

# **Water Margin Study Guide**

## **Water Margin by Shi Nai'an**

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## Plot Summary

The novel *Water Margin* by Shi Nai'an details the rise and fall of a group of bandits during the time of the Song Dynasty in China. Among the themes addressed in this novel are the abuse of power by officials, the unjust punishment of the loyal and the power of chivalry and loyalty. Much can also be learned from the novel about the customs and habits of the early Chinese people as well as their thought and belief systems.

The story of *Water Margin* begins when Marshal Hong Xin is sent to a Taoist monastery to request a cure for a plague currently being suffered by the people of the Eastern Capital. Hong causes problems when he commands the monks of the monastery to free the 108 demons being held captive in the Suppression of Demons Hall. It is written in the book that these demons would cause trouble if released. The conclusion of the first chapter, however, indicates that 108 stars, corresponding to the number of demons released, would also appear on the earth.

These 108 stars, 36 stars of heavenly spirits and 72 stars of earthly spirits, become the bandits of Liangshan Marsh. These men become bandits not because they are rebels, but because they have in some way been framed by corrupt officials and either forced to do something illegal because of the fake crime, or just accused of something they didn't do. Eventually, there are 108 of these bandit chieftains, along with numerous other warriors, who gather in the marshy stronghold at Im and wait for amnesty to be granted to them so that they can once again serve their country without the mark of being a criminal.

Even when amnesty does come, however, the bandits are still not completely free to serve their country. They are first sent to northern China where they defeat the invading Liao forces. Next, they are sent to southern China where after many battle casualties, they manage to overcome invading rebel forces led by Fang La. At the point that the chieftains are set to receive honors from the Chinese emperor, there are only 27 of the men remaining. Most of these refuse the leadership positions offered them in hopes of a quieter life. The two main leaders of the group of bandit chieftains, Song Jiang and Ju Junyi accept leadership roles, but are murdered by the corrupt officials who still regard these former bandits as enemies. Since the emperor never realizes it is his own officials who killed Song and Ju, these officials are never punished. After their deaths, however, Song and Ju are widely honored and worshipped.



# Chapters 1-5

## Chapters 1-5 Summary

The novel *Water Margin* by Shi Nai'an details the rise and fall of a group of bandits during the time of the Song Dynasty in China. Among the themes addressed in this novel are the abuse of power by officials, the unjust punishment of the loyal and the power of chivalry and loyalty. Much can also be learned from the novel about the customs and habits of the early Chinese people as well as their thought and belief systems.

In Chapter 1, the people of the Eastern Capitol, under the rule of Ren Zong, suffer from a severe plague. The people plead with Zong to have Zhang the Divine Teacher come so that he can pray over them and dispel the plague. Marshal Hong Xin is sent to the Taoist monk's home to present him with an edict. While at the monastery, Hong commands the remaining monks to free the 108 demons imprisoned in the Suppression of Demons Hall.

In Chapter 2, Gao Qiu is adopted by Prince Duan and named a marshal commanding the Imperial Guards. Gao Qiu attempts to punish Wang Jin for not coming to pay his respects to Gao. In fear, Wang Jin and his mother leave the area. They meet Shi Jin. Wang Jin teaches Shi Jin how to properly fight and use weapons. Later when a group of bandits attacks Shi Family Village, Shi Jin captures Chen Da. Shi Jin lets the bandit leader go free and becomes friends with the bandits. Li Ji discovers the friendship and tells the authorities that the bandits will be present at the Mid-autumn Festival. The chapter closes as Shi Jin realizes that a group of men have come to overtake him and his guests.

In Chapter 3, Shi Jin overcomes the men who have turned against him, kills Li Ji and Wang the Fourth. He then escapes to Weizhou, where he hopes to reconnect with Wang Jin. Instead, Shi Jin meets up with Lu Da. Lu Da kills the butcher Master Zheng in his attempt to win the freedom of Lotus and her father, Old Jin. Charges of murder are brought against Lu Da and he runs from the city to escape arrest. As the chapter ends, a man has just accosted Lu Da who encourages Lu Da to change his appearance and name.

In Chapter 4, Lu Da discovers that it is Old Jin who has pulled him away from the crowd. Old Jin's daughter is now the wife of Squire Zhao, a wealthy man. Zhao houses Lu Da for some time, then sets him up with an appointment in a monastery. Once in the monastery, Lu Da gets drunk on two different occasions. As a result, he is thrown out of the monastery.

In Chapter 5, Lu Da is sent to the Great Xiangguo Monastery to find a job. On the way there, however, he joins up with a group of bandits. Lu Da stays with this gang of



bandits several days until he realizes how stingy they are. He then steals some of their wealth and leaves their stronghold in secret.

## Chapters 1-5 Analysis

One characteristic of this book that becomes very clear very quickly is the writer's habit of passing the action of the book from character to character in a matter of seconds. There are many characters in this novel and their Chinese names can make these characters very difficult to sort out and track through the action of the story. For instance, in these first five chapters, there are more than 20 significant characters introduced and many more insignificant characters mentioned.

The most important action in these five chapters occurs when Marshal Hong Xin insists that the monks free the demons imprisoned in the Suppression of Demons Hall. At this point Hong releases 108 demons to roam the earth. These demons include 36 stars of heavenly spirits and 72 stars of earthly fiends. The monks tell Hong that these demons will cause no end of trouble on the earth. It is indicated in the conclusion of the first chapter that these demons will cause valiants to gather in strongholds and heroes to gather in marshes. This clues the reader off to pay attention to any outcasts or men who are wrongfully accused.



# Chapters 6-10

## Chapters 6-10 Summary

In Chapter 6, Lu Da is chased off the premises of the Waguan Monastery. When he realizes he forgot his sack in the monastery Lu Da decides to rob a man whom he meets. This man turns out to be Shi Jin. The two go back to the monastery and overtake the priest and monk. They loot and burn the old monastery then part ways. Lu Da reaches the Eastern City and is accepted to work in the monastery's vegetable garden.

In Chapter 7, scoundrels try to embarrass Lu Da by throwing him into an ordure pit, but end up getting thrown in themselves by Lu Da. Lu Da also meets Lin Chong, an arms instructor with the Mighty Imperial Guards. Young Master Gao makes advances toward Lin Chong's wife, then finally arranges to have Lin Chong killed when he sees no other way to make the woman his.

In Chapter 8, Lin Chong is exiled to Cangzhou and given the tattoo of a criminal. Lu Qian meets with the two men charged to guard Lin Chong and requests that they kill the man.

In Chapter 9, Lu Da saves Lin Chong from his guards then insists on escorting him to Cangzhou. At a tavern on the way, the three are introduced to Chai Jin. Chai Jin sends money and letters of recommendation to prison with Lin Chong so that he will be treated kindly.

In Chapter 10, Lin Chong happens to meet Xiao-er, an old friend who now works in a tavern. One day, two strange men enter Xiao-er's tavern. Xiao-er and his wife notice that the men are talking about Lin Chong. They warn Lin Chong about the men. Six days later, the prison warden assigns Lin Chong to oversee the army fodder depot. The small shack that Lin Chong is given to live in collapses, so he takes shelter in a nearby temple. During the evening, the fodder depot burns down. Lin Chong hears people talking outside the temple and discovers the head prison keeper, Captain Lu Qian and Fu An have set fire to the depot. He kills all three of the men. At the conclusion of the chapter, Lin Chong runs several vassals away from their fire and wine. When they later find him collapsed in the snow, they capture him.

## Chapters 6-10 Analysis

At this point, one of the main themes of this novel is beginning to develop. Three characters thus far have been wrongly accused of crimes by corrupt government officials and have been exiled or forced to flee as a result of their "crimes." The most obvious of these is Lin Chong. He is arrested and exiled on a false charge because a government official develops a desire for Lin Chong's wife. After Lin Chong is exiled, he does commit crimes, which include killing Fu An and Lu Qian. Not only does Lin Chong



have to hide from the authorities because of the false charges against him, now he has real reasons to hide.

There are certain Chinese customs that are detailed and repeated throughout the novel. One of these customs is the practice of bribing the jailers so that certain prisoners will be given better treatment. For instance, Chai Jin sends bribes to the jail in which Lin Chong will be held. These bribes had been intended to ensure that Lin Chong would be treated well, fed well and not harmed. Unfortunately, since others have more power over the jailers, there is still an order put out to have Lin Chong killed.





# Chapters 11- 15

## Chapters 11- 15 Summary

In Chapter 11, the vassals who have captured Lin Chong take him to Chai Jin's manor. Chai Jin helps Lin Chong escape from Cangzhou where he can join a group of bandits where he will be safe.

In Chapter 12, Lin Chong becomes a leader in the bandit group. Marshall Gao is not kind to Yang Zhi when he arrives in the Eastern Capital and Yang Zhi has to sell his ancestral sword to get money for food. Niu Er picks a fight with Yang Zhi. When Yang Zhi fights back, he kills the man. Yang Zhi is exiled to Darning.

In Chapter 13, battles between Zhou Jin and Yang Zhi are detailed. As a result of their battle, the title of major is given to both men. Later in the chapter, Lei Heng is sent out with a group of fighters to capture robbers.

In Chapter 14, Lei Heng captures Wang the Third sleeping in a temple and takes him to Ward Chief Chao Gai's home. The man tells Chief Chao that he has information about an opportunity to get rich. These riches would come from Governor Liang of Darning in the Northern Capital who is planning to transport birthday gifts to his father-in-law Cai the Premier in the Eastern Capital.

In Chapter 15, Wu Yong convinces three of the Ruan brothers to join Chao's project to steal Liang's riches. As Chao and the brothers are discussing the project, a priest named Gongsun Sheng insists on speaking with Chao. As this priest is speaking with Chao someone comes into the room where the two are talking and seizes Gongsun.

## Chapters 11- 15 Analysis

In this section of chapters, the hero Chao Gai is introduced. Chao Gai is already well-known for his willingness to feed and give shelter to men who are in trouble or who have fallen on hard times. In this section, Chao Gai gives protection to Wang the Third even though he does not know the man. He allows the man, who is believed to be a thief, to pretend he is Chao's nephew so that he will not be put to death or punished.

It is Wang who proposed to Chao that they steal the birthday gifts intended for Cai the Premier. It is interesting to note the moral view of this intended act of theft. Since it is known that Governor Liang acquired these presents by unlawful means, Chao, Wang and the others do not consider it to be a crime to steal these gifts as they are being transported.



# Chapters 16- 20

## Chapters 16- 20 Summary

In Chapter 16, the three Ruan brothers, Bai Sheng, Chao Gai, Wu Yong, Gongsun Sheng, and Liu Tang trick Yang Zhi and his convoy into drinking poisoned wine so they can steal the birthday gifts intended for Liang.

In Chapter 17, Yang Zhi leaves his convey of soldiers and meets up with Sagacious Lu. The two become acquainted then decide to capture Precious Pearl Monastery together. Back at the Eastern Capital, Liang is told that Yang Zhi was responsible for the loss of the birthday gifts. Ho Tao, the police officer in charge of the search, is tattooed with an exile warning in an effort to speed his results. Ho Qing suggests that he might be able to give his brother some information about where the robbers are hiding.

