

"It's just like Robin Hood and his Merry Men,
but instead of living in Sherwood Forest they all
live by a big lake in China." Kerry, 10



THE WATER MARGIN

SHI NAI'AN



Retold by Christine Sun
Illustrated by Shirley Chiang



Although Song Jiang is only a lowly local government official, he is loyal to the emperor and kind to all the citizens in his care. But Song is in trouble. A series of unfortunate incidents have led to him being arrested, and his political enemies are keen to see him sentenced to death.

There is still hope, however. One hundred and eight brave outlaws from Mount Liang have heard of Song's good name – they are willing to rescue him as long as Song will lead them in rebelling against the corrupt government.

Will Song agree to become an outlaw?
Will he be able to tread the narrow path between right and wrong?
Will justice eventually prevail over corruption and the misuse of power?



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THE CHARACTERS

'Monk' Lu Zhishen and 'Leopard' Lin Chong

Lu and Lin are two of the first fugitives to join the outlaws at Mount Liang. What makes them become outlaws in the first place?



'King' Chao Gai and 'Resourceful' Wu Yong

Chao is the original leader of the outlaws at Mount Liang. Wu is his strategist. Between them they devise schemes to rob the rich and help the poor.

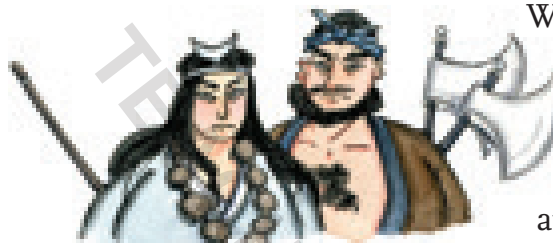


'Welcome Rain' Song Jiang
Song admires the outlaws at Mount Liang but is determined to remain loyal to his country. Will he change his mind and join them?



'Pilgrim' Wu Song and 'Whirlwind' Li Kui

Wu and Li are known for their great strength. Will their heroic acts win the respect of the outlaws at Mount Liang?



'Daredevil' Shi Xiu and 'Sickman' Yang Xiong

Shi and Yang have vowed to treat each other as brothers. Can their friendship stand the tests of suspicion and betrayal?



'Unicorn' Lu Junyi and 'Dragon' Gongsun Sheng

Lu and Gongsun are both reluctant to join the outlaws at Mount Liang. What makes them change their minds?



'Clubs' Huyan Zhuo and 'Blade' Guan Sheng

Huyan and Guan lead the imperial troops in their assaults on Mount Liang. Can they successfully defeat the outlaws?



Lu Zhishen, 'Monk'
Lin Chong, 'Leopard'
LEADER OF THE LIANG OUTLAWS

Chao Gai, 'King'

Wu Yong, 'Resourceful'
Song Jiang, 'Welcome Rain'

Wu Song, 'Pilgrim'
Li Kui, 'Whirlwind'

Suo Chao, 'Charge Ahead'

Yan Qing, 'Stealthy Wanderer'

Lu Junyi, 'Unicorn'
Gongsun Sheng, 'Dragon'

Huyan Zhou, 'Clubs'
Chai Jin, 'Little Whirlwind'

Guan Sheng, 'Blade'

Dai Zong, 'Magic Traveller'

Dong Ping, 'Double Spears'

Zhang Heng, 'Boatman'

Zhang Shun, 'Wayman'

Liu Tang, 'Red-haired Devil'

Mu Hong, 'Unrestrained'

THE WATER MARGIN

The marshes of Mount Liang

The main characters in the story have their names in orange

Li Jun, 'River Dragon'
Li Ying, 'Attacking Hawk'

Qin Ming, 'Thunderbolt'

THE 36 'HEAVENLY SPIRITS'

Shi Jin, 'Dragon Tattoos'

Ruan Xiaoqi, 'Ruler of Hell'

Ruan Xiaor, 'Unmoveable'

Ruan Xiaowu, 'Deadly Smile'

Shi Xiu, 'Daredevil'

