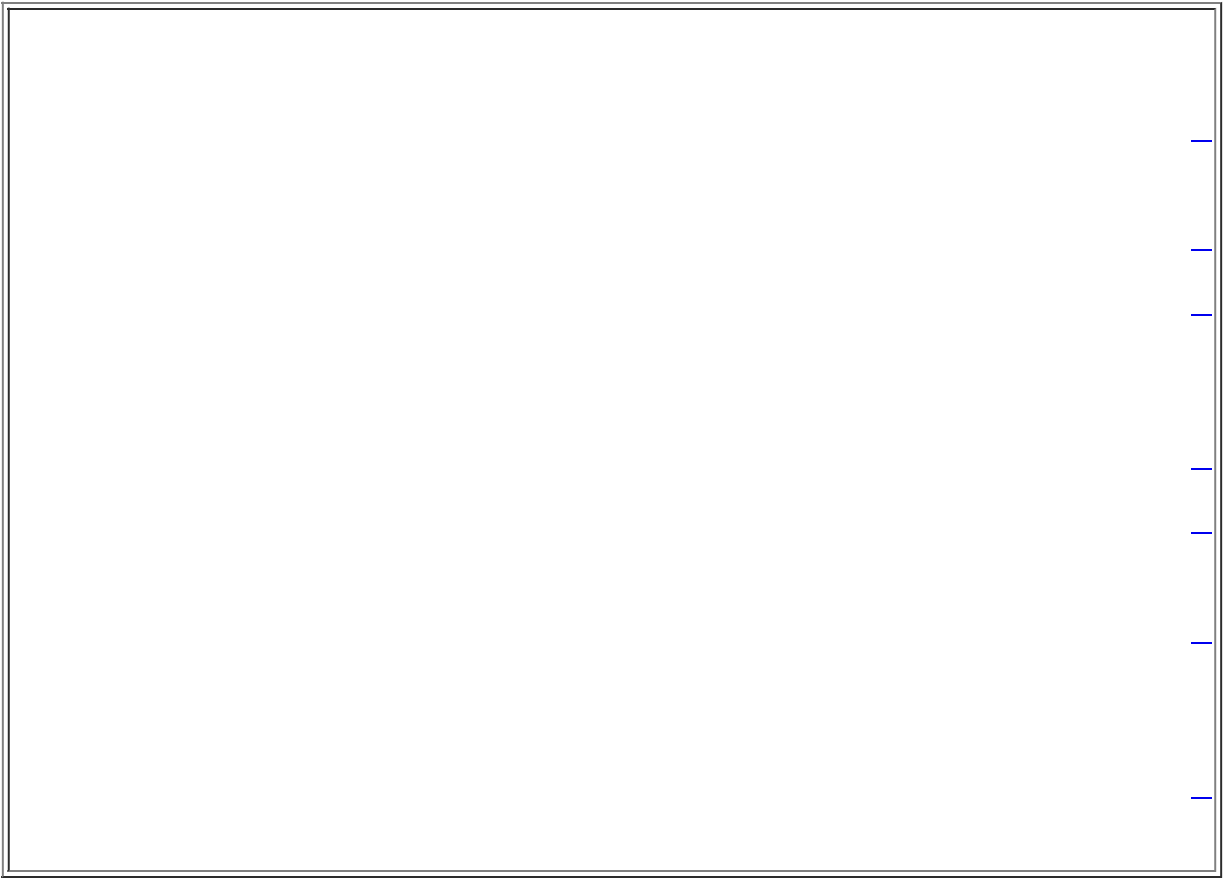


Chapter 1

**Three Heroes Swear Brotherhood In The Peach
Garden;
One Victory Shatters The Rebels In Battlegrounds.**



Domains under heaven, after a long period of division, tends to unite; after a long period of union, tends to divide. This has been so since antiquity. When the rule of the Zhou Dynasty weakened, seven contending kingdoms sprang up*, warring one with another until the kingdom of Qin prevailed and possessed the empire*. But when Qin's destiny had been fulfilled, arose two opposing kingdoms, Chu and Han, to fight for the mastery. And Han was the victor*.