In Chapter 18, Ho Qing gives his brother the identities of the robbers. The police go to Anle Village and arrest Bai Sheng after they find some of the stolen jewels in his home. Ho Tao engages a clerk to draw up an arrest for Chao. This clerk, Song Jiang, is a friend of Chao and warns him of the coming arrest. Chao and his men decide to go to Stone Tablet village where the Ruan brothers live. From there they plan to join the bandits at Liangshan Marsh. In order to slow down the police, Chao sets fire to his manor.

In Chapter 19, Chao and conspirators set a trap for the soldiers following them. Ho Tao is the only one of the soldiers left alive. After this battle, the group is escorted to the bandits' stronghold where they seek admittance to the group. Lin tells them that they need to monitor Wang Lun's actions during their second interview. Lin Chang promises to take over if his reactions are not favorable. With help from Chao's group, Lin Chang kills Wang Lun. Although Chao presses him to be the chieftain of the group, Lin Chang refuses.

In Chapter 20, Chao is made leader of the group of bandits. The bandits overcome attackers from Jizhou Prefecture. The officials of Jizhou Prefecture are unsure how to handle the situation. A new prefect arrives who helps with a plan to attack the stronghold. They send an order to the city of Yuncheng, which falls into the hands of Song Jiang. Jiang is shocked that Chao and his comrades have gone so far. Later in the chapter Song is reunited with Liu Tang. Song begs Liu to return to the stronghold so that he will not be arrested.

## Chapters 16- 20 Analysis

Note the way in which Chao Gai and his friends steal the birthday gifts from Yang Zhi. They don't attack and kill the men. Instead, they drug the men and steal the gifts without actually harming them physically. This action exemplifies the ideals of the group of bandits that Chao and his men join. Several times, it is indicated that the bandits don't



want to hurt the villagers and common people. Their only fight is with the corrupt government officials who hurt the common people and have caused the bandits to become outlaws.

Although the reader is not given information about how Chao Gai and his friends plan to steal the birthday gifts, a clue about what is going on is given when it is mentioned that one of the date merchants is a fellow with a scarlet birthmark. They offer the men transporting the jewels poisoned food and wine. For this reason, the men are not permanently injured or harmed, only made unconscious for a short while. Because he runs away from the group, Yang Zhi is made the scapegoat of the whole group's mistake.

Unfortunately, police officers discover that Chao and his men are responsible for the thefts. In order to keep from being arrested Chao and his men beg admittance to the group of bandits stationed at Liangshan Marsh. Because Wang Lun does not seem to want the men to join the group, and because many men in the group of bandits do not like Wang Lun, Lin Chang kills Wang Lun. Chao Gai wants Lin Chang to take over control of the bandits, but instead Chao Gai is made the leader of the bandits.

This section of chapters is important because they introduce a new era of leadership for the Liangshan Marsh bandits. The bandits don't like current leader, Wang Lun, so they are happy to do away with him and his leadership and welcome Chao Gai as their new leader. Chao is a very important character in the Liangshan Marsh's story. Song Jiang also will emerge as one of the most important characters in the novel.



# Chapters 21-25

## Chapters 21-25 Summary

In Chapter 21, Song Jiang kills his wife, Poxi, when she will not return a letter written by Chao Gai. Tang the Ox, however, is arrested for the murder.

In Chapter 22, Tang denies any involvement in Poxi's murder. Song Jiang's friends and family work together to help keep him from being arrested. Brothers Song Qing and Song Jiang decide to seek refuge with Lord Chai.

In Chapter 23, Song Jiang meets Wu Song, a man who isn't treated like Chai's other guests because he has a habit of being a mean drunk. Once he meets Song Jiang, Wu Song's behavior improves. Wu Song goes back to Qinghe County to see his brother. He kills a tiger as he crosses Jingyang Ridge and is made a constable.

In Chapter 24, Wu Song's brother, Wu the Elder, meets up with him at Yanggu. Wu the Elder's wife takes a fancy to Wu Song and insists that he move in with them. When she tries to seduce him, however, Wu Song rejects her advancements. Wu Song is sent to take riches to the magistrate's family in the Eastern Capital. The remainder of the chapter details how Ximen Qing hires the owner of the teahouse next door to Wu's house to match him up with Wu's wife.

In Chapter 25, Golden Lotus poisons Wu the Elder so that she and Ximen can be long time lovers. Ximen pays Coroner Ho to cover up Wu's murder. The coroner suspects something is wrong. When he sees the body, he becomes ill.

## Chapters 21-25 Analysis

Trouble with women seems to be a major theme of these five chapters. Song Jiang kills his wife when she steals a letter from him and then refuses to return it. Golden Lotus causes a rift between Wu Song and his brother when she tries to seduce Wu Song. Each of these situations ends badly, with murder. Song kills his wife. He chooses the loyalty he feels for his friend, Chao Gai over his wife, whom he knew was being unfaithful to him. In the second instance, Golden Lotus poisons her husband when she decides she'd rather have her lover than her husband. At the conclusion of the final chapter in this section, it is noted that the medical examiner suspected there was something suspicious about Wu the Elder's death.

When Wu Song kills the tiger that has been tormenting residents in the area of Jingyang Ridge, it becomes clear how important acts of courage are to the people of China. Wu Song is automatically made a constable simply because he kills a tiger. However, this instance also exemplifies a common characteristic shared by many of the characters in this novel. These characters often have unbelievable or super powers that allow them to do things that other characters cannot do. In Wu Song's case, his great strength that



comes out when he drinks heavily allows him to kill a tiger than no one else had been able to kill.

One aspect of Chinese culture that is illustrated in this section is the hospitality with which families treat one another. It is apparent by the way that Wu the Elder quickly agrees to his wife's suggestion that Wu Song stay with them that he does not even suspect that his wife might have an ulterior motive by asking Wu Song to stay with them. Wu Song also does not suspect anything unusual about Golden Lotus' request or her willingness to serve him so fully and politely



# Chapters 26 - 30

## Chapters 26 - 30 Summary

In Chapter 26, Inspector Ho's wife suggests he take a few of Wu's bones as evidence. When Wu the Elder's ghost appears to him, Wu Song knows that his death was suspicious. Coroner Ho tells him he suspected Wu the Elder had been poisoned and gives Wu Song the bones. Ho, Wu Song and Yunge file a case with the magistrate. Ximen attempts to pay off officials. The magistrate also wants to be paid off and tries to return the evidence to Wu Song. Wu Song forces Golden Lotus to tell a group of neighbors what happened to Wu the Elder. Wu Song kills Golden Lotus and Ximen.

In Chapter 27, Wu Song turns himself in for the murders of Golden Lotus and Ximen. Mistress Wang is sentenced to death. Wu Song is given forty strokes, tattooed and exiled.

In Chapter 28, Wu Song is treated kindly in prison at Shi En's command. Shi En, however, will not tell Wu Song the reason for his kindness.

In Chapter 29, Shi En tells Wu Song about the man, Jiang Zhong, who has taken over Shi En's territory in Happy Grove. Wu Song defeats this man in a fistfight.

In Chapter 30, Wu Song commands Jiang to leave Happy Grove and allow Shi En to have control back. In retaliation, General Zhang Mengfang requests that Wu Song go with him to Mengzhou Town. Wu Song is given liquor until he is drunk, then is framed for a robbery. Jiang takes back over Happy Grove and beats Shi En. Wu Song is exiled. Wu overtakes his guards and learns they had been hired to murder him. He heads back to Mengzhou.

## Chapters 26 - 30 Analysis

These five chapters narrate the majority of the action that causes Wu Song to be unjustly exiled; a punishment that eventually leads him to become a member of the Liangshan Bandits. Song's story also illustrates the way that corrupt officials were influencing government officials to overlook even the most obvious and heinous of crimes all the while they are condemning honest, upstanding people for less serious crimes, such as the crime of revenge in Wu Song's case.

Information in the novel indicates that it is obvious that Wu the Elder was murdered. When the coroner first sees Wu's body, he becomes sick because he realizes what has happened. It is only by his wife's quick thinking that Ho snatches a bone from Wu's pyre before his body is destroyed by fire. This bone is the only proof that Wu was killed, but the government officials don't seem interested in proof. These officials are being bribed by Lotus' lover to keep the murder under wraps. After Wu's funeral, Lotus and her lover



no longer even try to keep their relationship a secret; all neighbors living close to the Wu home are aware of what has happened.

Because officials are unable, or unwilling, to prosecute Wu's murderer, Wu Song takes matters into his own hands when he returns from his trip and discovers that his brother is dead. Wu avenges his brother's death by forcing Lotus to confess to Wu the Elder's murder in front of neighbors. Wu kills both Lotus and her lover, an action that makes him a wanted man. To make matters worse, Wu Song learns that the men who were hired to guard him on his way to his city of exile were also paid to kill him.

Another interesting point in this section is the idea of being visited by the spirit of a dead person. It is indicated that when Wu Song is visited by his brother's spirit that he becomes aware that his brother's death was not innocent. The idea is presented that Wu Song's spirit will not be able to rest in peace until the cause of his death is discovered and the guilty party or parties are punished.



# Chapters 31- 35

## Chapters 31- 35 Summary

In Chapter 31, Wu Song kills Commandant Zhang, General Zhang and Jiang. He writes on the wall in the dead men's blood that it was he who killed the men. Wu Song leaves Mengzhou under cover of darkness. Zhang Qing suggests that Wu Song seek refuge at Precious Pearl Monastery.

In Chapter 32, Wu Song finally winds up at the manor of Song Jiang. Wu and Song set out together to join the group of bandits at Precious Pearl Monastery, but separate before they reach their destination. Song Liang is captured by a group of bandits and allowed to join their group. One of the bandit leaders captures a woman who is the wife of Liu Gao, the companion of Hua Rong, the man whom Song Liang hopes to join. He begs the bandits to allow the woman to go free.

In Chapter 33, Song Jiang speaks with Hua Rong. Rong tells Jiang he should not have saved Commandant's Liu's wife because of her mouth and ability to persuade her husband to harm others. During Lantern Festival day Liu's wife has Song arrested when she accuses him of being one of the ones who kidnapped her. He tells Liu he is a merchant named Zhang San. Hua Rong sends a letter asking the man be released, but the letter only angers Liu. Hua and his men find Song in Liu's house and release him. Liu sends men to bring Song Jiang back. After Hua Rong demonstrates his ability with a bow and arrow, Liu's men run away. Song Jiang convinces Hua Rong to allow him to travel on to Clear Winds Mountain. Liu suspects what has happened and sends men to capture Song Jiang as he makes his way to Clear Winds Mountain. Hua Rong is also arrested. Both are transported to Qingzhou.

In Chapter 34, as the convoy with Song and Hua near the Prefecture, bandits attack out of the forest and command Huang Xin to pay three ounces of gold. Liu and Huang both run. Hua Rong manages to get his cage open, then frees Song. Liu Gao is captured. Qin Ming is hired to take care of the bandits. Qin Ming orders his men to set fire to the woods. Qin Ming is captured. When he hears Hua Rong and Song Jiang's stories, he requests permission to tell the Prefect Murong what has really happened. However, the bandits had taken his armor and burned the town while Qin Ming was asleep. Qin Ming is convinced to join the bandits. He also requests Huang Xin to join.

