

IRGINS PLAME!

ROMANCE, ADVENTURE, AND SEX (WITH HORSES)

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VIRGINS **A**BLAME!

Premarital Bliss



Rudolpho ran his fingers through her wild golden hair. It smelled of a spring morning. Her soft, pliant skin pressed hard against him. He looked deep into her eyes and saw that they were full of desire. Lips like two pleasant leeches continued to explore his chestal area. Her nails clutched at Rudolpho's back as he held her. His enormous hands firmly caressed her hips and buttocks as he nibbled at the nape of her neck.

"Yes!" thought Rudolpho. "I knew her indifference was but an act. No woman can bed down with me and not be enthralled with my manhood." Just then Princess Lingere bit down on one of her knuckles and let out a stifled cry of pleasure.

"Aha!" he said proudly. "Methinks I have found your erroneous zone!"

"What are you talking about?" the Princess said angrily. Rudolpho shot up from under the covers and surveyed the room. It was already daylight and Princess Lingere was standing at the foot of the bed with a very stern look on her face. His tongue felt dry and sticky and his pillow seemed to have an inordinate amount of drool on it. The Princess stared at him while tapping her royal foot impatiently.

"I'm not even going to ask what that was all about."

"What what was all about?" Rudolpho said in a daze.

"All of that thrashing about and sticking out your tongue. If

you have some sort of bizarre sleeping disorder then I shall have to make arrangements for keeping separate rooms."

"But how did you?..."

"The door was unlocked. I came here to see if you might be getting up today. Sir Stephan has been waiting in the courtyard all morning."

"Well," Rudolpho said grumpily. "That is his job isn't it? Perhaps he would enjoy becoming one of the lower classes. I hear peasants have it really sweet these days."

"He has made no complaint," defended the Princess. "In fact when I suggested I should wake you he attempted to convince me otherwise."

"Hmmm," he said with a smile. "I suppose they don't come any better than old Sir Stephan."

"That is why I think you should not keep him waiting any longer. I shall be waiting to see you off in the courtyard." With that, Princess Lingere left the room. Rudolpho, with great effort, slowly pulled himself from his bed.

Sir Stephan stood implacably next to his proud steed. Its packs were full with enough rations for ten long journeys and plenty of other things were strung on and around the horse as well. Guards milled around the courtyard and admired the knight although none of them envied him. It is said that leaving the safety of the castle walls is the best way to obtain tales of heroism. Any large period of time where a knight's whereabouts are unknown is fair game for a little creative re-tooling. The only downside to leaving is that the chances of being flayed alive or trodden on by wild animals are greatly increased. Sir Stephan stroked his graying goatee as he watched the guards.

"Weaklings," he thought. "If they only realized what they are. The first line of defense in an attack. A general's pawn in an insignificant battle. They are expendable whereas I am a major character!" Sir Stephan was feeling fairly superior. He looked over at Princess Lingere who was sitting on a royal chair while the

royal manicurist filed her nails. She seemed irritated.

"Sir Stephan!" someone began shouting. He turned to find Prince Rudolpho walking towards him. He decided to meet him half way.

"Well met my lord," he said. "It is indeed time that we began our journey." Sir Stephan looked him up and down for a moment. "However, may I suggest more appropriate riding gear?"

Rudolpho pulled at his royal bedrobes. "Thy wit is as sharp as ever," Rudolpho said patting his friend on the back as he turned them around.

"Where, may I ask, are we headed to now, my lord?"

Rudolpho looked at him. "I have not yet eaten my morning meal," he said matter of factly. "You do realize it is the most vital of all the daily consumptions. I have had the cook prepare us something special to celebrate our heroic adventure." They reached the door to the great hall. "Oh. I almost forgot," he said quickly. He turned back towards Princess Lingere. "Hey!.. Umm... You!.. Uhh..." Rudolpho looked back at Sir Stephan. "What is her first name anyway?"

"I haven't the slightest idea." he replied.

"Well she's been here for days and no one has told me."

"I'm not the one marrying her."

"Oh never mind. You're starting to become truly useless."

"Thank you sir."

"Hey!" he shouted again. "Woman to whom I am betrothed." The Princess looked up with a scowl on her lips. "Yes that's right, you!" He waved her over. "Come into the hall so that I may bestow upon you an ornate yet practical going away present." Rudolpho turned and entered the castle, looking back to be sure that the Princess was indeed coming in.