The rise of the fortunes of Han began when Liu Bang the Supreme Ancestor* slew a white serpent to raise the banners of uprising, which only ended when the whole empire belonged to Han (BC 202). This magnificent heritage was handed down in successive Han emperors for two hundred years, till the rebellion of Wang Mang caused a disruption*. But soon Liu Xiu the Latter Han Founder restored the empire*, and Han emperors continued their rule for another two hundred years till the days of Emperor

Xian, which were doomed to see the beginning of the empire's division into three parts, known to history as The Three Kingdoms.

But the descent into misrule hastened in the reigns of the two predecessors of Emperor Xian---Emperors Huan and Ling---who sat in the Dragon Throne about the middle of the second century.

Emperor Huan paid no heed to the good people of his court, but gave his confidence to the Palace eunuchs*. He lived and died, leaving the scepter to Emperor Ling, whose advisers were Regent Marshal Dou Wu and Imperial Guardian Chen Fan*. Dou Wu and Chen Fan, disgusted with the abuses of the eunuchs in the affairs of the state, plotted the destruction for the power-abusing eunuchs. But Chief Eunuch Cao Jie was not to be disposed of easily. The plot leaked out, and the honest Dou Wu and Chen Fan were put to death, leaving the eunuchs stronger than before.

It fell upon the day of full moon of the fourth month, the second year, in the era of Established Calm (AD 168), that Emperor Ling went in state to the Hall of Virtue. As he drew near the throne, a rushing whirlwind arose in the corner of the hall and, lo! from the roof beams floated down a monstrous black serpent that coiled itself up on the very seat of majesty. The Emperor fell in a swoon. Those nearest him hastily raised and bore him to his palace, while the courtiers scattered and fled. The serpent disappeared.

But there followed a terrific tempest, thunder, hail, and torrents of rain, lasting till midnight and working havoc on all sides. Two years later the earth quaked in Capital Luoyang, while along the coast a huge tidal wave rushed in which, in its recoil, swept away all the dwellers by the sea. Another evil omen was recorded ten years later, when the reign title was changed to Radiant Harmony (AD 178): Certain hens suddenly crowed. At the new moon of the sixth month, a long wreath of murky cloud wound its way into the Hall of Virtue, while in the following month a rainbow was seen in the Dragon Chamber. Away from the capital, a part of the Yuan Mountains collapsed, leaving a mighty rift in the flank.

Such were some of various omens. Emperor Ling, greatly moved by these signs of the displeasure of Heaven, issued an edict asking his ministers for an explanation of the calamities and marvels.

Court Counselor Cai Yong replied bluntly: "Falling rainbows and changes of fowls' sexes are brought about by the interference of empresses and eunuchs in state affairs."

The Emperor read this memorial with deep sighs, and Chief Eunuch Cao Jie, from his place behind the throne, anxiously noted these signs of grief. An opportunity offering, Cao Jie informed his fellows, and a charge was trumped up against Cai Yong, who was driven from the court and forced to retire to his country house.

With this victory the eunuchs grew bolder. Ten of them, rivals in wickedness and associates in evil deeds, formed a powerful party known as the Ten Regular Attendants---Zhang Rang, Zhao Zhong, Cheng Kuang, Duan Gui, Feng Xu, Guo Sheng, Hou Lan, Jian Shuo, Cao Jie, and Xia Yun.

One of them, Zhang Rang, won such influence that he became the Emperor's most honored and trusted adviser. The Emperor even called him "Foster Father". So the corrupt state administration went quickly from bad to worse, till the country was ripe for rebellion and buzzed with brigandage.

At this time in the county of Julu was a certain Zhang family, of whom three brothers bore the name of Zhang Jue, Zhang Ba, and Zhang Lian, respectively. The eldest Zhang Jue was an unclassed graduate, who devoted himself to medicine. One day, while culling simples in the woods, Zhang Jue met a venerable old gentleman with very bright, emerald eyes and fresh complexion, who walked with an oak-wood staff. The old man beckoned Zhang Jue into a cave and there gave him three volumes of **The Book of Heaven**.

"This book," said the old gentleman, "is the *Essential Arts of Peace*. With the aid of these volumes, you can convert the world and rescue humankind. But you must be single-minded, or, rest assured, you will greatly suffer."

With a humble obeisance, Zhang Jue took the book and asked the name of his benefactor.

"I am Saint Hermit of the Southern Land," was the reply, as the old gentleman disappeared in thin air.