In Chapter 35, two columns of soldiers, one led by Song Jiang and Hua Rong and another led by Yan Shun and Stumpy Tiger Wang approach the city of Qingzhou. The men have been instructed not to harm local people or soldiers, but they kill Liu Gao's family and take his wife captive. Because the stronghold on Clear Winds Mountain is not strong enough to hold against the government's forces, the men abandon this stronghold and burn it. With the help of Song Jiang, they join the stronghold at Liangshan Marsh. Song Jiang, meanwhile, has learned that his father has died. Once he returns home he learns that his father is still alive. Song's father tricked him into





coming home so that he would know that an edict lessening the charges against all criminals had been issued. That night, however, the manor is surrounded by soldiers wanting to capture Song.

## Chapters 31- 35 Analysis

In this section of chapters, Wu Song and Song Jiang are re-united, allowing the action of the novel to be passed off from Wu to Song. Three times during these five chapters Song is captured and it is feared that he will be killed. In all three circumstances, Song is either rescued from his captors at the last minute by other bandits, or his captors learn who he is and allow him to be released. At the conclusion of Chapter 35, however, it appears that Song's life is in danger again.

Note also the Chinese apparent preoccupation with death. Although Song must realize that danger is in store for him, he is determined to go and pay his respects to his father. Song's father realizes that although this visit holds much danger for his son, it is the only way that he will be able to get his son to visit him. Probably not intentionally, Song's father puts his son in danger since his manor is surrounded by soldiers soon after Song arrives.

The series involving Liu Gao and his wife illustrates the way in which Song's intentions to do good sometimes work against him. The group of bandits that Song has joined captures Liu Gao's wife. Believing that this is helping to free an innocent woman, Song begs the bandits to let the woman go. Later, he learns he should not have done so because this woman encourages her husband to do things that hurt innocent people. In fact, Song's good deed in freeing the woman turns directly against him when Liu Gao's wife directly accuses him of being the one who had captured her. She refuses to tell the truth and admit that it was Song who fought for her release. As a result, Song is arrested, once again, for a crime that he did not commit.

Notice that when Song and the bandits do have an opportunity to get revenge on Liu Gao, they do not harm any of the innocent people living under Liu's rule. They intend only to destroy the man who has been harming and oppressing the people.



# Chapters 36 - 40

## Chapters 36 - 40 Summary

In Chapter 36, Song Jiang promises the angry men that he will go to the magistrate to confess the following day. He is exiled to the prison in Jiangzhou. As he is being escorted to his place of exile, a group from Liangshan Marsh intercepts them to try to save Song. Song tells the leaders that he does not want to dishonor his father by becoming a bandit and continues to Jiangzhou. They stop at a tavern where the manager serves the men drugged wine. Because the manager later recognizes Song, he does not kill them.

In Chapter 37, Song Jiang and his two guards are given trouble because they give silver to a performing medicine man. When Song finally arrives in Jizhou, he angers the prison superintendent because he does not give him a gift as is customary.

In Chapter 38, when the superintendent learns who Song is, and Song shows him the letter from Wu Yong, he becomes more respectful. While eating together, the superintendent and Song meet Li Kui, a man who causes all sorts of troubles for them. At the conclusion of the chapter, Li Kui has pushed over a singing girl because she interrupted his story.

In Chapter 39, Song Jiang becomes drunk while eating alone at the Xunyang Pavilion and writes a poem on the wall of the tavern. Later, a man from Wuweijun, named Huang Wenbing, reads the poem and believes it to be a sign of rebellion. Huang shows Cai the poem and convinces him that Song Jiang is the rebel who has been forecasted. Huang has Song Jiang arrested. Meanwhile, Dai Zong and the group of bandits from the Mount Liangshan stronghold come up with a plan to set Song Jiang free.

In Chapter 40, Wu Yong explains that he used a formal seal on the letter instead of the one that a father would have used when writing to his son. It is Huang, and not Cai who realizes the letter is fake. After being questioned and beaten, Dai admits the letter is fake and tells Huang and Cai that it came from the Liangshan Marsh bandits. Cai and Huang make plans to have Dai and Song Jiang killed. The Liangshan Marsh bandits arrive in the city and cause tumult. Song Jiang and Dai Zong are rescued from their executioners.

## Chapters 36 - 40 Analysis

The power of fate is a topic that is dealt with frequently in this novel. In this particular section it is indicated that it was fate that determined that Song would anger Huang Wenbing and therefore have this cruel man as an enemy. Although there are many other references to the power of fate in this novel, it seems that the Chinese of this time period believed that if something was "fated" there was nothing that could be done to change the way events would play out. Notice also that information in the text indicates



that Huang is seeking to become an official again. For this reason, he believes that his discovery of Song's poem and interpretation of the riddle will give him leverage in attaining his goal.

One character who is introduced in this section who will become important to the novel is Li Kui. Li Kui is impetuous and easily angered — a combination of traits that make him both a blessing and a curse to Song later in the novel. Also notice that characters who are being introduced at this point have very distinctive, almost superhuman, qualities. Dai Zong, for instance, has the ability to travel at a superhuman rate of speed. Zhang Shun has been given the nickname White Streak in the Water because of his swimming abilities. In fact, the novel indicates that this swimmer is able to stay underwater for seven days and seven nights.



# Chapters 41 - 45

## Chapters 41 - 45 Summary

In Chapter 41, Song Jiang and his companions burn down Huang's house and kill his family and servants. Zhang Shun and Li Jun capture Huang off a government boat and Li Kui kills him. Song realizes that he must join the Liangshan Marsh force or face death.

In Chapter 42, Song tries to bring his father to safety in the Liangshan Marsh stronghold but he is forced to hide from soldiers in a shrine. Fairy maids and boys rescue Song from the temple and take him to the Mystic Queen of Ninth Heaven. When Song wakes the next morning, he finds the bandits have come to look for him and rescue him. They also take Song's father and brother safely back to the stronghold.

In Chapter 43, Li Kui tries to carry his mother to safety across the mountains, but she is eaten by tigers. Li Kui kills these tigers and is recognized as a murderer during a celebration. Zhu Fu and Zhu Gui drug Li Kui's guards and rescue him.

In Chapter 44, Li Yun and Zhu Fu return to Liangshan Marsh with Li Kui and Zhu Gui. The bandits begin to worry because Gongsun has not returned from his visit to his mother. Dai Zong goes to find what might have happened to him. He meets Yang Lin on the way, who shows him where to look for Gongsun. Also in the chapter, Master Pan gives Shi Xiu a job as a butcher.

In Chapter 45, Master Pan asks Shi Xiu to look after the anniversary service for the death of Wang the Scribe, Clever Cloud's first husband. Shi Xiu realizes that Clever Cloud is in love with Pei Ruhai. Shi Xiu tricks Pei Ruhai in order to convince Yang Xiong that Clever Cloud is cheating on him. Shi Xiu kills both a friar and the cheating monk. An old man who discovers the bodies is sent to jail for the act.

## Chapters 41 - 45 Analysis

In this section of the novel, the action of the story once again leaves Song Jiang and focuses on Shi Xiu, a new character. Shi Xiu has been taken in by a family and given a job. As a result of this gratitude, Shi Xiu feels that it is his responsibility to bring to light Clever Cloud's affair with the monk. In his plan to expose the affair, Shi Xiu kills both the monk and the friar who has been helping the adulterous couple to cover up their affair.

In the chapters prior to the one dealing with Shi Xiu, several new members, including Song Jiang have joined the bandits at Liangshan Marsh. These new members now go about ensuring that the government officials, who have become their enemies, will not harm their family members. This illustrates Chinese rules of that time which dictated that family members of a person charged with a crime could be arrested and held responsible for that crime if the true perpetrator could not be located. The only way for

these men to ensure both the safety of themselves and their families was to seek refuge with the bandits.



# Chapters 46 - 50

## Chapters 46 - 50 Summary

In Chapter 46, the leaders of the town decide the friar and monk killed one another. Shi Xiu and Yang Xiong kill Clever Cloud and her maid when the two confess. They agree to join the band in Liangshan Marsh. The two are joined by Shi Qian. They travel to the Zhu Family Inn where there is a disagreement concerning a stolen rooster. The three are attacked as they try to leave the inn and Shi Qian is captured.

In Chapter 47, efforts continue to ensure Shi Qian's release from the Zhu family. Yang Xiong and Shi Xiu finally decide to go for help from the Liangshan Marsh bandits. When the bandits try to attack the town they are ambushed.

In Chapter 48, Song Jiang's troops unsuccessfully attack the Zhu Family Village in an attempt to free Shi Qian.

Chapter 49 opens with the promise of Song Liang finding a way to overcome the Zhu Family Village, but the story line quickly changes paths to the story of Xie Zhen and Xie Bao. The two are put in prison after wrongfully being accused of stealing a tiger someone else had killed. Mistress Gu gathers a force to rescue the Xie Brothers. The two stories converge when this group joins Song Jiang's group and suggests a way to rescue Shi Qian.

In Chapter 50, Sun Li, a villager, helps Song Jiang's forces take the Zhu Family Village. Li Ying and Du Xing are rescued and join the bandits. Ten Feet of Steele is given in marriage to Wang Ying.

## Chapters 46 - 50 Analysis

In this section, the bandits rescue Shi Qian from the Zhu Family Village. During this battle, they add many members to their group, including one woman who is given in marriage to Stumpy Tiger. This woman replaces the wife of Liu, the woman whom Stumpy had wanted to claim as his wife but who was instead killed by Song because of her ungrateful, lying nature.



# Chapters 51 - 55

## Chapters 51 - 55 Summary

In Chapter 51, Lei Heng takes his mother and flees to Liangshan Marsh after killing an actress. Zhu Tong is arrested but is allowed to work in the prefect's office. The prefect's young son takes a liking to Zhu. One day while on a walk to see the lanterns, Zhu Tong leaves the boy to speak to Lei. While they are talking, Li Kui takes the boy away and kills him with a drug. It is discovered that Song ordered the boy be killed so that Zhu would have to join their group.

In Chapter 52, Zhu Tong refuses to join the stronghold unless Li Kui is killed. Chai Jin arranges to keep Li Kui with him. However, Li Kui kills Yin Tianxi because he is angry that the man continues to harrass Chai Jin's family. Chai sends Li Kui back to Liangshan Marsh. Song arranges peace between Zhu Tong and Li Kui. Song Jiang learns that Lord Chai is in trouble and sends a group of chieftains to rescue the man. Gao Lian's forces use magic to fight against Song's forces.

In Chapter 53, Dai Zong is sent to look for Gongsun, a Taoist who can break the spells used by Gao Lian. Li Kui is sent with him. Because Li Kui tries to kill Luo the Sage, the sage has him put in jail. After a few days of troubles, the sage returns Li Kui.

In Chapter 54, Luo the Sage teaches Gongsun the Divine Method for Summoning the Five Thunderbolts. With this help, Song Jiang overcomes Gao Lian's forces. Lord Chai is found in a dry well. When Marshal Gao Qiu learns that his cousin has been killed, he entreats the emperor to allow him to employ Huyan Zhuo to wipe out the forces at Liangshan Marsh.

In Chapter 55, forces are gathered to attack the bandits. During one battle, Ling Zhen is taken captive by the bandits. After the bandits promise to bring Ling Zhen's family to the compound, he agrees to join the group.