The three of them sat at the great dining table which seemed grotesquely opulent with so few place settings. Rudolpho had just finished his substantial breakfast while Sir Stephan and the Princess sat and watched, having already eaten at a reasonable

hour. Rudolpho raised his pewter goblet and drank the last of his goats milk. It left a white mustache on his upper lip. Sir Stephan wiped it off gingerly.

"Don't get so familiar with me!" Rudolpho said menacingly. Sir Stephan tried not to smile. He knew the only reason the Prince objected was due to the princess' presence. He usually enjoyed being coddled.

"It is getting on now sir," he said abruptly. "Let us then take our leave."

"All in good time," Rudolpho said, pushing away his plate. "I too am eager to begin our quest. For a while I had thought my life would consist of nothing more than walking around this castle all day. That would not be very interesting."

"I can not argue with that sentiment, my liege."

"However, before we leave I need to deliver on that promise to the princess." Rudolpho rose from the table and went to retrieve a large box that was sitting at the far end of the table. It was decadently wrapped and large enough to hold any number of presents. The princess' eyes lit up when she saw it. After all, presents are one of the few parts of being a princess that are actually enjoyable.

"I've had my best men working on this for months. Zillanard the jeweler has made numerous contributions as has Austin the gold smith." Rudolpho handed the package to the princess with a wink. "And as I said, not only is it a beautifully hand-crafted piece, it is extremely practical as well."

She wasted no time and began untying the complex network of twine as Rudolpho took his seat. Sir Stephan leaned over and in a hushed voice spoke to Rudolpho.

"A fine idea, my lord. There can be no better way to win over your new bride."

"I'm sure," he replied. By then Princess Lingere had already opened the box due to years of practice. She reached into its dark mouth and pulled out her present. Slowly her eyes began to narrow as she realized what it was.

"Then again sir," Sir Stephan whispered. "Your choice of gifts

does leave something to be desired."

"What," said the princess lowly, "do you call this."

"Well," Rudolpho answered smoothly. "I'm not sure of its proper name but it's a device used for..."

"I know what it is used for," she said with a frost in her throat.

"I am sure his highness only meant it as a jest my lady," Sir Stephan said, trying to be diplomatic.

"What are you talking about?" Rudolpho asked. "I paid good money for that. Look at the diamonds all around the edge, and the heavy silver plating. Nothing is going to get through that, I can assure you."

"And suppose I needed to relieve myself?" the princess asked with obvious anger.

"I hadn't thought of that," Rudolpho replied. "Still, you seem like a clever girl..." The princess continued to stare at the heavy metal device in her hands. It looked like it would not even fit around her hips without a generous amount of butterfat being applied.

"Shall I help you put it on?" He got up again and reached for the princess.

"Over my dead body," said the princess calmly. She stomped past Rudolpho and threw the instrument of her confinement out of the open window and into the moat below. There it sank as she walked back with a satisfied look on her face. Rudolpho was inflamed.

"How dare you!" he shouted.

"Please be calm, your highness." Sir Stephan put his hand on Rudolpho's arm to settle him.

"How can I be calm," the prince roared. "This wench does not know her place!"

"I know my place," she said. "It only seems that you do not."

"Why you!" Rudolpho said, clenching his fist. Sir Stephan forced Rudolpho back into his chair. It was quite some time before he calmed down enough to ready for his journey.

Mama Pajama



Both men sat on their horses in the courtyard and waited. Rudolpho had insisted on taking more bedrolls because he had heard rumors of the particularly hard ground that was to be found abroad. Sir Stephan lightly held the reigns of his mare as they talked.

"This is not a good idea my lord," Sir Stephan said in concern.

"It is the only option," Rudolpho replied succinctly.

"I am sure there would be no... incidents." Sir Stephan said.

"I am not taking any chances," Rudolpho said as he motioned to the gatekeeper. "If she is not protected then she must come with us."

"As you wish, sir."

"And see if you can't find out her name somewhere along the way." Just then the princess entered the courtyard riding her brilliant white horse. She drew it up alongside the two men and smiled at them. The gate was now open and the quest was about to begin. Rudolpho looked at Sir Stephan. "Have we forgotten anything then? Or shall we just trot off into adventure?"