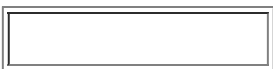
Zhang Jue studied the wonderful book eagerly and strove day and night to reduce its precepts to practice. Before long, he could summon the winds and command the rain, and he became known as the Mystic of the Way of Peace.

In the first month of the first year of Central Stability (AD 184), there was a terrible pestilence that ran throughout the land, whereupon Zhang Jue distributed charmed remedies to the afflicted. The godly medicines brought big successes, and soon he gained the title of the Wise and Worthy Master. He began to have a following of disciples whom he initiated into the mysteries and sent abroad throughout all the land. They, like their master, could write charms and recite formulas, and their fame increased his following.

Zhang Jue began to organize his disciples. He established thirty-six circuits, the larger with ten thousand or more members, the smaller with about half that number. Each circuit had its chief who took the military title of General. They talked wildly of the death of the blue heaven and the setting up of the golden one; they said a new cycle was beginning and would bring universal good fortune to all members; and they persuaded people to chalk the symbols for the first year of the new cycle on the main door of their dwellings.

With the growth of the number of his supporters grew also the ambition of Zhang Jue. The Wise and Worthy Master dreamed of empire. One of his partisans, Ma Yuanyi, was sent bearing gifts to gain the support of the eunuchs within the Palace.

To his brothers Zhang Jue said, "For schemes like ours always the most difficult part is to gain the popular favor. But that is already ours. Such an opportunity must not pass."



And they began to prepare. Many yellow flags and banners were made, and a day was chosen for the uprising. Then Zhang Jue wrote letters to Eunuch Feng Xu* and sent them by one of his followers, Tang Zhou, who alas! betrayed his trust and reported the plot to the court. The Emperor summoned the trusty Regent Marshal He Jin and bade him look to the issue. Ma Yuanyi

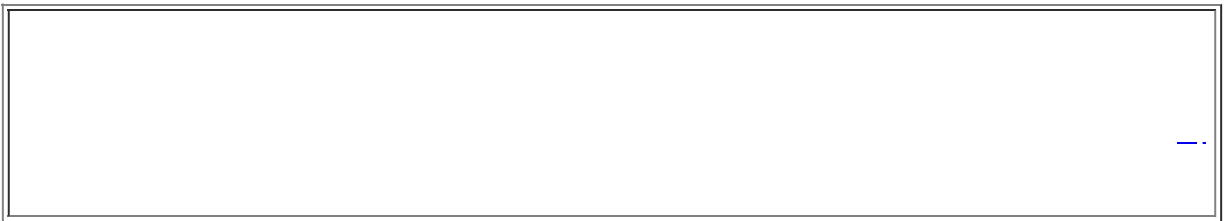
was at once taken and beheaded. Feng Xu and many others were cast into prison.

The plot having thus become known, the Zhang brothers were forced at once to take the field. They took up grandiose titles: Zhang Jue the Lord of Heaven, Zhang Ba the Lord of Earth, and Zhang Lian the Lord of Human. And in these names they put forth this manifesto:

"The good fortune of the Han is exhausted, and the Wise and Worthy Man has appeared. Discern the will of Heaven, O ye people, and walk in the way of righteousness, whereby alone ye may attain to peace."

Support was not lacking. On every side people bound their heads with yellow scarves and joined the army of the rebel Zhang Jue, so that soon his strength was nearly half a million strong, and the official troops melted away at a whisper of his coming.

Regent Marshal and Guardian of the Throne, He Jin, memorialized for general preparations against the Yellow Scarves, and an edict called upon everyone to fight against the rebels. In the meantime, three Imperial Commanders---Lu Zhi, Huangfu Song, and Zhu Jun---marched against them in three directions with veteran soldiers.



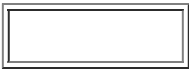
Meanwhile Zhang Jue led his army into Youzhou, the northeastern region of the empire*. The Imperial Protector* of Youzhou was Liu Yan, a scion of the Imperial House. Learning of the approach of the rebels, Liu Yan called in Commander Zhou Jing to consult over the position.

Zhou Jing said, "They are many and we few. We must enlist more troops to oppose them."

Liu Yan agreed, and he put out notices calling for volunteers to serve against the rebels. One of these notices was posted up in the county of Zhuo, where

lived one man of high spirit.