## Chapters 51 - 55 Analysis

It is in this section that the reader is first introduced formally to why exactly the bandits are fighting as they are. They live with the hope that one day they will be granted amnesty for the crimes that they have committed. On this day, they hope to be able to regain useful positions in the government and protection of their country. Until that time, they fight against the government officials who do nothing but harm the common people. It is interesting to note that many of the people who are captured by the bandits during their first few battles are willing join the group and its cause.

One area of dissension among the group involves the death of the prefect's son. Song Jiang makes a point that he does not want to kill anyone who is innocent, yet he orders Li Kui to poison this boy so that Zhu Tong will be forced to join the bandits. This action

not only seems to go against Song's statement about the nature of the bandits, it also creates strife between Zhu Tong and Li Kui since Zhu Tong wants Li Kui dead because he was the one who actually gave the poison to the boy.





# Chapters 56 - 60

## Chapters 56 - 60 Summary

In Chapter 56, the bandits trick Xu Ning, an arms instructor and cousin of Tang Long, into coming to the stronghold so that he can teach them how to properly use a barbed lance.

In Chapter 57, in another clash between the Liangshan Marsh bandits and their enemies, Han Tao is captured and joins the bandits. Huyan is distressed and goes to Murong to ask for a new army so he can get revenge on the bandits. Huyan is sidetracked when his horse is stolen. He soon has to abandon his plan to attack Liangshan Marsh and help defend the city against bandits from White Tiger Mountain.

In Chapter 58, Sagacious Lu is sent to ask Song to join forces with the other two bandit groups to overtake the city of Qingzhou. During the battle Huyan is tricked and trapped. He joins the bandits. Pretending to have escaped his captors, Huyan convinces soldiers in the city to open the gates and let him in. The group from Precious Pearl Monastery joins the Liangshan Marsh bandits. Lu Da requests the men send after Shi Jin to join the group. Lu tries to free Shi Jin but is instead captured himself.

In Chapter 59, the Liangshan Marsh bandits help free Shi Jin and Lu. At the conclusion of the chapter, Gongsun has sent out a spell that has made a demon king show himself on the mountain.

In Chapter 60, the bandits create the form of a snake with which they attack the robbers. The bandits also become involved in a battle with people from Zengtou. During this battle, Chao Gai is hit by a poisoned arrow and dies. He tells Song Jiang to allow the man who captures the man who killed him to be leader of the bandits. Song Jiang is convinced to become the leader of the bandits for the time being.

## Chapters 56 - 60 Analysis

It is in this section of the text that Song's forces suffer their first major loss. Their leader, Chao Gai is struck in the face by a poisoned arrow and later dies. The men's reaction to Gai's death illustrates how strongly the Chinese of this time period believed in omens and fate. Just before the battle in which Chao Gai is killed, a strong wind breaks the pole that supports Chao's battle standard. All of the men immediately interpret this as an evil omen and beg him to call off battle plans. Chao, however, will not listen to the men and goes ahead with battle plans. When Chao is struck by the arrow, they reason that this strike was the fulfillment of the omen forecasted by the breaking of Chao's standard pole.



# Chapters 61 - 65

## Chapters 61 - 65 Summary

In Chapter 61, Lu Junyi is tricked by Wu Yong into going to visit Liangshan Marsh. He fights with the bandits when he arrives at the stronghold.

In Chapter 62, Song Jiang, offers Lu the seat of leadership in the band. Lu requests to be sent home. The bandits start a rumor that Lu has joined the bandits so that when he returns home, he will be an outcast. Lu gives a false confession to save himself. He is treated badly by his prison guards on the trip to his city of exile. He is rescued by Yan Qin, but is discovered and arrested again. Shi Xiu saves Lu from being executed.

In Chapter 63, both Shi Xiu and Lu are captured before they can escape from the city. Liang receives letters from the Liangshan Marsh bandits referencing how they will destroy the city if Lu is not set free. Officials from the Northern Capital search for people to help them defend the city against their attackers.

In Chapter 64, Song Jiang and his troops attack the Northern Capital with no success. Jiang learns that there are forces from the Eastern Capital coming to attack the stronghold. Song's men trick the forces in the Northern Capital into believing that they are retreating when they actually are leading them into a trap.

In Chapter 65, Suo Chao is convinced to join the group of bandits. The ghost of Chao Gai visits Song and delivers a prophecy. Song becomes ill with a carbuncle on his back, and Dr. An Daoquan is summoned to heal him. A new plan is made to attack the Northern Capital and free the two bandits being held prisoner there.

## Chapters 61 - 65 Analysis

In this section, Lu Junyi is tricked into joining the bandits. Because he won't join willingly, the bandits start rumors about him stating that he has joined their forces. Therefore, when Lu tries to return to his hometown, he is arrested and treated badly. It is at this point that Song requests Lu become the leader of the bandits. Lu, however, rejects this request.



# Chapters 66 - 70

## Chapters 66 - 70 Summary

In Chapter 66, the bandits attack the Northern Capital during a lantern festival. Lu and Shi Xui are freed. Yang Qing and Zhang Shun find Li Gu as they try to sneak out of the city.

In Chapter 67, there is an argument as Song Jiang tries to give power over the group to Lu. Governor Liang presents a suggestion to Premier Cai that they attack the bandits at their stronghold. Cai Jiang chooses two men to lead an attack against the stronghold. The bandits learn of the planned attack. At the conclusion of the fighting, both Shan and Wei join the Liangshan Marsh bandits.

In Chapter 68, Duan Zingzhu is attacked by the same robbers responsible for Chao Gai's death as he tries to bring home horses for the stronghold. Lu the Magnate leads forces to fight against these men. Song again asks Lu to take control of the bandits. Lu again refuses and Song is convinced to continue as leader.

In Chapter 69, Song Jiang and his forces overtake Dongping.

In Chapter 70, Song Jiang and his forces return from assisting Lu at Dongping. As they sit down to feast their victories, it is noted that there are now 108 chieftains at the Loyalty Hall.

## Chapters 66 - 70 Analysis

The issue of leadership emerges as a major issue in this section as Song Jiang continually tries to give away his position of power to Lu. The bandits, however, make it very clear who they want as their leader. Even after Lu captures Shi Wengong, making him the avenger of Chao Gai's death, Lu continues to refuse leadership. At the same time, the group of bandits continues to insist that Song be their leader.

Chapter 70 is an important chapter in the book as the number of chieftains has now reached 108. This count of 108 chieftains corresponds to the number of demons released from the Suppression of Demons Hall in the first chapter.



# Chapters 71-75

## Chapters 71-75 Summary

In Chapter 71, Song Jiang expresses his gratitude that there are 108 chieftains gathered at Loyalty Hall and that none of them, with the exception of Chao Gai have been killed in battle. A mass is held for seven days. At the conclusion of the services, a sign comes down from Heaven's Gate in the form of a stone tablet on which all of the names of the chieftains are etched. During a later celebration, Li Kui becomes angry when Song speaks of getting amnesty. Song has Li put in jail and is very disturbed by the incident.

In Chapter 72, Chai Jin removes the words "Song Jiang of Shondong" from a list of outlaws in the Hall of Deep Thought. Song and his men arrange a meeting with Marshal Yang through prostitutes Li Shishi and Zhao Yuannu. Li Kui, who is angry with Song Jiang for suggesting they beg for amnesty, hits Marshal Yang with a chair, then sets the house on fire. Song Jiang and his men, with the exception of Yan Qing, who is sent to look for Li, try to leave the city.

In Chapter 73, Yan apprehends Li Kui and the two leave the city. Li Kui receives forgiveness from Song Jiang after he captures two men who are impersonating Song.

In Chapter 74, Yan Qing successfully fights against Sky-Supporting Pillar. However, Li Kui causes turmoil in this city as well as the city of Shouzhang. Song swears he won't forgive Li Kui's next misadventure. Meanwhile, the imperial court in the Eastern Capital is sent a complaint about the bandits' behavior. It is suggested that the bandits be offered amnesty so that they will fight the Liao on behalf of the Eastern Capital. Marshal Chen Zongshan is sent to deliver the message and amnesties.

In Chapter 75, Marshal Gao tells Chen he is opposed to the amnesties and insists that Captain Li and Majordomo Zhang be sent along as well. These two men infuriate the bandits with their lack of respect and hateful speech. They also replace the imperial with cheap wine. When the amnesty is read, it angers Song Jiang and his men. Marshal Chen tells his people that the amnesty just made things worse. Tong Guan is chosen to lead forces against Liangshan Marsh.

## Chapters 71-75 Analysis

Introducing this section of chapters is a magnificent religious ceremony in which the bandits pray for Chao Gai's passage to heaven as well as safe passage to heaven for all of those killed by violence. This ceremony illustrates not only the bandits' desire for those not involved in hurting others not to be harmed by them, but also shows the religious ceremony practiced by the Chinese. This is a massive ceremony in which priests are called in to make sacrifices, pray and worship on behalf of the bandits. This ceremony, which is referred to as "mass" covers a span of seven days. At the



conclusion of the ceremony, the bandits are given a sign that the gods are pleased with their worship because a stone tablet comes down from heaven etched with the names of the 108 bandits.

Also in this section, amnesty is finally offered to the bandits. Because Marshal Gao, who still does not trust the bandits and has caused much of their trouble, interferes with the delivery of the amnesty, the offer is not accepted. Although the emperor has asked those delivering the amnesty to be respectful to the bandits, they act in ways that are anything but respectful; they are hateful, rude and even exchange the imperial wine with cheap wine. In addition, the wording of the amnesty itself angers the bandits. Although the emperor had hoped that the bandits would be willing to help fight against the Liao forces, he has instead offended them.



# Chapters 76 - 80

## Chapters 76 - 80 Summary

In Chapter 76, Tong Guan realizes what a formidable force the bandits are.

In Chapter 77, Tong Guan's army is defeated in the first battle. Song Jiang's forces ambush those of Tong in the second battle. Because the bandits suspect that another expedition will be sent out, they decide to send someone to investigate what might be in store for them.

In Chapter 78, Dai Zong and Liu Tang are sent to investigate when they will be attacked again. Marshal Gao offers to lead an army to defeat the bandits. Gao asks that he be allowed to have boats to assist him in the war against the bandits. Dai returns to the stronghold with this news and the group begins to form battle plans. Despite his plans, Gao's water attack fails. He and his army try to retreat but are attacked by the bandits.

In Chapter 79, Marshal Gao tries to call in reinforcements but is unsuccessful. He and his troops attempt to return to Jizhou but find that Song Jiang and his troops have set the city on fire. Meanwhile, an amnesty with a loophole has been issued. Wang Jin suggests to Gao that the edict is instructing them to kill Song and then grant amnesty to the remainder of the bandits. Song Jiang and his forces are ordered to come to the walls of Jizhou to hear the imperial decree.

In Chapter 80, Marshal Gao oversees the issuance of the edict. When Song's men learn the citizens of Jizhou plan to obliterate Song, they rebel against the edict and fight Gao's army. Gao writes to Prime Minister Cai, Chancellor Tong and Marshal Yang, who authorize another attack on Liangshan Marsh. Although Gao builds paddleboats that he believes will be able to get past the bandits, he is again overcome by the bandits. The men who are captured are allowed to return to their city where Gao promises that he will beg for amnesty for the bandits and get them high positions.