"Well, we can't exactly just trot," replied Sir Stephan. "I mean, try to have some reverence for the act of going off and doing great things."

That's the spirit, Sir Stephan. And here I was afraid you'd be an old stick in the mud."

"Even if it is just the pansy King of Yorendale," added Sir Stephan spitefully.

"Can we go now?" inquired a very impatient princess with an elusive first name.

"Let's get this over with," grumbled Sir Stephan.

But Rudolpho was not to be discouraged. "How fitting that my first great adventure starts with my favorite horse," he beamed proudly. "My father gave me Patagonia when I was but thirteen. I raised him from colthood into the fiery steed you see before you. No hardship is too terrible when I'm with my Patagonia." Rudolpho kicked his heels into the mighty beast and took off at a gallop.

"Adventure, Ho!" he shouted with spirit. His horse clattered onto the drawbridge and out into the dangerous world outside the castle. About halfway across the drawbridge, Rudolpho's favorite horse tripped up on a loose nail. The poor beast lost its footing and spilled over sideways into the moat. Rudolpho clung helplessly to the saddle as they plunged into the disgusting water below.

The foul liquids of the moat began to swirl and bubble as the moat monster came to investigate. Rudolpho screamed and thrashed his arms in terror as the water turned crimson with Patagonia's spurting gore.

Sir Stephan went into action at once.³ He leapt from his horse and quickly began pushing knights into the moat to distract the monster from Rudolpho. Finally, Rudolpho grabbed hold of a length of rope, and was pulled to safety by a very unattractive woman.

Sopping wet and quite disheartened, Rudolpho slumped to the ground and tried not to cry. Sir Stephan put a comforting arm around him and tried to pull him to his feet.

"Don't be weak," he whispered to Rudolpho. "Once we get to our first campsite, we can lament and allow our less respectable sides to show through. Right now, we must make a grand exit and begin the adventure."

"I don't think I want to go anymore," whined Rudolpho.

³ After all, there were ladies present.

Sir Stephan looked at the anxious crowd and shuddered. "Yes, you do," he replied.

"I don't feel half as well rested as I thought I did a few minutes ago. Perhaps a few months of sleep will help me to prepare for this journey."

"No," replied a very irritated Sir Stephan.

"Don't I get some mourning time for me to get over the death of my favorite horse?"

"Not unless you complete the mission with valor. Besides, lamenting is generally reserved for women or family members. Horses are considered to be expendable."

"When I'm king, all this is going to change!" cried Rudolpho in an angry tone. He shook his fist into the air for effect.

Sir Stephan tried to take advantage of his new burst of strength in an attempt to make this scene far less embarrassing than it was at the moment.

"The prince is angry, and full of verve for this great mission!" Sir Stephan shouted to the crowd. "Woe unto he who dared to fight with the pansies at Yorendale!" Sir Stephan led his horse over the rest of the drawbridge and then pushed Rudolpho toward the saddle.

"I don't want that horse."

By this point, Princess Lingere was quite miffed. She galloped over to the two men, scooped Rudolpho into her saddle and rode off into the distance. Which was just as well, as it was beginning to get dark.

Princess Lingere threw Rudolpho from her saddle and then slowed to a halt. The young prince tried to tidy himself up while she fed and watered her beautiful white horse.

They were deep in the woods, and things were looking quite spooky.

"Shouldn't we start a fire or something?" inquired Rudolpho.

"You might do well to get off your derriere and do something for yourself for once," snapped the Princess.

"You might be more polite."

"Or I might just leave you here and save Yorendale by myself."

Looking into her fiery, rebellious eyes in the moonlight, Rudolpho realized just how much he missed his friend Sir Stephan. This woman seemed more than willing to ditch him in this dark, cold forest.

"You're very pretty," he said syncophantically.

"Shut up and make that fire," said the blazing hot princess.

Franks and Beans



Sir Stephan was in quite a different part of the countryside, mainly because he and his men weren't half as daring or adventurous as Princess Lingere. They had all been on quests before, and felt no reason to hurry up about it. Sir Stephan chugged down a quart of mead and saluted the castle in the distance.

"Just think, tomorrow we probably won't even be able to see our fair castle anymore."

"Assuming we get to the woods by then," replied Frank, eating hungrily.