This man was no mere bookish scholar, nor found he any pleasure in study. But he was liberal and amiable, albeit a man of few words, hiding all feeling under a calm exterior. He had always cherished a yearning for high enterprise and had cultivated the friendship of humans of mark. He was tall of stature. His ears were long, the lobes touching his shoulders, and his hands hung down below his knees. His eyes were very big and prominent so that he could see backward past his ears. His complexion was as clear as jade, and he had rich red lips.



He was a descendant of Prince Sheng of Zhongshan whose father was the Emperor Jing*, the fourth emperor of the Han Dynasty. His name was Liu Bei. Many years before, one of his forbears had been the governor of that very county, but had lost his rank for remissness in ceremonial offerings. However, that branch of the family had remained on in the place, gradually becoming poorer and poorer as the years rolled on. His father Liu Hong had been a scholar and a virtuous official but died young. The widow and orphan were left alone, and Liu Bei as a lad won a reputation for filial piety.

At this time the family had sunk deep in poverty, and Liu Bei gained his living by selling straw sandals and weaving grass mats. The family home was in a village near the chief city of Zhuo. Near the house stood a huge mulberry tree, and seen from afar its curved profile resembled the canopy of a wagon. Noting the luxuriance of its foliage, a soothsayer had predicted that one day a man of distinction would come forth from the family.

As a child, Liu Bei played with the other village children beneath this tree, and he would climb up into it, saying, "I am the Son of Heaven, and this is my chariot!" His uncle, Liu Yuanqi, recognized that Liu Bei was no ordinary boy and saw to it that the family did not come to actual want.

When Liu Bei was fifteen, his mother sent him traveling for his education. For a time he served Zheng Xuan and Lu Zhi as masters. And he became great friends with Gongsun Zan.

Liu Bei was twenty-eight when the outbreak of the Yellow Scarves called for soldiers. The sight of the notice saddened him, and he sighed as he read it.

Suddenly a rasping voice behind him cried, "Sir, why sigh if you do nothing to help your country?"

Turning quickly he saw standing there a man about his own height, with a bullet head like a leopard's, large eyes, a swallow pointed chin, and whiskers like a tiger's. He spoke in a loud bass voice and looked as irresistible as a dashing horse. At once Liu Bei saw he was no ordinary man and asked who he was.

"Zhang Fei is my name," replied the stranger. "I live near here where I have a farm; and I am a wine seller and a butcher as well; and I like to become acquainted with worthy people. Your sighs as you read the notice drew me toward you."

Liu Bei replied, "I am of the Imperial Family, Liu Bei is my name. And I wish I could destroy these Yellow Scarves and restore peace to the land, but alas! I am helpless."

"I have the means," said Zhang Fei. "Suppose you and I raised some troops and tried what we could do."

This was happy news for Liu Bei, and the two betook themselves to the village inn to talk over the project. As they were drinking, a huge, tall fellow appeared pushing a hand-cart along the road. At the threshold he halted and entered the inn to rest awhile and he called for wine.

"And be quick!" added he. "For I am in haste to get into the town and offer myself for the army."

Liu Bei looked over the newcomer, item by item, and he noted the man had a huge frame, a long beard, a vivid face like an apple, and deep red lips. He had eyes like a phoenix's and fine bushy eyebrows like silkworms. His whole appearance was dignified and awe-inspiring. Presently, Liu Bei crossed over, sat down beside him and asked his name.

"I am Guan Yu," replied he. "I am a native of the east side of the river, but I have been a fugitive on the waters for some five years, because I slew a ruffian who, since he was wealthy and powerful, was a bully. I have come to join the army here."

Then Liu Bei told Guan Yu his own intentions, and all three went away to Zhang Fei's farm where they could talk over the grand project.

Said Zhang Fei, "The peach trees in the orchard behind the house are just in full flower. Tomorrow we will institute a sacrifice there and solemnly declare our intention before Heaven and Earth, and we three will swear brotherhood and unity of aims and sentiments: Thus will we enter upon our great task."

Both Liu Bei and Guan Yu gladly agreed.

