

Characters from *Killers of the Three Kingdoms*

Zhou Yu (175-210)

One of the most capable strategists for Sun Ce and his successor Sun Quan. In 200, Sun Ce was assassinated and power passed to his brother, Sun Quan. Zhou Yu took over military affairs while Zhang Zhao was given domestic affairs. Around this time, Cao Cao defeated Yuan Shao and he demanded that Sun Quan send a family member hostage. Zhou Yu advised against sending a hostage. This raised Zhou Yu's respect within the Sun family, and he was treated as an elder brother by Sun Quan. In 206, Zhou Yu attacked the local bandits, capturing over ten thousand and resettled them. In 208, Sun Quan ordered an attack on Jiangxia, which was protected by the Sun family's nemesis, Huang Zu. Zhou Yu led the navy, and along with Gan Ning, Lü Meng, Dong Xi and Xu Sheng, defeated Huang Zu at Xiakou, killing him. In the famous Battle of the Red Cliffs, did not contribute much and Zhou Yu was the supreme commander of the united forces against Cao Cao. In this battle, a series of stratagems were employed by Zhou Yu to destroy Cao Cao's giant fleet. Huang Gai proposed a plan in which he pretended to surrender to Cao Cao and infiltrated Cao Cao's camp. There, he set his own ships on fire and rammed them into Cao Cao's ships before jumping into the river. Many of Cao Cao's ships were destroyed and Cao Cao was forced to flee back to Xuchang. Afterwards, Zhou Yu led his army in pursuit of Cao Cao and laid siege to the strategic town of Nanjun (Battle of Jiangling). While on the front lines, Zhou Yu was struck by a stray arrow and seriously wounded with his right ribs broken by the arrows. Though the wound was not fatal, the illness that developed from the infection of the wound killed Zhou Yu at age thirty-five.

Huang Yue Ying (186-235)

Fictional name for the wife of Zhuge Liang. Her true name is unknown. In folk tradition, she was known to be quite unattractive, but this was a rumor she spread so men would admire her for the abilities she carried and not her beauty. It is said that she was extraordinarily plain (with several pits on her face), but was very talented. The only man who could see past her ruse was Zhuge Liang who pursued her when he heard tales of her wisdom. She was never thought of as a great beauty, and her father even said she wasn't beautiful; therefore when Zhuge Liang asked for her hand in marriage everyone was surprised. He simply stated that he married her not for her beauty but for her wits. According to one legend, she had invented wooden animals that moved like real ones. Zhuge Liang was so amazed by her inventions that he fell in love with her brilliant mind

Zhen Luo (183-221)

First wife of Wei's first emperor, Cao Pi. At a young age she was personally involved in famine relief and gained the praise of many people. Her first husband was the son of the warlord Yuan Shao, who was defeated by Cao Cao at the Battle of Guandu in 200.. After his death, his sons became involved in internecine struggles over their father's vast domain. Cao Cao played the two brothers off against each other and eventually conquered all of the Yuans' territory. During this campaign Cao Cao captured Yecheng and his son Cao Pi, upon seeing Lady Zhen, became obsessed with her beauty. Even though her husband was still alive at this point, Cao Pi forced her into marriage. Eventually, Lady Zhen lost favor with Cao Pi. When he forced Emperor Xian of Han to abdicate and established Cao Wei in 220, he set up his capital at Luoyang but did not summon Lady Zhen from Yecheng to join him. Lady Zhen's upset at this was reported by Lady Guo, further angering Cao Pi. In 221, he sent messengers to force her to commit suicide. After Lady Zhen's son Cao Rui became emperor in 226, he honored her posthumously as an empress, although he also honored Empress Guo as empress dowager. In 235, Empress Guo died under controversial circumstances -- with many historians believing that Cao Rui had found out her role in Lady Zhen's death and forced her to commit suicide. Many popular stories speculated that the reason for Lady Zhen's death was that she carried on an affair with Cao Pi's brother Cao Zhi -- a speculation not supported by evidence. Some more fantastical accounts alleged that she had an affair with his father Cao Cao as well. These accounts generally allege that a poem generally attributed to Cao Zhi, dedicated to the goddess of Luo River, was actually dedicated to Zhen Luo.

Gan Ning

General of Sun Quan, he gained the titles of General Who Oppresses the Enemy with Ferocity and Grand Administrator of Xiling during his military career. Gan Ning was rough but forthright and head strong. He was open-minded, valorous and skilled in strategy. His lack of respect for material goods was balanced by his respect for talented men. Gan Ning was extravagant and often covered his travelling quarters in silk only to cut the cloth up when he left. He travelled surrounded by carriages and steeds or when by water, galleys or light ships. He hated wealth. Throughout his younger years, he paid no heed to chivalry and often committed murder, both in public and in secret.