"Why don't you just spoil my mood, you lowly servant?" Sir Stephan was a bit irritable this evening. It was his job to make sure that Rudolpho survived his first strapping adventure and right now he had no idea where the man was. He hoped that Rudolpho would at least have the courtesy to make up a sordid tale about lascivious romance in the woods. Otherwise, this whole incident could reflect quite badly on him.

Frank seemed naively willing to vocalize his feelings on this issue. "Won't you get in trouble if Rudolpho gets killed?"

"Yes, actually, I will," grumbled Sir Stephan.

"It seems that it would be in your best interest to know where he is at all times," prodded the consistently annoying peasant.

"I'm not clear on how this concerns you, Frank."

"Well, I thought I might remind you that it is my duty as a knight errand boy to report back to the king if you shirk your

duties in any way. And, I think it would be considered quite a shirking if you were to allow Rudolpho to get killed or maimed during this adventure," Frank informed helpfully.

"I think I would probably poke you in the eye with a fork before I let you tell King Dominicus any such thing." Sir Stephan slapped Frank on the back as if this were a perfectly jovial conversation to be having on an adventure.

"Well said, sir." Frank frowned and considered keeping his thoughts to himself for a while.

Sir Stephan, as if to make his point even more clear, stabbed a cherry tomato with his fork and ate it. This conjured many disturbing images for the humble servants around him.

"You know, it's kind of nice to be behind Rudolpho and his blushing bride. This way, they can have their privacy and I can enjoy the feeling of power that comes with being the top-ranking person in the group," pondered Sir Stephan aloud.

"You do know where they are, though, don't you?" asked Frank right before he slapped himself on the forehead and felt extremely stupid for asking such a question.

Sir Stephan knew well the ways in which a person of high standing is meant to deal with their inferiors. He answered accordingly.

"Of course I know where they are, you miserable underling. How dare you even question my authority. I've known where they've been all the time."

"You know, I have a question about your syntax," said Frank, the surprisingly curious irritant. "You pronounce the word "been" with a long vowel instead of the colloquial usage, which sounds like the name 'Ben'. Is there a reason for this, or do you just have some strange obsession with legumes?"

Sir Stephan wasn't quite sure what this aggravating little man was talking about, but he was too tired to slap him, so he attempted to answer the question. "It is an inside joke between me and Rudolpho," he explained. "You see, the prince and I are very close, and share many things - "

"I bet you do," agreed another servant. Sir Stephan was

certainly not too tired to slap him.

He continued, "and this little humorism harkens back to an adventure I had when I was just a child. You see, my mother sent me out to sell our cow - "

"Why didn't your servant do it?" These words were followed by a loud slap.

"-but all I could get for it were a couple of beans, which I was told were magic."

"I've heard this story!" exclaimed an overenthusiastic servant. "Then you grew a magic beanstalk and stole golden things from a giant and you slew him and lived a much richer life."

This slap reverberated for miles. "Thank you to not interrupt me while I'm telling you a tale. I see you've heard a similar story and can see how I was fooled by such a conniving old woman."

"You mean they weren't magic?" said Frank as he prepared to be slapped.

"Quite right. They were just regular beans and I ended up looking quite foolish. Rudolpho thinks this is quite humorous, and although I've forgotten why I've just shared this with you little plebeians, I will remind you not to repeat this story to anyone else. I think I'll go to bed now."

And so the servants learned an amusing story about their master, which made their jobs seem so much more fulfilling. Everyone agreed that this was going to be a first-rate adventure, and spirits were high when the last of them drifted off to sleep. They were even moderately high the next morning when they awoke to learn that three servants had been eaten by wolves during the night.

The Smoking Ember



Rudolpho had a far less pleasant evening. He was not accustomed to dealing with people of equal rank, and was even less accustomed to losing arguments. He was also very cold. Rudolpho had done a rather poor job of building a fire. He had cheated by dumping lantern fluid onto bare ground, and while it created an impressive bonfire for about five minutes, it died quickly and did a poor job of keeping him warm during the night. No amount of whining could convince Princess Lingere to make the fire for him.

Originally, it looked as though she might offer to sleep beside him for warmth, but as his voice grew more shrill, those chances faded into cold, hard, dark night with no blankets. The woman kept all the blankets to herself.