All three being of one mind, next day they prepared the sacrifices, a black ox, a white horse, and wine for libation. Beneath the smoke of the incense burning on the altar, they bowed their heads and recited this oath:

"We three---Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei---though of different families, swear brotherhood, and promise mutual help to one end. We will rescue each other in difficulty; we will aid each other in danger. We swear to serve the state and save the people. We ask not the same day of birth, but we seek to die together. May Heaven, the all-ruling, and Earth, the all-producing, read our hearts. If we turn aside from righteousness or forget kindness, may Heaven and Human smite us!"

They rose from their knees. The two others bowed before Liu Bei as their elder brother, and Zhang Fei was to be the youngest of the trio. This solemn ceremony performed, they slew other oxen and made a feast to which they invited the villagers. Three hundred joined them, and all feasted and drank deep in the Peach Garden.

The next day weapons were mustered. But there were no horses to ride. This was a real grief. But soon they were cheered by the arrival of two horse dealers with a drove of horses.

"Thus does Heaven help us!" said Liu Bei.

And the three brothers went forth to welcome the merchants. They were Zhang Shiping and Su Shuang from Zhongshan. They went northwards every year to buy horses. They were now on their way home because of the Yellow Scarves. The brothers invited them to the farm, where wine was served before them. Then Liu Bei told them of the plan to strive for tranquillity. Zhang Shiping and Su Shuang were glad and at once gave the brothers fifty good steeds, and beside, five hundred ounces of gold and silver and one thousand five hundred pounds of steel fit for the forging of weapons.

The brothers expressed their gratitude, and the merchants took their leave. Then blacksmiths were summoned to forge weapons. For Liu Bei they made a pair of ancient swords; for Guan Yu they fashioned a long-handled, curve blade called Green-Dragon Saber, which weighed a full one hundred twenty pounds; and for Zhang Fei they created a ten-foot spear called Serpent Halberd. Each too had a helmet and full armor.

When weapons were ready, the troop, now five hundred strong, marched to Commander Zhou Jing, who presented them to Imperial Protector Liu Yan. When the ceremony of introduction was over, Liu Bei declared his ancestry, and Liu Yan at once accorded him the esteem due to a relation.

Before many days it was announced that the rebellion had actually broken out, and a Yellow Scarves chieftain, Cheng Yuanzhi, had invaded the region with a body of fifty thousand rebels. Liu Yan bade Zhou Jing and the three brothers to go out to oppose them with the five hundred troops. Liu Bei joyfully undertook to lead the van and marched to the foot of the Daxing Hills where they saw the rebels. The rebels wore their hair flying about their shoulders, and their foreheads were bound with yellow scarves.

When the two armies had been drawn up opposite each other, Liu Bei rode to the front, Guan Yu to his left, Zhang Fei to his right.

Flourishing his whip, Liu Bei began to hurl reproaches at the rebels, crying, "O malcontents! Why not dismount and be bound?"

Their leader Cheng Yuanzhi, full of rage, sent out one general, Deng Mao, to begin the battle. At once rode forward Zhang Fei, his serpent halberd poised

to strike. One thrust and Deng Mao rolled off his horse, pierced through the heart. At this Cheng Yuanzhi himself whipped up his steed and rode forth with sword raised ready to slay Zhang Fei. But Guan Yu swung up his ponderous green-dragon saber and rode at Cheng Yuanzhi. At the sight, fear seized upon Cheng Yuanzhi, and before he could defend himself, the great saber fell, cutting him in halves.

[hip, hip, hip]

Two heroes new to war's alarms,
Ride boldly forth to try their arms.
Their doughty deeds three kingdoms tell,
And poets sing how these befell.

[yip, yip, yip]

Their leader fallen, the rebels threw away their weapons and fled. The official soldiers dashed in among them. Many thousands surrendered and the victory was complete. Thus this part of the rebellion was broken up.

On their return, Liu Yan personally met them and distributed rewards. But the next day, letters came from Imperial Protector Gong Jing of Qingzhou Region saying that the rebels were laying siege to the chief city and it was near falling. Help was needed quickly.

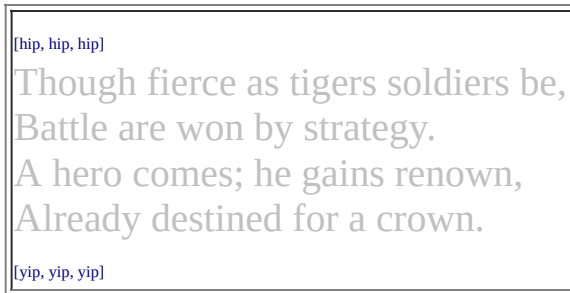
"I will go," said Liu Bei as soon as he heard the news.

