

Tianxia



BLOOD, SILK & JADE

BY JACK NORRIS



Tianxia

**BLOOD, SILK
& JADE**

Sample file

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This book is dedicated to

JACK NORRIS:

To my parents, grandparents, fiancé, and friends for their continued support and encouragement. And to the *sifu* and other instructors over the years whose guidance and training at one point literally helped save my life.

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CHAPTER ONE

WELCOME TO TIANXIA

OCCURRENCE AT PEACH BLOSSOM BRIDGE

“The right ground can turn a man into an army, and an army into a collection of fools.” Ma Wei Sheng’s father had told him this when he was eight.

His father, the Great General Ma, victor of countless battles fought for his Emperor and the Great Empire of Shénzhōu. He was always right, a fact which comforted and frustrated the young swordsman on alternating occasions. Today, watching thirty swordsmen rush him across the opposite end of the narrow bridge was one of the comforting times.

He had stumbled upon the White Turbans by accident. A murdered farmer, a young child asking for his aid, and a youthful enthusiasm for justice and chivalry had led him to uncover the sect. Their ultimate goal was to overthrow the empire and cast down the priesthoods, replacing both with their heretical theocracy. Wei Sheng had not figured out how the death of the farmer featured in their plot. He might never find out

now, not if the next few moments went against them. Of course, he was not unprepared.

“Swift and thoughtful action saves lives. Swift and thoughtless action kills them.” Another of his father’s sayings, and again, so very appropriate. He had fled the turbans when he saw their numbers. Not out of fear, but only to find the right ground. He found it at Peach Blossom Bridge.

The bridge was narrow and unimpressive. It crossed a small tributary of the Silk River, little more than a stream but just fast and deep enough to make crossing uncertain. The bridge had been built to allow for the small amounts of traffic between the nearby villages, and it was difficult for more than three or four men to walk side by side. In other words, it was perfect.

Ma Wei Sheng watched as the White Turbans ran across the bridge towards him, all drawn swords and murderous fury and fear. They needed him dead, he

knew, lest he escape, bringing soldiers and magistrates to crush their sect.

Unfortunately for them, escape was not Wei Sheng’s strategy. He did not wish to avoid fighting. He simply wished to find the right place for it—a narrow bridge where their thirty fanatical fighters became rows of three or four pressing against each other with little room to swing their blades. On this little, unassuming bridge, Ma Wei Sheng was the army, and they merely a collection of fools.

The White Turbans slowed momentarily when they realized he had stopped. Perhaps some among them had read the Great General’s works and realized their folly, or maybe they were simply confused their prey had stopped running.

“Wondering on its purpose only kills its utility,” Ma Wei Sheng whispered to himself while moving to meet the mob of thirty armed killers.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Tianxia uses a variety of terms inspired by Chinese history and martial arts drama, especially in the setting material.

To make it easier to follow, we have included this handy list of common terms right up front.

Adherents of the Tao: Also called Dao, this religion makes up one of the three major belief systems of Shénzhōu. Focusing on harmony, balance, and spontaneous and natural actions, Daoists seek peace and immortality through purity of purpose and action. This religion is similar to real world Daoism, but filtered through the *wuxia*/Kung Fu action genre *Tianxia* embraces.

Chi: Internal energies thought to be capable of great feats if properly channeled, manipulated, and cultivated. It is often divided into categories, most notably Yin and Yang. Also a Skill within the game, revolving around *Chi* use during play.

Da Jiang (“Great River”): One of the largest and most important waterways in Shénzhōu, it runs through the southern provinces and flows east to the sea. As it does not pass through the starting setting of Jiāngzhōu, it is only briefly mentioned in this book, but its importance to Shénzhōu as a whole merits mention here.

Emperor: The ruler of Shénzhōu and member of one of the several dynasties who have ruled the empire since its founding. Also known as *Huangdi*, he is believed ordained by heaven to rule through a complex bureaucracy of ministers, governors, and officials. Sometimes called the Son of Heaven, or *Tiānzǐ*, referencing the Shén belief that he rightly rules all the lands of the world. In various periods of history, this ruler has been an empress.

Eunuchs: A term used to describe both those who have had their sex organs removed and the eunuchs who serve as government ministers and imperial officials. In the land of Shénzhōu, this process involves a mystic ritual, not surgery. Often portrayed as villains in Chinese period media.

Followers of Bodhisattva: Also known as Bodhists, this religion makes up one of the three major belief systems of Shénzhōu. Buddhism has various sects and famed enlightened figures in its past, including its founder and namesake. Bodhists seek enlightenment through the alleviation of suffering by rejecting material attachments. This religion is similar to real world Buddhism, but filtered through the *wuxia*/Kung Fu action genre *Tianxia* embraces.