## Chapters 76 - 80 Analysis

Although Gao first believes that the bandit forces will be easy to overcome, it soon becomes clear to him how formidable a force these bandits really are. He leads two attacks against the bandits and is defeated in both attacks. After he is captured by the bandits and is treated kindly, Gao promises that if he is released, he will beg for a true amnesty to be offered to the bandits.



# Chapters 81 - 85

## Chapters 81 - 85 Summary

In Chapter 81, Yan Qing is allowed to go to visit Li Shishi and try to find out the status of Gao Qui and the amnesty. Li arranges a meeting for Yan Qing with the emperor. They also contact Marshal Su. In addition, Dai Zong and Yue Ho are rescued from their captivity.

In Chapter 82, Marshal Su Yuanjing offers to take the imperial decree to Song Jiang and the bandits. As they prepare to leave the stronghold, Song Jiang and his men divide the riches among the men and nearby citizens. However, the bandits become angry when they realize that the Chancellor of Military Affairs wants them to return to their original army units.

In Chapter 83, Tong Guan, Prime Minister Cai Jing, Marshal Gao Qui and Marshal Yang Jian decide to send Song Jiang and his forces to fight the Liao forces with the hope that Song's forces will be destroyed. At the conclusion of the chapter Song Jiang is forced to pronounce a death sentence on one of his own men after he attacks an official of the imperial court who has shorted their supplies.

In Chapter 84, Song's forces take over the city of Tanzhou as well as the prefecture of Qizhou.

In Chapter 85, the minister of Liao suggests to the king that he consider offering to allow Song and his men to join their forces. Song refuses to accept the offer at the time, and suggests they discuss the offer again in the fall. Gongshun and Song travel to visit Luo the Sage. The Sage tells Song that his "future in life is dim." Back in Qizhou, Minister Ouyang again approaches Song with the proposition that he join the Liao forces. Song pretends to be interested in the minister's offer in order to trick their forces. He and Lu conceive a plan to take the city of Bazhou.

## Chapters 81 - 85 Analysis

Song's strong loyalty to his country is highlighted by his actions in this section of the novel. Although he could easily have joined the stronger Liao forces and possibly have received more laud and a higher standing, Song continues to fight for his own administration. He does not realize that he and his men were given the opportunity to fight against the Liaos in hopes that all of the bandits would be killed during the battles. He believes that he still has an opportunity to redeem himself through his valiant military deeds.

Also note Song's unwillingness in Chapter 83 to kill one of his own men even though this man had attacked an official of the imperial court for shorting supplies. Song knows that the man had acted in a way that was proper since the man was stealing, but cannot



allow his men to make any mistakes that might cost all of them their returned reputations. In fact, note that Song cannot even bring himself to kill his fellow bandit. He has the bandit hang himself, thus doing the murder, then Song cuts off the man's head as if he were the one who had actually killed him.





# Chapters 86 - 90

## Chapters 86 - 90 Summary

In Chapter 86, Ho Zhongbao the commanding officer of the Liao forces makes a plan to trap the bandits in Stony Valley. Lu's forces are trapped in the valley. They manage to get Bai Sheng out of the valley to go for help. After Lu and his forces are freed from Stony Valley, they move on to Youzhou. Yanshou, son of the Liao minister Wuyan, is allowed to set out for Youzhou and attack before the main army is dispatched.

In Chapter 87, Yanshou is captured during his first battle with Song's forces. As fighting continues, the sound of another army approaching gives fear to Song.

In Chapter 88, Song and his men deploy in a nine-unit octagon against the Liao forces. Zhu Wu admits to Song that he doesn't recognize the formation the Liao forces have set up; in two different battles, Song and his men are unable to overcome the Liao forces. After the second battle, Song Jiang has a dream in which he is visited by the Mystic Queen of the Ninth Heaven. She explains to Song how to overcome the Zodiac Deployment.

In Chapter 89, Song and his forces use the battle plan presented by the Mystic Queen and obliterate the Liao forces. The Liao king surrenders to Song Jiang. As the chapter concludes, Sagacious Lu asks permission to go and visit the abbot at Wutai, his first teacher. Song Jiang and the other chieftains decide to go with Lu.

In Chapter 90, the abbot makes a pronouncement to Song that he does not understand. The men leave the monastery and reach a place called Double Woods Crossing. Here Song berates a hunter for shooting geese. The army moves on until it reaches the capital. The emperor gives all the men money and also titles and positions. Song Jiang is depressed because he has been granted only a low rank despite his troubles in battle against the Liao. At the conclusion of the chapter, Song is allowed to lead an expedition to attack rebel forces lead by La Fang.

## Chapters 86 - 90 Analysis

Although Song and his men overcome the Liao forces, they are not given the hero's welcome for which Song had hoped. The men are given low ranking positions, and not even allowed to enter the city without special permission. Song Jiang and his men are, however, given another duty at the conclusion of this section; they are sent to beat back a group of rebel forces hoping to form their own city under the leadership of La Fang.



# Chapters 91 - 95

## Chapters 91 - 95 Summary

In Chapter 91, Song Jiang and his forces take over and occupy the city of Runzhou. Three chieftains die in this battle.

In Chapter 92, Guan Sheng defeats Xing Zheng in this battle. However, in another attack on Fang La's forces, Han Tao and Peng Qi are killed. As the war rages on, Jin Jie's wife suggests to him a plan that will save them and end the war. The plan is successful. Song Jiang, however, falls unconscious when he learns that three more chieftains have been killed when forces took the city of Xuanzhou.

In Chapter 93, when Song Jiang wakes, he voices his fears that their army will never be able to capture Fang La. Song's forces move on to Wuxi, a city of which they take control quickly. Robbers pretending to be fishermen help Song Jiang and his men come up with a plan to successfully capture Suzhou.

In Chapter 94, an emissary from the emperor comes to request that Dr. An go to treat the emperor, who has fallen ill. In battle with Fang La's forces, Xu Ning is struck with a poisoned arrow. Without Dr. An present, Song believes the chieftain will die. Zhang Shun is killed by arrows as he tries to enter the city of Hangzhou by water. As Song and his men mourn the death of Zhang Shun, they are attacked.

In Chapter 95, Dai Zong and Song Jiang are ambushed when they go to make sacrifices to Zhang Shun's spirit. These forces are surprised, however, when they find that Song has his own forces prepared and ready. Song and his forces continue their attacks on the city of Hangzhou. They are finally successful when Song's forces disguise themselves as grain salesmen in order to enter the city. During this battle, the spirit of Zhang Shun, brought to life in Zhang Heng's body by the Marsh Shaking Dragon King, captures Prince Fang and cuts off his head.

## Chapters 91 - 95 Analysis

It is in this section of chapters that Song and Lu begin to lose their chieftains rapidly. It appears that the prophecies that Song Jiang has a bleak future are coming true. It is interesting to note in this section the emphasis that is put on retrieving the bodies of those killed in battle even if this retrieval threatens the lives of those doing the retrieving. In the same way, Song also puts himself in harm's way as he is trying to make sacrifices to Zhang Shun's spirit. This example illustrates how important it was to the Chinese people to honor the dead, and properly bury their bodies.



# Chapters 96 - 100

## Chapters 96 - 100 Summary

In Chapter 96, Song mourns the loss of all the chieftains who died in battle. Song and Lu then move on to attempt to defeat Muzhou and Shezhou respectively. Song's forces are ambushed when they attempt to retrieve the bodies of Xie Zhen and Xie Bao.

In Chapter 97, Song Jiang and his men are rescued at the last minute by friendly troops. During a battle near the city of Muzhou, Song's forces believe they are about to be killed but are protected by a dragon spirit. This spirit also tells Song that in ten days, Fang La's forces will fall. When the dragon spirit appears to Song a second time, the forces agree the time is right to attack Muzhou.

In Chapter 98, Song's forces overtake the city of Muzhou. Meanwhile, Lu and his forces have bad luck in the beginning of their attempt to overcome the city of Shezhou. A monk gives them information that helps them take Yuling Pass. They also successfully defeat forces and take the city of Shezhou. Li Jim and a group pretend to surrender to La Fang's forces in a ploy to destroy La Fang's palace when he goes out to fight the remainder of Song's army.

In Chapter 99, Chai Jin tricks Fang La into letting him lead his forces. At a crucial point in the battle, Chai Jin reveals his true identity and helps Song's forces overcome the rebels. Sagacious Lu captures Fang La as he tries to get some food at a monastery. Lu dies at the monastery after hearing the roar of the tide, fulfilling a prophecy. Song Jiang and twenty-six of his chieftains return to the Eastern Capital to receive honors.

In Chapter 100, Dai Zong decides to become a Taoist priest. Marshals Gao Qiu and Yang Jian make a plan to kill Lu Junyi with mercury and Song with poison. As a result of the mercury poisoning Lu falls off a boat into a river and drowns. Song suspects the wine has been poisoned when his stomach begins to hurt soon after he drinks it. Fearing Li Kui will rebel and ruin the bandits' reputation, he has the man brought to Chuzhou and serves him the poisoned wine also. As Li Kui is preparing to leave, Song tells him about the poison. He requests that when Li dies, his spirit meet the spirit of Song on Liao Er Flats. After Li and Song die, their spirits visit Wu Yong and request that he come and visit their graves. Hua Rong has the same dream and joins Wu Yong at the graves. They decide to kill themselves so they can join their leader in death.

## Chapters 96 - 100 Analysis

In this section, Gao Qui finally gets rid of the two men whom he considered his enemies. In order to do so, however, he has had both of the men poisoned. Although the spirits of both Song and Li Kui visit the emperor and tell him about the murder, their deaths are not avenged because there are other government officials willing to cover up Gao's crimes. Notice the sacrifice at the conclusion of the novel. Even though it is not

required of them, both Hua Rong and Wu Yong kill themselves so they can join their leader in death.



# Characters

## Song Jiang

If there is one person who could be considered the main character or the hero of this novel, it is Song Jiang. Song originally works as a clerk in Yuncheng. He was born in the Song Family Village. He has been given the nickname of Dark Song Jiang because he is short and swarthy in appearance. Even as a clerk, Song was well-known for helping anyone who requested his help.

Song becomes an outlaw when he attempts to keep his friend, Chao Gai, from being arrested for his participation in the robbery of Premier Cai's birthday gifts. Song's wife, Poxi, manages to get a letter that Chao has written to Song thanking him for helping him avoid arrest in connection with the gift robbery. Song kills Poxi when she refuses to return the letter to him. At that time, officials tried to arrest Song for Poxi's murder but Song's father helped him hide from authorities. Later, when drinking in a tavern, Song writes a poem considered "rebellious" by those who read it. It is at this point that Song joins the group at Liangshan Marsh.

After the death of Chao Gai, Song is promoted to leader of the bandits. Although he tries to abdicate his rule at every chance, it is Song who leads the bandits through their hardships to the point that they receive their amnesty. Song also leads the bandits as they fight first the Liao army, then later the rebel forces as they try to regain the trust of the emperor. At the conclusion of the novel, Song is given poisoned wine by corrupt officials in the emperor's service. His last action before he dies is to give Lu Kui this bad wine also so that he will not revolt and ruin the bandits' legacy.