And he set out at once with his own soldiers, reinforced by a body of five thousand under Zhou Jing. The rebels, seeing help coming, at once attacked most fiercely. The relieving force being comparatively small could not prevail and retired some ten miles, where they made a camp.

"They are many and we but few," said Liu Bei to his brothers. "We can only beat them by superior strategy."

So they prepared an ambush. Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, each with a goodly party, went behind the hills, right and left, and there hid. When the gongs beat they were to move out to support the main army.

These preparations made, the drums rolled noisily for Liu Bei to advance. The rebels also came forward. But Liu Bei suddenly retired. Thinking this was their chance, the rebels pressed forward and were led over the hills. Then suddenly the gongs sounded for the ambush. Guan Yu and Zhang Fei poured out from right and left as Liu Bei faced around to meet the rebels. Under three-side attack, the rebels lost heavily and fled to the walls of Qingzhou City. But Imperial Protector Gong Jing led out an armed body to attack them, and the rebels were entirely defeated and many slain. Qingzhou was no longer in danger.



After the celebrations in honor of victory were over, Commander Zhou Jing proposed to return to Youzhou.

But Liu Bei said, "We are informed that Imperial Commander Lu Zhi has been struggling with a horde of rebels led by Zhang Jue at Guangzong. Lu Zhi was once my teacher, and I want to go help him."

So Liu Bei and Zhou Jing separated, and the three brothers with their troops made their way to Guangzong. They found Lu Zhi's camp, were admitted to his presence, and declared the reason of their coming. The Commander received them with great joy, and they remained with him while he made his plans.

At that time Zhang Jue's one hundred fifty thousand troops and Lu Zhi's fifty thousand troops were facing each other. Neither had had any success.

Lu Zhi said to Liu Bei, "I am able to surround these rebels here. But the other two brothers, Zhang Ba and Zhang Lian, are strongly entrenched opposite Huangfu Song and Zhu Jun at Yingchuan. I will give you a

thousand more troops, and with these you can go to find out what is happening, and we can then settle the moment for concerted attack."

So Liu Bei set off and marched as quickly as possible to Yingchuan. At that time the imperial troops were attacking with success, and the rebels had retired upon Changshe. They had encamped among the thick grass.

Seeing this, Huangfu Song said to Zhu Jun, "The rebels are camping in the field. We can attack them by fire."

So the Imperial Commanders bade every man cut a bundle of dry grass and laid an ambush. That night the wind blew a gale, and at the second watch they started a blaze. At the same time Huangfu Song and Zhu Jun's troops attacked the rebels and set their camp on fire. The flames rose to the very heaven. The rebels were thrown into great confusion. There was no time to saddle horses or don armor: They fled in all directions.

The battle continued until dawn. Zhang Lian and Zhang Ba, with a group of flying rebels, found a way of escape. But suddenly a troop of soldiers with crimson banners appeared to oppose them. Their leader was a man of medium stature with small eyes and a long beard. He was Cao Cao, a Beijuo man, holding the rank of Cavalry Commander. His father was Cao Song, but he was not really a Cao. Cao Song had been born to the Xiahou family, but he had been brought up by Eunuch Cao Teng and had taken this family name.

As a young man Cao Cao had been fond of hunting and delighted in songs and dancing. He was resourceful and full of guile. An uncle, seeing the young fellow so unsteady, used to get angry with him and told his father of his misdeeds. His father remonstrated with him.

But Cao Cao made equal to the occasion. One day, seeing his uncle coming, he fell to the ground in a pretended fit. The uncle alarmed ran to tell his father, who came, and there was the youth in most perfect health.

"But your uncle said you were in a fit. Are you better?" said his father.

"I have never suffered from fits or any such illness," said Cao Cao. "But I have lost my uncle's affection, and he has deceived you."

Thereafter, whatever the uncle might say of his faults, his father paid no heed. So the young man grew up licentious and uncontrolled.

A man of the time named Qiao Xuan said to Cao Cao, "Rebellion is at hand, and only a man of the greatest ability can succeed in restoring tranquillity. That man is yourself."

