?



Sima Yi

Sima is a cunning government official, suspicious of everyone around him. Can he succeed in his quest to gain high office?



THE THREE KINGDOMS

China at the beginning of the 'Three Kingdoms era', which started nearly two thousand years ago in 169 CE





THE THREE KINGDOMS

The great Han Empire was in trouble.

The emperor's servants were regularly deceiving him; any official who was faithful to the emperor was sacked. The government had become corrupt at every level. As a result, the people suffered greatly.

Across the empire riots broke out. Among the most violent protestors were the Yellow Turbans, who claimed to have magical powers. The emperor sent his troops to suppress them, but failed. It was now the responsibility of each province to defend itself.

In Yu Province in the empire's north, the officials decided to put up an announcement to enlist civilian support. Among those who stopped by the public noticeboard was Liu Bei, a handsome young man with unusually long arms and large earlobes. Liu had grown up

believing that one should always be loyal to one's country and people. Deeply concerned about the empire's future, he gave a great sigh.

A voice boomed behind him. 'What are you moaning about? Why don't you volunteer to serve your empire!'

Liu turned and saw a large man built like a tower, his face half covered by a dark beard and his eyes blazing with fury.

'I want to fight the Yellow Turbans, but I have neither money nor power,' Liu answered, undaunted by the man's size.

The anger in the man's eyes was replaced with friendly understanding. 'Well, I have money,' he responded, reaching out a hand the size of a dinner plate to shake Liu's. 'My name is Zhang Fei, the town's butcher. I'm not a powerful man, but I can help you.'



Liu and Zhang agreed to have a drink in a nearby tavern. No sooner had they ordered

than they heard a fellow drinker yelling at the waiter, 'Give me some wine! Send me off to fight the Yellow Turbans!' This man, whose name turned out to be Guan Yu, was just as imposing as Zhang. His long, lush black beard gave him a dignified look. If Zhang looked like a roaring lion, then Guan resembled a majestic tiger.

Liu and Zhang engaged Guan in conversation, and were delighted to hear that he too wanted to quell the rioters.

The three men immediately became good friends, and returned to Zhang's house to discuss their next move. In the peach garden behind the house, they made an oath to treat each other as brothers and do everything in their power to serve the empire and its citizens.

Liu had special armoury and weapons made – two swords for himself, a crescent blade for Guan, and a steel spear for Zhang. Together they joined the provincial army.

- After the Battle of Red Cliffs, Zhuge prevents Guan from pursuing the escaping Cao, concerned that Guan will spare Cao's life on account of their past friendship. Guan pledges that he is willing to face execution if he fails to kill Cao. However, Guan eventually captures and releases Cao, just as Zhuge has foreseen. When Guan returns, it is only thanks to Liu and Zhang's intervention that he is not executed. It is later revealed that Zhuge has expected Guan to spare Cao, and his intention is actually to allow Cao to escape so as to hasten the formation of the three kingdoms.
- After Liu's death, Zhuge leads five military campaigns against Cao, which are referred to as his northern expeditions. It is during the first expedition that Zhuge loses a battle in the town of Jieting and withdraws his men, then sits on top of a tower for all to see, playing a zither and drinking tea, hence scaring Sima's troops away. It is during the fifth and final expedition that Zhuge dies.

Back in time

Luo Guanzhong wrote *The Three Kingdoms* in the fourteenth century, which coincided with the defeat of the Mongols by the Chinese at the end of the Yuan Dynasty. The desire of Luo and his fellow citizens for the newly established government of the Ming Dynasty to create a civilised, strong and prosperous nation is reflected in Luo's book. It is based on events in the turbulent years near the end of the Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms era of China, starting in 169 CE and ending with the reunification of the nation in 280 CE.

In *The Three Kingdoms*, Luo successfully combines historical records with folk tales about the Three Kingdoms era, creating a rich tapestry of personalities. Also included in the book are materials created by previous generations of poets, writers, playwrights and composers, as well as Luo's personal interpretation of concepts such as virtue and legitimacy.

One of the things that Luo is particularly interested in is the concept of loyalty to family,