"Yours fell into the moat," she explained. This was extremely unkind of her, but, being royalty, he knew it was her right. He would do the same thing to her if he could. While his jealousy was strong, it was not enough to warm him through the night. He considered gutting the princess' horse and sleeping inside it, but that seemed much too nauseating. Besides, it was still summer and there was no real need. The real problem was that he was not getting his own way and this princess wasn't helping one little bit. It was infuriating.

When day finally broke, Rudolpho did not feel properly rested, and this made him grumpy. Oh, how he longed for a servant to slap around.

Adding to his intemperate mood was the fact that the princess was still asleep. Here he was, cold and uncomfortable, and this woman had the nerve to sleep in. Prince Rudolpho could only take so much.

"Wake up!" he shouted. The princess did not stir. Rudolpho grabbed some small pebbles and began to throw them at the warm, cozy bundle of blankets that held Princess Lingere. This didn't work, so he began to search for something that looked less like a pebble and more like a rock. The best he could manage was a rock that looked suspiciously like a boulder. Rudolpho heaved the rock into his arms and hobbled over to the princess, suspending the rock above her head. His arms shook with effort as sweat poured down his forehead.

"Avalanche!" he shouted. The princess opened her eyes this time, and found herself face to face with a very large rock. She moved her head just in time to avoid a painful skull-crushing. The rock thumped to the ground and embedded itself in her pillow.

"What the hell was that all about?" asked a very angry princess.

"Um, that rock fell out of the sky and I caught it with my bare hands," Rudolpho paused for a second to figure out the most heroic detail he could add to this brilliant lie. "I had been holding it up above your head for hours so as not to disturb your sleep, but it was slipping from my grasp, so I had to wake you." The princess narrowed her eyes at him, but did not otherwise respond.

At this point, Rudolpho began to feel just a little bit guilty. He knew that if someone tried to drop a boulder on his head while he was sleeping, it would make him quite angry. Surely he would do more than simply narrow his eyes at the offending person. And what beautiful eyes they were, too. This was no ordinary woman he was traveling with, she was... extraordinary. Much better than ordinary.

Rudolpho's palms began to sweat as he began to recognize the spectacular nature of the fair princess before him. Suddenly, he knew that it was more than just prearranged marriage that had brought them together. He looked into Princess Lingere's emerald green eyes and wondered what her first name was. This was no

longer just an idle curiosity, but rather a burning desire to know this woman in every way.

Rudolpho puckered his lips and made odd fish faces as he tried to find his voice and ask this burning question. The princess kissed him on the cheek.

"Thanks for not dropping a rock on my head," she said. With that, she walked back to her campsite and began to pack for the day's journey.

Rudolpho's dazed fish face turned to a grin, and he wandered about the clearing in a blissful stupor. Then, his jaw dropped in terror as the thunderous roar of stampeding horses fell upon him.

These were the Norman Bastards, a menacing assemblage of hairy, hedonistic masculinity. There were thirty or more⁴ and they were out to perform a terrifying ritual. The horses surrounded their campsite, and their leader, Don Pelligro, advanced firmly. Don Pelligro wore a mask made of black iron, and it made the Bastard look both evil and foreboding. He surveyed the situation, and then pointed to his most trusted companion.

"Sir Entenmann, my best man, commandeering the woman," quoth he. The Bastard known as Sir Entenmann rode forward to apprehend the princess. Rudolpho stepped forward to impede his progress.

"I don't know what you Norman Bastards are thinking, but I am Rudolpho and that is my woman," he said with unprecedented bravery.

Sir Entenmann burned bright red with fury and shook his fist in the air. "You will crumble before me!" he cried.

The Bastards laughed with condescending mirth and looked down upon Rudolpho with glee. This was their mistake. Rudolpho unsheathed his sword and sliced the brave warrior across the midsection. Sir Entenmann clutched his stomach and moaned as a sick, raspberry-like filling flowed between his fingers. Rudolpho lifted his sword once more and beheaded Sir Entenmann with one fell swoop. The head, covered in dirt and bloody on one

⁴ Although Rudolpho would later swear there were at least five hundred.

side, resembled a hideous pastry that no one in their right mind would ever want to eat. Before anyone could react, Rudolpho managed to kick it up at Don Pelligro, whacking him soundly on the helmet. Blood smeared along the black mask, leaving a gruesome stain.

Don Pelligro was not amused. He would have been content to make off with the woman and have his way with her, but now things were not so simple. This Rudolpho obviously recognized them as Norman Bastards (as anyone would, they were quite notorious), but he did not seem to understand his situation. Don Pelligro grinned evilly and began to explain.