And He Yong of Nanyang said of him, "The dynasty of Han is about to fall. He who can restore peace is this man and only he."

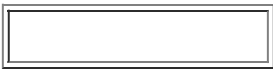
Cao Cao went to inquire his future of a wise man of Runan named Xu Shao.

"What manner of man am I?" asked Cao Cao.

The seer made no reply, and again and again Cao Cao pressed the question.

Then Xu Shao replied, "In peace you are an able subject; in chaos you are a crafty hero!"

Cao Cao greatly rejoiced to hear this.



Cao Cao graduated at twenty and earned a reputation of piety and integrity. He began his career as Commanding Officer in a county within the Capital District. In the four gates of the city he guarded, he hung up clubs of various sorts, and he would punish any breach of the law whatever the rank of the offender. Now an uncle of Eunuch Jian Shuo* was found one night in the streets with a sword and was arrested. In due course he was beaten. Thereafter no one dared to offend again, and Cao Cao's name became heard. Soon he became a magistrate of Dunqiu.

At the outbreak of the Yellow Scarves, Cao Cao held the rank of General and was given command of five thousand horse and foot to help fight at Yingchuan. He just happened to fall in with the newly defeated rebels whom he cut to pieces. Thousands were slain and endless banners and drums and horses were captured, together with huge sums of money. However, Zhang

Ba and Zhang Lian got away; and after an interview with Huangfu Song, Cao Cao went in pursuit of them.

Meanwhile Liu Bei and his brothers were hastening toward Yingchuan, when they heard the din of battle and saw flames rising high toward the sky. But they arrived too late for the fighting. They saw Huangfu Song and Zhu Jun to whom they told the intentions of Lu Zhi.

"The rebel power is quite broken here," said the commanders, "but they will surely make for Guangzong to join Zhang Jue. You can do nothing better than hasten back."

The three brothers thus retraced their steps. Half way along the road they met a party of soldiers escorting a prisoner in a cage-cart. When they drew near, they saw the prisoner was no other than Lu Zhi, the man they were going to help. Hastily dismounting, Liu Bei asked what had happened.

Lu Zhi explained, "I had surrounded the rebels and was on the point of smashing them, when Zhang Jue employed some of his supernatural powers and prevented my victory. The court sent down Eunuch Zhuo Feng to inquire into my failure, and that official demanded a bribe. I told him how hard pressed we were and asked him where, in the circumstances, I could find a gift for him. He went away in wrath and reported that I was hiding behind my ramparts and would not give battle and that I disheartened my army. So I was superseded by Dong Zhuo, and I have to go to the capital to answer the charge."

This story put Zhang Fei into a rage. He was for slaying the escort and setting free Lu Zhi. But Liu Bei checked him.

"The government will take the due course," said Liu Bei. "You must not act hastily!"

And the escort and the three brothers went two ways.

It was useless to continue on that road to Guangzong, so Guan Yu proposed to go back to Zhuo, and they retook the road. Two days later they heard the thunder of battle behind some hills. Hastening to the top, they beheld the government soldiers suffering great loss, and they saw the countryside was

full of Yellow Scarves. On the rebels' banners were the words **Zhang Jue the Lord of Heaven** written large.

"We will attack this Zhang Jue!" said Liu Bei to his brothers, and they galloped out to join in the battle.

Zhang Jue had worsted Dong Zhuo and was following up his advantage. He was in hot pursuit when the three brothers dashed into his army, threw his ranks into confusion, and drove him back fifteen miles. Then the brothers returned with the rescued general to his camp.

"What offices have you?" asked Dong Zhuo, when he had leisure to speak to the brothers.

"None," replied they.

And Dong Zhuo treated them with disrespect. Liu Bei retired calmly, but Zhang Fei was furious.

"We have just rescued this menial in a bloody fight," cried Zhang Fei, "and now he is rude to us! Nothing but his death can slake my anger."

Zhang Fei stamped toward Dong Zhuo's tent, holding firmly a sharp sword.

[hip, hip, hip]

As it was in olden time so it is today,
The simple wight may merit well,
Officialdom holds sway;
Zhang Fei, the blunt and hasty,
Where can you find his peer?
But slaying the ungrateful would
Mean many deaths a year.

[yip, yip, yip]

Dong Zhuo's fate will be unrolled in later chapters.

[Main Next to Chapter 2 >>](#)