Guo Jia (170-207)

Strategist and advisor to Cao. During the campaign against Lü Bu in 198, Cao Cao's force won three consecutive battles, forcing his enemy to retreat and fortify itself within the city of Xiapi. By then Cao Cao's troops were exhausted from fighting, and he intended to withdraw. However, Guo Jia persuaded Cao Cao to press on and not give Lü Bu time to recuperate. Cao Cao took the advice and ultimately prevailed against his opponent. In 200, Cao Cao confronted Yuan Shao's force at the Battle of Guandu, leaving his base city Xuchang sparsely guarded. Seeing this opportunity, Sun Ce, a warlord in the south, planned to move north and attack Xuchang. Everyone despaired at the news, but Guo Jia foretold that Sun Ce, being proud and impulsive, would be killed by his own people before reaching Xuchang. True to his prediction, Sun Ce was assassinated before he could even cross the Yangtze River. Cao Cao then scored a great victory against Yuan Shao, solidifying his position as the strongest warlord in the north. Once Cao Cao intended to launch an expedition deep into the north to eradicate Yuan Shang and the Wuhuan tribes, but many feared that Liu Biao would attack from the south. Under Guo Jia's counsel, the army travelled light, leaving behind the bulk of supplies. The resulting swift strike caught the Wuhuan unprepared in the Battle of White Wolf Mountain. Tadun was killed and Yuan Shang went into exile in what is now the province of Heilongjiang and Jilin. Guo Jia died of a sickness in 207 AD, at the young age of 37.

Zhuge Liang (181-234)

Chancellor of Shu Han, he is often recognized as the greatest strategist of his era. Often depicted wearing a robe and holding a fan made of crane feathers, he was not only an important military strategist and statesman; but also an accomplished scholar and inventor. His reputation as an intelligent and learned scholar grew even while he was living in relative seclusion, earning him the nickname "Crouching Dragon". His name has become synonymous with intelligence and tactics.

Hua Tuo (?-208)

Renowned physician described as "an immortal who had passed the gates of this life" and "a man with the complexion of a youth and a snowy beard". The Book of Later Han records Hua Tuo as the first person in China to use anesthesia during surgery. He used a general anesthetic combining wine with a herbal concoction called mafeisan (lit. "cannabis boil powder").

Lü Meng (178-219)

Renowned officer under Sun Quan. In the spring of 208, Sun Quan set out to battle his nemesis Huang Zu again in the Battle of Xiakou. Lü Meng's regiment crushed Huang Zu's vanguard, and personally killed the enemy admiral Chen Jiu. Meng was promoted and was heavily rewarded. That same year, Lü Meng participated in the Battle of Red Cliff, where an alliance between Sun Quan and Liu Bei defeated the numerically superior forces of Cao Cao. it was said that Lü Meng focused entirely on martial skills until he was admonished by Sun Quan. Lü Meng used to say that military matters take away his time and he had no time to read, but Sun Quan stated that he himself had to tend to matters both big and small in his land, even so, he had the time to read and enhance himself. Lü Meng was enlightened, and started to take up scholarly pursuits. Soon his breadth of knowledge became so broad that even some elder Confucians could not match him, and Sun Quan was so impressed at Lü's improvements that he often used Lü Meng as a role model for his other officers. Lü Meng and his men invaded Jing Province under the disguise of merchant boats and forced its defenders to surrender. He treated the populace with respect and care, to the point of giving medicine to the ailing and clothes to the cold. When Guan Yu's men heard of their families' safety, they became dispirited and many surrendered to Wu. Guan Yu, having nowhere to return to, attempted to flee to Sichuan but was captured. Guan Yu was then executed by Sun Quan. After Guan Yu was executed, Lü Meng soon fell to illness. Despite the medical help provided by Sun Quan, Lü Meng died at the age of 41.

Ma Chao (176-222)

Eldest son of Ma Teng and a general. In the novel he received the nickname "the Splendid" due to his elaborate armour and grand skill as a warrior. Originally serving under Zhang Lu, he lost his trust and eventually Ma Chao decided to defect to Liu Bei. He is remembered as one of the Five Tiger Generals of Shu Han. As a Shu general he raised morale and offered more strategies than achievements in battles.