"You that calls yourself Rudolpho, you have slain by best man."

"Indeed I have, you unwashed ruffian," spoke Rudolpho.

Don Pelligro continued. "This was a very bad thing for you to do. A best man is traditional at wedding ceremonies, and one's murder is not to be overlooked."

"I don't care," responded Rudolpho.

"Ordinarily, this might be enough to stop my amorous courtship of the woman you think to be your own, but today I have come prepared. All of these men are fully capable of filling in for Sir Entenmann, and so my wedding will proceed unimpeded."

"What are you talking about?"

"I claim this woman as my own. She will be my wife and there is nothing you can do to stop me. Hand her over, and we will let you live. Obstruct this sacred ceremony again, and you will pay dearly." Don Pelligro's face was shielded by the black mask, but it was a pretty safe bet that he was wearing a big suave smile as he said these words.

Rudolpho looked to his fair wife-to-be; she was standing defiantly beside her shimmering white horse, waiting for his response. Rudolpho glanced about nervously. It seemed that it had come time for him to do something truly heroic.

Sir Stephan looked crossways at the morning sun while carefully shielding his eyes from its powerful glare. He judged it

to be around half past eight. Surveying the campsite he observed his men collecting their things and putting out the cooking fires. They were taking their time as usual. Sir Stephan adjusted his chainmail tunic and walked up to Frank.

"A pleasant morning to you Sir Francis," he said with his hands resting on his hips.

Frank eyed the knight suspiciously. "What do you mean?," he asked.

"Pardon me?" Sir Stephan smiled politely.

"What do you mean, a pleasant morning to you Sir Francis, since when have you given a damn how my early hours went?"

Sir Stephan shrugged. "Very well then," he said grabbing Frank by the neck. "We'll do it your way." Frank's eyes bulged from their sockets as Sir Stephan tightened his grip. "I want this entire troupe ready to move out in five minutes. Do you understand?" By now he had lifted the knight a few inches off the ground and was slowly swinging him from side to side.

"Gyyesss Srrrr," Frank managed to get out. Milky white saliva poured over his chin.

"Good," Sir Stephan said setting him down. "I shall mount my horse immediately. Anyone not ready by the appointed time will be struck down and divided into rations." Frank took a deep breath and swallowed hard. Sir Stephan went to his horse and mounted her. As he drove her to the edge of the campsite he could not help feeling slightly uneasy. He thought to himself, "The quicker we find Rudolpho the better it will be for my nerves."

Short Swords and Cleavage



Rudolpho assumed an offensive stance and bared his gleaming white teeth in something between a smile and a sneer.

"I accept whatever puny challenge you choose to hurl at me," he boldly proclaimed. "Who then, shall be the next to feel the wrath of my sword?" Very few hands went up in response. None in fact. These Normans may have been Bastards but they knew an exceptional fighter when they saw one. Don Pelligro quickly attempted to salvage his tribe's honor.

"That is not how it is done," he stammered. "I must appoint a new best man."

"Well be quick about it," Rudolpho said harshly. "My sword is thirsty today."

Don Pelligro looked at his fellow Normans and sized them up according to swordsmanship and, more importantly, expendability.

"I choose..." He pointed at a huge, well-armored man on a gigantic horse. "Mountellus!" The Normans began applauding wildly as Mountellus leapt off his horse and in only a few enormous strides came face to face with Rudolpho. They seemed to be applauding Don Pelligro's good judgment. However, Princess Lingere couldn't help thinking they were more pleased with not being chosen themselves.

"Dispose of this nuisance," Don Pelligro commanded. "Then we shall take his woman and be off."

Mountellus grunted a crude affirmative and raised his giant stone mace high above his head. He arched his back inwards as he

let the weapon hang behind him and readied a crushing blow. Mountellus let out a earth-shaking sound as he started his swing.

"GGGGRRRRRRRAAAA...choichk!" Rudolpho had thrust upward and drove his sword right into Mountellus' mouth and straight on through the back of his head. He slid the weapon back and forth a few times like he had a pig on spit just for gruesome effect. He removed his sword and let the Norman's limp body fall backwards to the ground. Rudolpho looked at Don Pelligro and frowned.