## Chao Gai

Before he became one of the Liangshan Marsh bandits, Chao Gai was the ward chief of East Bank Village. He is known for fighting injustice and helping the needy. Liu Tang presents Chao with the idea of stealing the birthday gifts bound for Cai the Premier in the Eastern Capital. It is discovered that Chao was involved in the theft of the gifts and although officials try to have him arrested, Chao's friends help him to escape. It is at this point that Chao Gai joins and becomes leader of the bandits in Liangshan Marsh after the original leader is killed because he is not well liked. Chao Gai is the first of the bandits to be killed in battle. He is killed when he is struck in the face by a poisoned arrow shot by Shi Wengong.

## Lu Junyi

Lu Junyi is tricked by the bandits into visiting the Liangshan Marsh stronghold. Because Lu refuses to become a bandit and wants to return home, the bandits start rumors that Lu has joined the group. For this reason, when Lu returns to his home, he is considered



to be an outcast. He is arrested twice and almost executed before being rescued by the Liangshan Marsh bandits.

Lu is the bandit who avenges Chao Gai's death, which by Chao Gai's request, makes him the new leader of the bandits. Instead of accepting his role as leader, however, Lu insists that Song keep the position as the leader of the bandit group. Lu does hold the position of second in command and helps Song throughout the reign of the outlaws and their battles against the Liaos as well as the rebel forces of La Fang. After these victories, Lu is given the title of Marshal of Military Contribution and is made governor of Luzhou Prefecture. Shortly after this, Lu Junyi is murdered by Marshals Gao and Yang when they slip mercury into his food at an imperial feast.

## Marshal Hong Xin

Marshal Hong Xin is the official chosen to take the edict to Zhang the Divine Teacher asking that the people be healed. While he is visiting the monastery where Zhang lives, he insists that the Hall of the Suppressed Demons be opened so that he can see what a demon looks like.

## Gao Qiu

Gao Qiu is a young scamp from the Xuanwu District first exiled, then passed from family to family until he was "adopted" by Prince Duan because of his ball playing skills. Prince Duan is later made emperor. As a result, Gao is named a marshal commanding the Imperial Guards.

During his reign, Gao causes much grief for many innocent people. For instance, he punishes Wang Jin when he does not appear to pay his respects to Gao. Although Wang is sick, Gao believes that Wang is faking his illness and has him arrested. It is also Gao Qiu who arranges for Lin Chong to bring the sword into the Inner Sanctum. For this "crime" Lin is arrested and exiled.

Gao leads two raids against the bandits while they are still based in their stronghold at Liangshan Marsh. He is also one of those responsible for ruining the emperor's first attempt to allow the bandits to have amnesty. In both of these raids, Gao's forces are defeated by the bandits. At the conclusion of the novel, Gao is one of the marshals who comes up with the plan to kill Lu and Song.

## Lu Da

Lu Da is a major in the garrison, whom Shi Jin meets in a tea house in Weizhou. Lu takes charge of Lotus and her father by ensuring that the innkeeper will let the father and daughter go. He then accidentally beats Master Zheng to death and escapes to Yanmen. Old Jin, who is Lotus' father, arranges for his daughter's new husband, Squire Zhao, to set Lu Da up with an appointment in a monastery. He is passed off as a cousin



of Squire Zhao. During his time at the monastery Lu Da is called Sagacious Lu the Tattooed Monk.

After being unsuccessful in the monastic life, Lu Da joins the bandits. Before becoming part of the Liangshan Marsh bandits, he is first in control at Precious Pearl Monastery.

## Master Zheng

Master Zheng is also called the "Lord of the West." He hopes to buy the girl, Jade Lotus, as a concubine and promises to pay her father three thousand strings of cash for her. He never pays Jade Lotus' father the money. When Zheng's wife drives the girl out of the house, Zheng demands her father return the money, which Zheng never paid. Lu Da gets involved in the affair and accidentally kills Zheng trying to make the matter right.

## Squire Zhao

Squire Zhao is the wealthy man who marries Jade Lotus after she and her father escape from Zheng with Lu Da's help. Because of his gratitude for Lu Da, he arranges for Lu Da to have a place in a monastery so he can assume a different identity and avoid being arrested for the death of Zheng. Zheng also arranges another place for Lu Da to stay after he twice creates a ruckus at Mount Wutai. Zheng also repays the monks for the damage that Lu Da has done at the monastery.

## Tiger-Fighting General Li Zhong

It is this man whom Shi Jin and Lu Da meet at Weizhou selling medicine and putting on an arms show. He is one of Shi's old arms teachers. Lu Da again meets up with this man on Peach Blossom Mountain. Li had become the leader of a pack of bandits on the mountain who rule the area. The Peach Blossom Bandits eventually merge with the Liangshan Marsh bandits. At this point, Li is named a lieutenant commander in the bandit forces. He is one of the troops who assist Lu Junyi in his assault on Shezhou and Yuling Pass.

## Lin Chong

Lin Chong was an arms instructor of the Mighty Imperial Guards. He tries to retaliate when Young master Gao sets his eyes on his wife. Instead of convincing Gao to leave his wife alone, however, Lin is lured into taking a sword into the white tiger inner sanctum, then arrested for his "crime." After escaping from prison when the army fodder depot he is in charge of is burned, Lin Chong becomes a member of a band of outlaws in Liangshan Marsh. Lin kills Wang Lun, the current leader of the bandits when Chao and his group decide to try to join the outlaws. Although members try to make Lin the leader of the stronghold at this point, he refuses to do so.



## Chai Jin

Chai Jin is a wealthy man who welcomes prisoners into his home in Cangzhou. He feeds these prisoners and gives them money. It is to Chai Jin that the Song brothers go to seek refuge for their crimes. Although he never joins the Liangshan Marsh bandits he is rescued by them from a dry well where he has been left to die.

## Lei Heng

Lei Heng is the leader of the men sent to Liangshan Marsh to capture robbers. He is also sent to the Song manor to arrest either Song or his father and brother, but is not able to do either.

## Wang the Third (Liu Tang)

Wang the Third, also called the Red-Haired Demon, seeks Chief Chao wanting to talk to him about a chance to earn riches. Chao pretends the man is his nephew so that he will not be put in jail.

## Three Ruan Brothers

These brothers are Ruan the Second, Ferocious Giant; Ruan the Fifth, Recklessly Rash; Ruan the Seventh, Devil Incarnate. Wu Yong goes to visit these brothers to enlist their help in stealing the Liang riches. The three brothers later join the Liangshan Marsh bandits.

## Gongsun Sheng

Gongsun Sheng is a Taoist priest who helps Song and his men overcome enemies who use spells against them.

## Poxi

Poxi was Song Jiang's wife. Poxi is killed by Song Jiang because she refuses to return a letter to him written by Chao Gai.

## Zhang Wenyuan

Zhang is Poxi's lover. It is Zhang who draws up papers for Song's arrest after Poxi's murder. Although all others either do not want to prosecute Song because he is such a good man or because they have been paid off, it is Zhang who keeps alive the request to arrest Song.





## Wu Song

Wu Song meets Song Jiang at Chai's manor. Because he kills the tiger that kills people on Jingyang Ridge, he is made a constable. He meets with his brother, Wu the Elder, and moves in with him, but his brother's wife tries to seduce him and he leaves. Wu Song later learns that Golden Lotus has killed his brother. He discovers the truth about Wu the Elder's death and avenges his murder.

## Wu the Elder

Wu the Elder is Wu Song's older brother. He is an upright person. He is married to Pan Jinlian, or Golden Lotus, who hates him. Golden Lotus murders her husband. Wu the Elder appears to his brother in a dream. It is at this point that Wu Song realizes his brother was murdered.

## Wang Ying, Zheng Tianshou, and Yan Shun

These three men are the leaders of the bandit group by which Song Jiang is captured. These three men later join the Liangshan Marsh bandits.

## Li Kui

Li Kui is a prison guard who becomes mean when he gets drunk. He causes all sorts of problems for Song and Dai Zong because of his temper. Li travels to his home to save his mother and bring her to the Liangshan Marsh stronghold but she is eaten by tigers along the way. It is Li Kui who is responsible for poisoning the prefect's young son. Li Kui at one point offends Song so completely that Song tells Li Kui that he must find some men who are impersonating Song before he will be given forgiveness. Li Kui does so successfully. At the conclusion of the novel, Song gives Li Kui poisoned wine. He does this because he is afraid that if Li Kui learns that Song and Lu were murdered he would rebel and ruin the bandits' reputation.

## Zhu Gui

Zhu Gui is the Liangshan Marsh bandit whom Song chooses to send along behind Li Kui to keep him out of trouble. When Li Kui is arrested, Zhu Gui and his brother Zhu Fu, make meat and wine laced with drugs to knock out the soldiers guarding Li so they can set him free.



## Shi Xiu

Shi Xiu kills a monk and friar after he discovers they have been in cahoots in allowing the monk to sleep with Yang Xiong's wife. Shi also helps Yang Xiong kill his wife and her maid when they finally confess to their part in the affair.

## Yang Xiong

Yang Xiong is Clever Cloud's second husband. He realizes when the monk and friar are found dead that Shi Xiu must be responsible for their deaths. He also realizes he was wrong in accusing Shi of making moves toward his wife. Yang Xiong assists Shi in the murder of his wife and then the two agree to join the bandits.

## Pei Ruhai

Pei Ruhai is the monk who is murdered by Shi Xiu after Shi discovers the monk has been sleeping with Yang Xiong's wife. He is a member of the grateful retribution monastery.

## Shi Qian

Shi Qian is the man who overhears and sees the murders of Clever Cloud and her maid. He goes with Shi Xiu and Yang to join the Liangshan Marsh bandits, but is kidnapped after the three set fire to the Zhu Family Inn. Shi Qian is also known as Flea on a Drum.

## Ten Feet of Steele

Ten Feet of Steele is a woman warrior named after the two swords that she carries. She is captured by the Liangshan Marsh bandits and is given to Stumpy Tiger in marriage. She is the only female member of the Liangshan Marsh bandits.

## Xie Brothers

The Xie brothers are Xie Zhen and Xie Bao. They kill a tiger but this tiger is stolen by Squire Mao. The brothers are put in jail by Mao, but are later broken out by Sun Xin. They join the bandits at Liangshan Marsh.

## Zhu Tong

Liangshan Marsh stronghold leaders want Zhu Tong to join the gang. In order to lure him onto the mountain, they kill the prefect's young son while the boy is in Zhu's care.



Because it was Li Kui who was responsible for giving the drugs to the boy, Zhu does not want to join the group unless Li is killed.

## **Yan Qing the Prodigy**

Yan Qing is kicked out of the house in which he serves by Lu's wife and Li Gu after it is rumored that Lu joined the Liangshan Marsh bandits. He warns Lu to join the bandits for real to seek refuge. When Lu refuses and is arrested, it is Yan Qing who saves him from the guards when they try to kill him by killing them first with arrows.

## **Dr. An of Jiankang District**

Dr. An is the doctor who is called to cure Song Liang of the carbuncle on his back. He continues to travel with the bandits and treat their sick and wounded until he is called to treat the emperor of China.

## **Fang La**

Fang La is the leader of rebel forces against the Chinese. It is when Song and his armies try to overcome these troops that they begin to be killed off.

## **Marsh Shaking Dragon King**

The Marsh Shaking Dragon King allows Zhang Shun to inhabit the body of Zhang Heng and kill prince Fang.