Yang Xiong, 'Sickman'
Zhu Tong, 'Beautiful Beard'

Hua Rong, 'Little General'
Lei Heng, 'Winged Tiger'

Xu Ning, 'Golden Lance'

Xie Zhen, 'Two-headed Serpent'

Xie Bao, 'Scorpion'

Yang Zhi, 'Blue-faced Beast'

THE 72 'EARTHLY DEMONS'

Zhang Qing, 'Featherless Arrow'





THE WATER MARGIN

For many decades the Song Empire had been prosperous and strong. It was well served by humble emperors and their diligent servants, and the people lived in peace and happiness.

Then, without any warning, a terrible plague broke out. It spread to every corner of the empire. The emperor, concerned for his people, decided to appoint a renowned spiritual master to lead the empire in praying for heavenly blessings. Marshal Hong was sent to meet the guru at his temple and bring him back to the capital.

Marshal Hong was an arrogant man. When he reached the temple where the guru lived, he insisted on being given a tour. There was one room whose door was tightly locked. Ignoring the temple official's advice, Hong ordered that the door be opened. Inside the room was nothing

but a stone tablet covering a large hole in the ground. Four words were engraved into the tablet – ‘Thus revealed with Hong.’

Assuming the words referred to him, Hong ordered that the tablet be removed.

Boom!

A mass of smoke blasted out of the hole and up into the sky, destroying half of the temple roof. As Marshal Hong and the temple official ducked for cover, the smoke transformed into a hundred and eight beams of golden light, which radiated in all directions and then disappeared.

Trembling, Hong demanded to know what had happened. With a sour face the temple official explained. ‘Deep in that hole were thirty-six heavenly spirits and seventy-two earthly demons imprisoned by the spiritual master. Now that you have let them out the whole world will be devastated.’

Marshal Hong was deeply ashamed. When he returned to the capital he did not tell the

emperor what he had done. As we shall see, however, the results of Hong’s arrogance would have enormous consequences in the years to come. The one hundred and eight spirits released by Hong would return as mortal heroes, and in time would change the course of the Song Empire.



The plague eventually passed, and the empire recovered. Some sixty years later a handsome clown named Gao Qiu arrived at the capital. Capable of many circus tricks, Gao knew exactly how to please his audience, especially the emperor of the time. The emperor was so delighted by Gao’s excellent juggling that the clown was awarded with a high-ranking post in the government.

Power went to Gao’s head. He thought he was now ringmaster of the whole circus. He bullied the other officials and sacked many of those most loyal to the emperor. In their place Gao promoted his own friends and relatives to high power.

meant that *The Water Margin* has remained one of the most popular Chinese books ever written.

During the Yuan Dynasty, when Shi was writing *The Water Margin*, there was widespread resentment towards China's Mongol rulers, and *The Water Margin* with its themes of citizen revolt and popular uprising became a common source for dramatic adaptation. Stories of the Mount Liang outlaws reflected a desire among the common people to rise up against a cruel and unjust government. It is no wonder that later, during the Ming Dynasty when the government became increasingly corrupt and incompetent, the Emperor decided to ban Shi's book!

Despite its popularity, there is a traditional warning in Chinese that young people should not read *The Water Margin*, as the book places an unhealthy emphasis on violence, brawls and male machismo (the same warning goes on to say that old people should not read

The Three Kingdoms – also available in *Real Reads* – because it might give them dangerous ideas about fraud and deception). With the exception of the three women outlaws, the few female characters in the book are almost always depicted as being selfish and deserving to be punished. *The Water Margin* is often thought of as a 'bad boys' book' with some very questionable ideas about what 'brotherhood' really means.

Nonetheless, *The Water Margin* holds an important position in China's literary history as the first full-length work written in everyday Chinese as opposed to a high literary style. Its descriptions of ordinary people's lives, practices, views and beliefs are highly convincing, and have enriched numerous other forms of art. The codes of ethics highlighted in the book, such as responsibility, justice, friendship and family duty, have been important in developing Chinese thinking.