Sima Yi (179 - September 7, 251)

Strategist, general, and politician of Cao Wei. Perhaps best known for defending Cao Wei from Zhuge Liang's Northern Expeditions, his success paved the way for his grandson Sima Yan's foundation of the Jin Dynasty, which eventually ended to the Three Kingdoms era.

Diao Chan

One of the Four Beauties of ancient China. She was said to have been born in 161 or 169 AD, depending on the source. In the novel (though probably not historically) she assisted in a plot to persuade the warrior Lü Bu to kill his adopted father, the tyrannical warlord Dong Zhuo, by becoming Dong Zhuo's concubine, but also Lü Bu's betrothed, then manipulating the two through their jealousy and her charm. Dong Zhuo's tactician, Li Ru, saw that the dancing girl was driving both the lord and the warrior mad, so he proposed that Dong Zhuo give Diao Chan to Lü Bu instead of fighting over her. Upon hearing this he threatened Li Ru with death and stated that no warrior was worth what Diao Chan was to him. Diao Chan had Lü Bu wrapped around her finger. She told him that being with Dong Zhuo made her unhappy and wished to only be with him. Lü Bu was outraged and went to Wang Yun to plot Dong Zhuo's death. Lü Bu had to escape shortly after killing Dong Zhuo and he lost a battle to Dong Zhuo's generals. He did, however, meet up with Diao Chan once more. Diao Chan followed Lü Bu during his time as a rogue leader until he took Cao Cao's castle of Puyang. Together they were married and traveled the land until Lü Bu was later killed when Cao Cao's forces overran his base at Xiapi. There is no mention of Diao Chan in the novel after this.

Sun Shang Xiang

Daughter of the warlord, Sun Jian, she had five brothers, the most notable being the two eldest, Sun Ce and Sun Quan, both of whom subsequently became warlords south of the Yangtze River. She is often depicted as a tomboy, as she received extensive martial arts training and her maidservants all wielded weapons, which was strange for her time. She was wed to Liu Bei as his third wife, supposedly to secure the alliance between Sun Quan and Liu Bei. When Liu Bei turned west to attack the land of Sichuan, Sun Quan sent ships to bring her back.

Cao Cao

Warlord and the penultimate Chancellor of the Eastern Han Dynasty who rose to great power during its final years in ancient China. As one of the central figures of the Three Kingdoms period, he laid the foundations for what was to become the state of Cao Wei and was posthumously titled Emperor Wu of Wei. Although often portrayed as a cruel and merciless tyrant, Cao has also been praised as a brilliant ruler and military genius who treated his subordinates like his family. He was also skilled in poetry and martial arts and authored many war journals.

Huang Gai

General for Wu, renowned as a hardened combat veteran who loyally served three Sun Family lords throughout his lifetime. At the Battle of Red Cliffs in 208, Huang Gai suggested that a fire attack would be the best strategy to defeat Cao Cao's gigantic fleet and overwhelming numbers. This was approved and Huang Gai sent word to Cao Cao claiming that he wished to defect. Huang Gai had earlier loaded his boats with wax and straw, and when his ships were within proximity of Cao Cao's fleet, he set them ablaze and steered them on a collision course with Cao Cao's lines. This, coupled with the fact that Cao Cao had chained his ships together to prevent their soldiers from being seasick, caused the fire to spread throughout the fleet, causing massive damage and casualties to Cao's army and forcing him into retreat. This plot resulted in a critical victory for both Sun Quan and Liu Bei, who would now be granted more than enough time to rally their armies and further bolster their positions within their respective territories. During the battle, Huang Gai was hit by an arrow and fell from his boat, but was rescued. Huang Gai received various titles throughout the years, including: "Auxiliary Corps Commander", "Acting Colonel of the Firm Attack", "Chief Commandant of Danyang", "General of the Gentlemen of the Household", and "Governor of Wu Ling." For his long-serving life of Wu, he is listed as one of the Five Wu Elders.

Zhao Yun (?-229)

Major general. For most of his career, served the Liu Bei, playing a part in the establishment of Shu Han. In literature and folklore he is lauded as the third member of the Five Tiger Generals. In the novel, Zhao Yun is described as being almost perfect, possessing unparalleled physical power as well as unwavering loyalty to his master, tremendous courage, keen intelligence and serene charisma. The novel portrays him as a courageous, loyal, and heroic warrior, and show him surviving insurmountable odds, many times single-handedly.