Gong: Artisans and craftsmen, they make the up part of the “middle class” of Shénzhōu.

Jade Road: A major trade route named for its importance in the mining and production of jade goods, this road extends beyond the borders of Shénzhōu and travels all the way to the major cities in the eastern part of the empire.

Jianghu: Sometimes called the Wu Lin, this is a community and culture of warriors and martial artists. Most *wuxia* fiction takes place in the Jianghu, and it is seen as existing on the fringes of normal society in a place where beggars can best princes if their skills are strong enough.

Jiāngzhōu (“Border Land”): Border province on the western edge of Shénzhōu, this largely lawless land of bandits, gangs, and corrupt officials is the focus of *TIANXIA: BLOOD, SILK & JADE*.

Kung Fu: Catchall term for Chinese martial arts, used in *Tianxia* to describe the various styles and substyles that make up this game’s martial arts rules.

Legalism: The official religion of the empire and one of the three major belief systems of Shénzhōu, Legalism focuses on devotion to duty and obedience of laws and established social order. This religion is similar to real world Confucianism, but filtered through the *wuxia*/Kung Fu action genre *Tianxia* embraces.

Nong: Peasants and farmers, they are the lowest social class that receives any recognition or respect in Shénzhōu.

Security Companies: Businesses employing many mercenaries and warriors in Shénzhōu who can be paid to protect various goods and people. Often respected by, and rivals with, government authorities, these institutions are run by powerful warriors ranging from heroic protectors to little more than bandits.

Shang: Merchants and traders. They form part of the “middle class” of Shénzhōu, though the wealthiest of them mix with the social elite.

Sifu: Honorific given to masters and teachers, much like Master in English or *sensei* in Japanese. Students of Kung Fu are expected to respect their *sifu* even after they have ceased studying with them.

Shén: Collective name for the people of Shénzhōu. Rarely used in many cases, since people are often defined more by the village or province they live in, but the term sees use in diplomatic or government circles. Foreigners often call people or objects from Shénzhōu “Shénese”.

Shénzhōu (“Divine Realm”): Name given to the entire realm in *Tianxia*. Ruled over by a dynastic imperial system supported by countless ministers and bureaucrats, this land is much like ancient China during various periods.

Shi: Nobles and scholars, they rule Shénzhōu and are among its most respected members.

Silk River: A major waterway in Shénzhōu, it passes through Jiāngzhōu and continues east through the empire to the sea.

Tianxia (“Under Heaven”): A concept involving cultural unification once used to refer to all the various parts of the Chinese empire or the world, it is the name for this game as a whole (system and setting).

Wuxia (“Wandering Swordsman” or “Knight Errant”): Both a type of character and genre of media, *wuxia* films and books focus on the lives and struggles of highly skilled warriors. *Wuxia* heroes often have skills and abilities bordering on or crossing over into the superhuman.

Wu Xing: A fivefold system of connected colors, seasons, directions, animals, and other concepts, the Wu Xing features heavily into Chinese culture, folklore, and legends. Everything from medicine to fashion is influenced by the concepts. In *Tianxia*, the traditional animals of the Wu Xing are slightly altered to prevent repetition and for dramatic purposes, with the snake and phoenix replacing the more commonly used tortoise and red bird, and the crane replacing a second dragon present in the framework.

Yang: Term for various “positive” forces. Not seen as inherently good, though this is sometimes misunderstood in the West. *Yang* involves proactive forces, heat, light, masculinity, and other such concepts.

Yi (“Outsider” or “Barbarian”): A term technically referring to anyone from outside Shénzhōu, used commonly to refer to barbarians, strange foreigners, and those who exist completely outside Shén society. Bandits and wandering warriors are not typically considered Yi, as they are still seen as having some connections to Shénzhōu. This term is not inherently pejorative, but is often used as such. Sometimes the term *Hú* is used, especially for the barbarian tribes living near the borders of Shénzhōu.

Yin: Term for various “negative” forces. Not seen as evil or dark, though this is sometimes misunderstood in the West. *Yin* involves reactive forces, cold, winter, shadow, femininity, and other such concepts.

Zhōngzhōu (“Center Land”): Core province housing the imperial capital city and emperor’s palace. Often used in the west to refer to various eastern areas with strong imperial presence, regardless of their actual location. Despite being located along the eastern shore, it is considered the central point of Shénzhōu due to its historical significance as the central point of early Shénzhōu and its imperial presence.