## **Shi Wengong**

Shi Wengong shoots an arrow and kills Chao Gai, leader of the bandits.



## Objects/Places

### Era of Three Abundances

The Era of Three Abundances covers 27 years, consisting of three nine-year periods, in which the people enjoyed great happiness. These years occurred during the reign of Ren Zong who was emperor for 42 years.

### Suppression of Demons Hall

A hall on the Taoist compound where 108 demons were imprisoned until Marshal Hong ordered these spirits be released is called the Suppression of Demons Hall.

### Shi Family Village

It is in the Shi Family Village that Wang Jin and his mother take refuge.

### Weizhou

Weizhou is the town where Shi Jin meets Lu Da.

### Pan Family Tavern

Li Zhong, Lu Da and Shi Jin have tea at the Pan Family Tavern. Also, they meet Lotus and her father and hear their story here.

### Zhuangyuan Bridge

It is at the foot of Zhuangyuan Bridge that Master Zhong has his butcher shop. He tricks a girl into being his concubine, does not pay the promised money for her services and, when his wife runs the girl away, he insists that he be repaid the money that he never paid.

### Yanmen

Yanmen is the city in which Lu Da learns the charges against him and the reward for his arrest. Lu Da is given the fake name of Zhang while in this city.



## **Mount Wutai**

Mount Wutai is the mountain where the monastery that Lu Da is sent to hide from the people seeking to arrest him is located.

## **Two Gate Idols**

These two gate idols are some of the fatalities of Lu Da's second drunken rage.

## **Four-phase Prophecy**

This four-phase prophecy is given to Lu Da by an abbot. In this prophecy Lu Da is told to "take action in the forest, prosper in the mountains, flourish amid the waters, but halt at the river."

## **The Great Xiangguo Monastery**

It is to the Great Xiangguo Monastery that Lu Da is sent to look for a job.

## **Gold-spangled Bed Curtains**

It is behind gold-spangled bed curtains that Lu Da hides when waiting for the bridegroom to enter the room so he can "talk" to him.

## **Willow Tree**

It is a willow tree that Lu Da pulls up by the roots by hand, proving his strength.

## **Lu Da's Staff**

Lu Da's staff is a Buddhist staff that is five-feet long from end to end and weighs 62 catties.

## **Catty**

A catty is a measure of weight equal to about 1.3 pounds.

## **Five Peaks Pavilion**

Five Peaks Pavilion is the place where young Master Gao first sees and lusts after Lin Chong's wife.



## **A Fine Sword**

Lin Chong purchases a fine sword from a man on the street and is later arrested for accidentally bringing it into the White Tiger Inner Sanctum.

## **The White Tiger Inner Sanctum**

Lin Chong is framed and arrested when he is told by a lieutenant to bring a sword into the White Tiger Inner Sanctum where high military affairs are discussed.

## **Cangzhou**

Cangzhou is the town to which Lin Chong is exiled.

## **The Golden Print**

The golden print is the tattoo that is put on a prisoner's face. Lu Qian asks the guards to bring him Lin Chong's golden print as proof that they have killed him.

## **Wild Boar Forest**

Wild Boar Forest is the forest in which Dong Chao and Xue Ba plan to kill Lin Chong.

## **Mountain Spirit Temple**

It is Mountain Spirit Temple where Lin Chong spends the night when his shack collapses because of a snowstorm. It is also in this temple where Wu Song reads a notice about the white tiger.

## **Large Army Fodder Depot**

It is to a large army fodder depot that the prison warden assigns Lin Chong in order to kill him quietly.

## **Liangshan Marsh**

Liangshan Marsh becomes the headquarters of a group of 108 bandit chieftains. It is in this stronghold that the group waits to receive amnesty from the Chinese government. Many innocent men flee to this stronghold to escape punishment for crimes they either didn't commit, or ones they committed as a result of self-defense against others trying to harm them.



## **Yellow Earth Ridge**

Yang Zhi threatens to jump from Yellow Earth Ridge after he discovers that he has lost the birthday gifts intended for Governor Liang.

## **A Notebook**

It is in a notebook that the Ho Qing has listed the names of the gift robbers when they checked into the Wang Family Inn.

## **Purple Stone Street**

Purple Stone Street is the place where Wu the Elder and his wife live.

## **Bones and a Silver Bar**

Inspector Ho keeps bones and a silver bar in order to prove to Wu Song that his brother was murdered.

## **Mengzhou**

Mengzhou is the city to which Wu Song is exiled.

## **Enzhou**

Enzhou is the second place to which Wu Song is exiled.

## **Righteousness Hall**

Righteousness Hall is the name of the meeting place for the leaders of the bandits hiding out at Liangshan Marsh. This hall is later renamed Loyalty Hall.

## **Xunyang Pavilion**

It is at this pavilion that Song Jiang gets drunk and writes a rebellious poem.

## **Temple of the White Dragon Spirit**

It is to Temple of the White Dragon Spirit that Song Jiang and Dai Zong are carried after Cai and Huang attempt to execute them.



## **Circular Road Village**

It is in Circular Road Village that Song meets the Mystic Queen.

## **Three Heavenly Books**

The Mystic Queen gives three heavenly books to Song as a gift.

## **Temple of the Mystic Queen**

It is in Temple of the Mystic Queen that Song hides from his pursuers and receives help and three heavenly books from the Mystic Queen.

## **Barbed Lances**

It is barbed lances that Tang Long suggests the chieftains use against their enemies.

## **A Suit of Goosefeather Armor Hooped in Metal**

By pretending to steal this heirloom, the Liangshan Marsh bandits trick Xu Ning into joining their band.

## **Heaven's Eye or Heaven's Gate**

A hole rips in the sky while the Taoist monks are praying and a stone tablet becomes embedded in the ground. They call these Heaven's Eye or Heaven's Gate.

## **Stone Tablet**

A stone tablet comes down out of the sky bearing the names of all of the chieftains. The words "Act in heaven's behalf" are etched on one side while "Complete loyalty and righteousness" are on the other side.

## **Xiling Bridge**

Xiling Bridge is the place where Dai and Song go to sacrifice to the spirit of Zhang Shun. They are ambushed by Prince Fang Tianding as they are sacrificing.

## **Mercury**

Mercury is the agent used to kill Lu Junyi.





## Poisoned Wine

Poisoned wine is the agent used to kill Song Jiang. Song also gives this wine to Lu Kui to kill him so that he won't revolt when he learns of Song's murder.



# Themes

## Corrupt Government

The fall out from a corrupt government is one of the major issues dealt with in this novel. The reason that the bandits have formed their coalition in Liangshan Marsh is because they have been wrongly accused of crimes, or have been forced to commit crimes in an effort to protect themselves or others. For instance, Song Jiang kills Poxi because she is trying to keep a letter from Chao Gai that could endanger both Song and Chao.

In this society, government officials are more apt to be swayed by a bribe than the truth. It doesn't help that most of the government officials consider Song and his bandits as enemies since most of them are outcasts as a result of actions by those same government officials. Although the emperor at the time that the Liangshan Marsh bandits are finally given amnesty is not crooked, he still listens to the advice of the dishonest advisors that he has on his staff.

One of the most noticeably corrupt officials is Gao Qui. Gao is adopted into a powerful family because of his ability to play ball. He has no other credentials. Once in a position of power, Gao uses his power in a corrupt manner. One of his first conquests is Lin Chong's wife. Although this woman will have nothing to do with him, Gao has Lin Chong tricked into carrying a weapon into the White Tiger Inner Sanctuary. As a result, Lin Chong is arrested and exiled.

Later, when the bandits are eligible for amnesty, Gao interferes with this process repeatedly. First, he has the amnesty offered in such a way that he knows that the bandits will not accept it. He and his cronies then come up with an amnesty that seems to be worded in such a way that it indicates that Song Jiang should be killed. At the conclusion of the novel it is at Gao's request that Lu Jinyu and Song Jiang are murdered.

## Chinese Culture

Through reading this novel, much information can be gleaned about Chinese culture. First, information in the novel indicates how superstitious people in the Chinese culture were at the time this novel was written. The people believed very strongly in the power of fate. They thought that if something was fated to happen, there was no way to stop or change the fated circumstances. The Chinese people also believed strongly in good and bad omens. For instance, when the pole supporting Chao Gai's standard breaks, all of the men see this action as a bad omen. It is no surprise to these men when Chao Gai is struck with a poisoned arrow later in the day and dies.

Religious ceremony also appears to be a big part of the lives of the Chinese people. This is especially true when a person in the novel dies. In order to help the soul of this person pass over into heaven, it seems the people believed they had to hold religious



services including prayers and offerings for the deceased person. It is also important to note that the people seemed to believe they couldn't perform these rituals themselves, but needed to call in priests to make the sacrifices for them.

Hospitality is also an important issue in Chinese culture. The Chinese are often seen offering their guests wine and meat. In fact, it appears that it is almost considered rude for a host not to offer his guests meat. Order of seating at a table also appears to be an important issue in Chinese culture. There are times in the novel where it is indicated that the men sitting down to eat "argued politely" about the order in which they were to be seated at a table.

## Loyalty

Loyalty, or lack thereof, is another issue in this novel. For instance, there is an extremely strong bond of loyalty between the bandits who have inhabited Liangshan Marsh. They refer to each other as brothers and seem to live under the assumption that they would die for one another if this action were requested.

Loyalty was also an issue in the reasoning behind the gathering at Liangshan Marsh. Although their country has outlawed them, they remain loyal to their country. They intend only to try to avenge and change the ways of officials who are corrupt and who are hurting innocent people. Song Jiang tells the people at each village that the group takes in battle that he does not intend to hurt the innocent people. In fact, these people are often given food, shelter and other assistance by the bandits.

The lack of loyalty is seen in many of the female characters in the novel. Gao Qui is one of the male characters in this book who shows a great lack of loyalty. Gao is at one point captured by the Liangshan Marsh bandits, although he promises them that he intends to fight for them to get a proper amnesty since they set him free without harming him. Once he is free, however, Gao does nothing but try to interfere with offers for amnesty. Poxi is one of the female characters in the book who are unloyal. Not only does Poxi cheat on her husband, she also does not obey his commands. Poxi's disloyalty puts both Song and Chao's lives in danger, so he kills her.



# Style

## Point of View

This story is told from the point of view of a third person narrator. It is written almost as if it were a story being told out loud by a storyteller. Along with telling the story of the bandits, the storyteller also occasionally addresses his audience with a comment about the story or its significance. Since this story is written as a historical document telling the stories of the deeds of the Liangshan Marsh bandits, it is fitting that it would be written from the point of view of a third person narrator. It was intended by the author to appear to be a story that had been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth before finally being preserved by being put into written form.

The story would not have worked as well if it had been written from the viewpoint of one of the people in the story. Any of these people would have told a biased story instead of presenting a factual story. As it is told, the narrative is very much like what one would expect to find in a news report. The facts are stated with very little editorializing. The text of the story is also divided with about one-third presented as dialogue with the rest in exposition.

## Setting

This story is set sometime in the second century during the Song Dynasty in China. Information in Chapter 2 indicates that Emperor Zhe Zong was the ruler during the time of the majority of the action in the novel.