Zhang Liao (169 – 222)

General under Cao Cao, he had participated in many campaigns, including those against Yuan Shao's heirs and the Wuhuan tribes. But he was most noted for his pivotal role in the Battle of Hefei in 208, where he successfully defended the city of Hefei against the advances of Sun Quan's massive army. Chen Shou, author of the Records of Three Kingdoms, considered Zhang Liao among the five top generals of the Kingdom of Wei, along with Xu Huang, Yue Jin, Zhang He and Yu Jin.

Sun Quan (182-252)

Son of Sun Jian, founder of Eastern Wu. When his elder brother was assassinated the 18-year-old Sun Quan inherited the lands. His administration proved to be relatively stable in those early years and he built up strength. In winter of 207, Cao Cao led an army of some 200,000 to conquer south to complete the reunification of China. In the end, Sun Quan decided to oppose Cao Cao in the Middle Yangtze with his superior riverine forces. Allied with Liu Bei and employing the combined strategies of Zhou Yu and Huang Gai, they defeated Cao Cao decisively at the Battle of Red Cliffs. In 220, Cao Pi, son of Cao Cao, seized the throne and proclaimed himself Emperor of China. At first Sun Quan nominally served as a Cao Wei vassal, but after Cao Pi demanded that he send his son as a hostage he refused and declared himself independent. Because of his skill in gathering important, honorable men to his cause, Sun Quan was able to delegate authority to capable figures. This primary strength served him well in gaining the support of the common people and surrounding himself with capable generals. Sun Quan enjoyed the longest reign among all the founders of the Three Kingdoms.

Zhang Fei (167-221 AD)

General of Shu Han, he was a masterful general rather than simply a warrior. He treated his superiors with respect, but had little respect for his underlings. He was often warned by Liu Bei that his habit of over-punishing his own soldiers by lashing and killing would eventually bring himself disaster. Zhang Fei married Xiahou Yuan's daughter, who was captured by Zhang Fei's troops as she was out gathering firewood. They had a two daughters, the older becoming empress of Shu Han after marrying Liu Shan, with Zhuge Liang as the matchmaker. After Zhang Fei's eldest daughter died due to natural causes, Zhuge Liang once again played the role of matchmaker, and Liu Shan married Zhang Fei's younger daughter, who thus succeeded her older sister to become the empress of Shu Han. Some claim that Zhang Fei was also an excellent painter. Zhang Fei was killed by his own men Zhang Da and Fan Jiang, while preparing his troops to attack the rival Eastern Wu to avenge the death of Guan Yu. Zhang Da and Fan Jiang went on to defect to Wu.

Xu Zhu

One of Liu Bei's advisors during the Three Kingdoms era of China, he helped to provide strategies against Cao Cao. It was he who defeated Cao Cao's army led by Cao Ren. Cao Cao had long admired the man, and wishing to lure Xu Shu into his service he captured his mother and took her to the capital. There Cao Cao's advisors wrote a fake letter pretending to be Xu Shu's mother saying how she wanted him to be there with her and her suffering. Xu Shu was known to be a man of strong filial piety and left to find her though he promised never to serve Cao Cao. When he went to his mother, she was outraged and hung herself. Xu Shu kept his promise and did not advise Cao Cao. Just before the Battle of Red Cliffs, however, he was in Cao Cao's camp when Pang Tong advised Cao Cao to tie the ships together with chains to prevent sea sickness among his soldiers. Xu Shu saw at once that this was to assist Zhou Yu's fire attack against Cao Cao's fleet. Xu Shu asked Pang Tong how to escape, and the latter told him to spread the rumour that Ma Teng and Han Sui were leading a rebellion against Cao Cao. Cao Cao commanded Xu Shu to subdue the rebellion. Xu Shu therefore managed to escape from the battle. Prior to leaving Liu Bei, Xu Shu recommended that he seek out Zhuge Liang, who would become Liu Bei's most indispensable and trusted advisor.

Lü Bu (?-November 7, 198)

General and later minor warlord during the late Eastern Han Dynasty. Said to be a master in horseback riding and archery, and thus known as the Flying General. His image as a handsome and mighty warrior wearing a pheasant-tailed helmet and wielding a ji known as the "Sky Piercer" on top of his steed Red Hare. In the novel he is the single most powerful warrior in all of China, comparable to the Greek hero Achilles in prowess. Besides being matchless on the battlefield, Lü Bu was also notorious for having betrayed and slain two separate masters (who were both his adoptive fathers). He was perhaps most well-known for his amorous relationship with the most likely fictional Diao Chan which led to his slaying of his adoptive father Dong Zhuo, the tyrannical warlord who held the puppet figurehead Emperor Xian in his control. Lü Bu was eventually defeated and captured by Cao Cao in the city of Xiapi. At Liu Bei's suggestion, Cao Cao had Lü Bu beheaded by Cao Cao's cousin Xiahou Dun.