There are a variety of different settings included in this novel. One of the more important and prominent settings included in the action of the book is Liangshan Marsh. Liangshan Marsh appears to be a mountainous area where the bandits' stronghold is located. This mountainous area is surrounded by a marshy lake that gives the bandits much protection from their enemies. None of the soldiers who try to vanquish the bandits are able to get past this lake, despite their most heroic efforts. The only way to get passage to the stronghold is to go to a tavern on the banks of Liangshan Marsh. Those approved to travel to the stronghold are taken by boat to the mountain. The tavern owner signals these boats to come and transport prospective bandits to the stronghold.

In addition to the stronghold, there are a variety of cities mentioned in the novel. These include the Eastern Capital, the Northern Capital, Jizhou, Shi Family Village, Peach Blossom Village, Cangzhou, East Bank Village, Yuncheng Town, Mengzhou, Happy Grove, Wuweijun, Zhu Family Village and Zengtou Village. In addition to these earthly places, Song Jiang also visits the Ninth Heaven where he meets the Mystic Queen.



## Language and Meaning

When considering the language of this novel, it is important to keep in mind that the novel is translated from Chinese. There are some phrases and nicknames that may seem strange simply because these phrases did not translate well from one language to another. If one were to read a translation of this book by a different person, one might notice variations in some of the language and phrases.

Another thing to keep in mind when reading a novel that includes Chinese names is that their names are listed differently from American names. While in the English naming system the given name is the first word in a person's name, it is exactly backwards in the Chinese naming system. What an American would consider a surname or "last" name is actually listed first, with the given name second. For example, the American name John Smith would be Smith John if in Chinese.

## Structure

This very long book is divided into a total of 100 chapters. Each chapter is about 20 pages long with no extremely short or extremely long chapters. These individual chapters are noted both with a chapter number and also with a few short lines that give a brief summary of two of the main happenings in each chapter.

About the first half of the book is very complex and sometimes confusing since the action in the novel is passed off from character to character and place to place. The author does this so as to be able to introduce each of the 108 bandits and share a portion of their story with the reader. Some of the bandits, such as Song Jiang and Sagacious Lu, have their story told more completely while others are only touched on in passing.

Main characters and a sense of a plot structure are not really fully developed until about the middle of the novel. It is at this point that the majority of the bandits have joined the forces at Liangshan Marsh. The final half of the novel is focused on the recruitment of the remainder of the 108 chieftains to the bandit forces. After these forces are recruited, the bandits receive amnesty, but then most are killed off in battle as they try to prove their worth.



## Quotes

"Reader, don't be alarmed, for in what follows thirty-six stars of Heavenly Spirits come to earth and seventy-two stars of Earthly Fiends appear among men." Chapter 1, pg. 25

"Bandits have built a fort on the mountain. They've six or seven hundred men and over a hundred good horses." Chapter 2, pg. 48

"Get my horse. I'm going to attack Shi Family Village, then I'm going to take Huayin." Chapter 2, pg. 51

"Today our younger brother Chen Da went against our advice. He offended Your Excellency and has been locked up in your honorable manor. Since we have no way to save him, we've come to die with him." Chapter 2, pg. 55

"Instructor Wang, my arms teacher, is attached to a border garrison west of the Pass. I've been intending to seek him out, but because my father died I was unable to leave. Now that the manor is ruined, there's nothing to keep me here." Chapter 3, pg. 64

"Who would have thought that three blows would kill him? They're sure to hold me for trial, and I've nobody to bring me food in prison. I'd better get out of here." Chapter 3, pg. 79

"That notice offers a thousand strings of cash for your capture. How could you stand there looking at it? If I hadn't spotted you, you might have been nabbed by the police." Chapter 4, pg. 84

"Would you be willing to shave off your hair and become a monk?" Chapter 4, pg. 89

"But yesterday evening you came back drunk and beat up the gate-keepers, broke the vermilion latticed door of the surra hall and drove out the cooks and janitors, shouting and yelling all the while." Chapter 4, pg. 101

"Take action in the forest, prosper in the mountains, flourish amid the waters, but halt at the river." Chapter 5, pg. 114

"Lin Chong was very pleased, and adopted Sagacious as his sworn brother on the spot." Chapter 7, pg. 161

"As to Young Master Gao, after he received that fright in Lu Qian's house and had to flee over the wall, he became ill and took to his bed." Chapter 7, pg. 171

"...you're an arms instructor in the Imperial Guards. You must know the law. How could you enter the Inner Sanctum holding a sword? That's an offense punishable by death." Chapter 8, pg. 179

"Everyone knows Gao Qiu uses his position tyrannically." Chapter 8, pg. 180



"Even if he escapes with his life, burning down a military fodder depot is crime punishable by death." Chapter 10, pg. 228

"Who would have thought that thief Gao Qui would have reduced me to this condition, the mark of a criminal on my face, exiled here! I can't go home, no place is safe. How lonely I am!" Chapter 11, pg. 239

"If we keep only Lin Chong here, it won't be to our advantage. Why not put on a show of kindness and keep Yang Zhi as well? Then we can play one off against the other." Chapter 12, pg. 253

"Governor Liang in the Northern Capital harms the people. With the money he has extorted from them he has brought gifts to send to Cai, the Premier in the Eastern Capital, on his birthday. This is evilly obtained wealth. If any of us six has any selfish intent, let Heaven and Earth obliterate him!" Chapter 16, pg. 311

"If Yang Zhi were here, we'd have nothing to say. But since he's gone, no one knows where, why not put the blame on him?" Chapter 17, pg. 339

"Today, Arms Instructor Lin has made me leader of this stronghold and Teacher We the military advisor. Master Gongsun also controls military authority. Arms Instructor Lin and the other have over-all charge of the fortress." Chapter 20, pg. 406

"I never dreamed Chao Gai and the others would go so far,' he said to himself. 'They've robbed the birthday gifts, killed policemen, injured Inspector Ho Tao, annihilated many soldiers and horses, and are holding Huang An in their fortress.'" Chapter 20, pg. 417

"Get some arsenic from your drug shop, let this lady buy medicine for heart pains, mix the two together and finish the dwarf off." Chapter 25, pg. 545

"You've been framed by General Zhang to avenge Jiang the Gate Guard Giant,' he whispered to Wu Song. 'But don't worry. I've persuaded Clerk Ye to save you.'" Chapter 30, pg. 639

"If fated, men come together though a thousand li apart. If not, they miss each other though they meet face to face. I am Song Jiang, the man you seek!" Chapter 35, pg. 743

"If those brigands come down and rescue you and urge you to join their band, don't do it, or people will criticize you for being disloyal and unfilial." Chapter 36, pg. 759

"What's the point of my life if I become disloyal and unfilial? If you won't permit me to go down the mountain, I prefer to die at your hands!" Chapter 36, pg. 764

"What brass. An incomparable rebel leader! If that's not a proclamation of revolt, I don't know what is!" Chapter 39, pg. 831



"The destroyer of our country is home and tree. Put the top of the character for 'home' over the character for 'tree' and you've got the character 'Song.' He's the man who'll pillage our country's money and grain. Then, water and work are armed soldiery - the second line. Place the 'water' radical next to the character for 'work' and you've got 'Jiang,' the man who will raise armed soldiers. And it's Song Jiang who's written the rebellious poem. This is a warning from Heaven." Chapter 39, pg. 834

"I hate only Huang Wenbing. That villain did nothing but pick fault and spread slanders." Chapter 41, 874

"But we have committed great crimes, and caused turmoil in two prefectural towns. This will surely be reported to the emperor. I have no choice but to join you brothers in Liangshan Marsh." Chapter 41, pg. 887

"Most of us are hunted men who have taken temporary shelter in the Marsh. The imperial court has sent you, General, here to arrest us. The proper thing for me would be to submit and be bound. But I fear for my life. And as I've criminally clashed with you. I beg your forgiveness for my presumptuousness." Chapter 55, pg. 1,199

"Leaders Chao Gai and Song Jiang act righteously for Heaven, receiving bold fellows from all over. They are waiting only for an amnesty and acceptance into the emperor's forces so that they may serve the country." Chapter 55, pg. 1,208

"His majesty has been deluded. He's given power to corrupt ministers and officials who harm people. My brothers and I seek only to perform righteous deeds for Heaven and emperor. We have no evil intent." Chapter 64, pg. 1,397

"'Brothers,' said Song Jiang, 'we fight in righteous self-defense. We never use our strength against the weak.'" Chapter 64, pg. 1,398

"They slander the upright, are jealous of ability, make no distinction between what is worthy of reward and what deserves punishment, and have sown confusion throughout the land." Chapter 85, pg. 1,812

"We went through so much hardship to smash the Liao, but I've obtained very little for you brothers." Chapter 90, pg. 1,920

"All things are pre-ordained." Chapter 90, pg. 1,920

"Hear me, reader. This is a very diverse tale, handed down to us from the story-tellers of old. We couldn't possibly tell it all at one sitting. But we will sketch the broad outline, as you shall see. Remember it, for only thus will you be able to follow the complications and subtleties of the plot." Chapter 94, pg. 1,996

"I've lost interest in mundane affairs. I don't want to be an official. It will be enough if I can find a quiet place to live out the rest of my life in peace." Chapter 99, pg. 2,104

"Only thirty-six of the original one hundred and eight were left." Chapter 100, pg. 2,108





"The itemization showed that fifty-nine had been killed in battle, ten died of illness, one expired in a religious trance, one was crippled and became a monk at Six Harmonies Monastery, another was a Taoist who returned to Qizhou, four had gone off on their own, five had remained in or returned to the capital, and twenty-seven now presented themselves before the throne." Chapter 100, pg. 2,119

"Hui Zong the present sovereign was clairvoyant and wise, but corrupt ministers managed to gain control under him as well, to the detriment of the virtuous and loyal." Chapter 100, pg. 2,128



## Topics for Discussion

Consider the death of the prefect's son in Chapter 51. Song Jiang and the others repeatedly insist that no innocent people be harmed or killed in their raids and pillages. Why then, do they command Li Kui to poison this small child?

Since it has been proven so many times that Li Kui has a brash attitude and cannot control his anger, why does he continue to be sent on missions? Why do the people around him not learn that he is best left at home?

Why do you think that Song Jiang tries so often to give up his leadership of the Liangshan Marsh bandits? Do you believe he was a good leader? Why or why not?

Search Chinese history to see if any parts of this novel are based on true events. Write an essay detailing which parts of the book might be founded on history and which ones are fiction.

Often the bandits who take refuge in Liangshan Marsh are forced to commit crimes by taking matters into their own hands when government officials frame them for actions they have not done. For instance, Song kills Poxi when she will not return Chai Gao's letter to him. In your opinion, should the bandits receive amnesty for these actions or should they be held responsible?

Why do you believe Song's forces lose none of their chieftains when they fight against the Liao forces, but their numbers are dwindled to nearly one-third of their original size when they fight against the armies of La Fang?

Consider the idea of predestination as presented in the novel. Research the beliefs of predestination as held by the Chinese people. Did they believe that all one's activities were predestined? Was anything left to chance?

The Chinese people of this time period seemed to have very strict beliefs about the particular way that a body should be handled or dealt with after that person was dead. How did this habit of paying respect to the bodies of the dead sometimes get others in trouble? Why did the Chinese believe so strongly in this ritual that at one point, Song almost risked his life to collect the bodies of fallen comrades?