Guan Yu

General serving Liu Bei, he played a significant role in the civil war that led to the collapse of the Han Dynasty and the establishment of the Kingdom of Shu, of which Liu Bei was the first emperor. As one of the best known Chinese historical figures throughout East Asia, Guan Yu's true life stories have largely given way to fictionalized ones in which his deeds and moral qualities have been lionized. Guan Yu was deified as early as the Sui Dynasty and is still being worshiped by Chinese people today, especially in southern China. He is respected as the epitome of loyalty and righteousness.

Da Qiao

The Two Qiaos, daughters of Qiao Xuan, were known as two of the great beauties of ancient China. Their names are not recorded, so they are referred to simply as Dà Qiáo and Xiǎo Qiáo, literally "the elder Qiao" and "the younger Qiao". The elder Qiao sister was married to Sun Ce, the lord of Wu; while Xiao Qiao was married to Zhou Yu. In the novel, the two Qiaos were one of the major causes of the Battle of Red Cliffs. Zhuge Liang manipulated Zhou Yu under the guise of advising him of Cao Cao's plot to obtain the Qiao sisters for himself. Enraged, Zhou Yu plotted with Zhuge Liang and Pang Tong to attack Cao Cao.

Lu Xun (183-245)

Officer of Eastern Wu. When Liu Bei found out that Jing province had been taken he was enraged. He led the army of Shu eastward to reclaim Jing province and to avenge Guan Yu. After several defeats of Wu, Lu Xun was given command of the army and ordered to counter this threat. Instead of directly contesting the advance, Lu Xun, who feared a trap, was criticized for establishing forts and reinforcing the existing citadels. Then, after several months of inactivity, Lu Xun suddenly struck, first tricking the Shu commanders with a mock attack on one of their camps, then ordering his troops to move forward with torches and set fire to all the other camps of Liu Bei's army. This was followed by a devastating attack from three sides by all of the Wu forces, and Liu Bei's army was utterly destroyed. Lu Xun was known for his virtue and humility, as well as his keen insight. After Sun Quan named himself Emperor, Lu Xun was made Chancellor. Later he was caught up in a dispute between the sons of Sun Quan and was dismissed from office. Filled with grief, Lu Xun fell ill and died at the age of 63.

Liu Bei (161-21 June 223)

General, warlord and founding emperor of Shu Han. Despite having a later start than his rivals and lacking both the material resources and social status they commanded, Liu overcame his many defeats to carve out his own realm, which at its peak spanned modern day Sichuan, Guizhou, Hunan, part of Hubei and part of Gansu. Liu Bei is widely known as the ideal benevolent, humane ruler who cared for his people and selected good advisors for his government. His character was an salutary example of a ruler who adhered to the Confucian set of moral values, such as loyalty and compassion.

Xiahou Dun (?-13 June 220)

General under Cao Cao who lost his left eye during the battle of Xia Pi in 198 AD, and subsequently became known among the rank and file as "Blind Xiahou", which greatly irked him. He was said to have yanked the arrow fired by enemy general Cao Xing out of his eye and devoured his own eyeball to instill fear in his enemies. He is described as a modest and generous man, personally fetching his teacher to the camp so that he could continue his studies during the midst of battle. He also distributed any excess wealth he had, taking from the treasury only in need, and did not own any property. At his death, he was given the posthumous title of Marquis Zhong, literally meaning the loyal marquis.

Zhen Ji

The first wife of Cao Wei's first emperor, Cao Pi. During her early life she was personally involved in famine relief and gained the praise of many people. A warlord became aware of her reputation and beauty, and successfully married her to his son, Yuan Xi. He was sent to govern a province, but she remained behind. When the family was defeated by Cao Cao and the warlord died, her husband struggled with his brother over the inheritance. Eventually both were conquered by Cao Cao whose son Cao Pi became obsessed with Zhen Ji's beauty and forced her into marriage. Eight months later she gave birth to Cao Rui. She became involved in rivalry with her husband's other favorite, Guo Nüwang, and eventually she lost favor and was forced to commit suicide. After Cao Rui became emperor in 226, he honored her posthumously as an empress. In 235, Empress Guo died under controversial circumstances – with many historians believing that Cao Rui had found out her role in Lady Zhen's death and forced her to commit suicide.