"I'm just the slightest bit confused with this whole best man situation. Am I not correct in thinking the best man should be the strongest amongst your tribe?"

"Not necessarily!" Don Pelligro countered angrily. "I could be saving my strongest man for last."

"That would seem to be a faulty strategy on your part," Rudolpho said, unconvinced. "However, it is your decision and I'll leave you to it. Just thought I'd try to be helpful." Rudolpho looked back at the Princess and winked. He felt very smooth. The princess, as usual, was not impressed.

Don Pelligro scanned his men once again for a likely warrior. He chose Sir Mouscles. The applause this time was a little less enthusiastic as the well shaped knight dismounted from his horse. Sir Mouscles' skills were held in high regard, but then again so were Mountellus' and currently Mountellus was being looked over by a number of parasitic insects looking to find a suitable nursery for their maggotty offspring.

"I see that speed is your advantage," Don Pelligro said condescendingly. "That was Mountellus' weakness." He closed his fist in an obvious power gesture. "Now you shall meet your superior."

Sir Mouscles removed two short swords from their hidden sheaths and pointed them at Rudolpho. He twirled and twisted them in the air with the agility of a circus performer. After a few seconds of prodigious handling he crossed them in front of him in a defensive manner.

"A more worthless fighting style I have never seen," Rudolpho

said calmly as he swung his broad sword down at Sir Mouscles. Its blade snapped the two swords from their handles and continued to plunge through Sir Mouscles' body from shoulder to hip. His lifeless form slumped to the ground in two distinct sections. And so it went for the next hour. Gargalous, Debauchio, Norweinhar... all fell before Rudolpho's feet. The prince periodically looked back at the princess to see how he was doing but only received impatient stares and disinterested yawns. The slaughter continued until only two Normans remained. Rudolpho pulled his sword from his latest victory and playfully swung it low as though he was cutting the grass.

"I guess this must be your best man then," Rudolpho said trying not to smile. By now Don Pelligro was sitting on the ground holding his head in his hands. He looked up wearily.

"Let's just get this over with." Don Pelligro watched as his final soldier dismounted and prepared for battle. He didn't bother to proclaim him as the new best man. He'd be dead in a few seconds anyway. The frail looking knight walked to Rudolpho and cowered.

"I prefer to know my opponent's name," Rudolpho said.

"I am Sir Wecklang," the knight said as roughly as he could manage. "Have at thee." He began struggling to unlatch his morning star from his belt. Rudolpho pushed him over and walked past towards Don Pelligro.

"It seems your grand ambitions have brought you to an impasse." He put his sword away and began to taunt the beaten Norman. "I guess there will be no songs written about the great and powerful Don Pelligro, will there?" He got no response. "I have dispatched all but your weakest man and now I ask you, what good has come of it?" Don Pelligro looked up with a frown.

"Well then," Rudolpho said. "Would you like to have a go at it?" He pulled his sword out once more.

"Stay your weapon," Don Pelligro stuttered. "Only a best man can fight this battle. It is tradition."

"Ha!" laughed Rudolpho. "You Normans and your moronic traditions. Did it ever cross your mind to have more than one of

your soldiers attack me at once?" Don Pelligro thought about this for a while and then dropped his head again. "Yes," said Rudolpho. "I knew that you Normans had no concept of strategic warfare."

Just then Sir Wecklang brought Sir Entenmann's severed head down on Rudolpho's skull. It produced a loud thump and he fell to the ground unconscious.

"Idiot," sighed Princess Lingere as she shook her head.

"Excellent," Don Pelligro said to Sir Wecklang. He rose from where he was sitting. "Who would have thought you'd turn out to truly be my best man?"

"Not I, sir," he replied. Suddenly he felt a piercing pain in his forehead. It didn't last long however, for soon all neural activity ceased in his cranial cavity.

Don Pelligro watched in disbelief as he fell to the ground, revealing the lovely Princess standing behind him. She quickly bent down and tried to retrieve the dagger she had just driven through the back of Sir Wecklang's head. It was immovable. Don Pelligro suddenly grasped the situation and drew his own sword. He pointed it sharply at Princess Lingere. She stepped back from the dead knight and wiped the blood from her hands. She smiled.

"Well then," she said. "Shall we call it a draw?"

KYLE HERRMAN owns a Volkswagen bug and is working on a number of creative projects which are amusing to himself and maybe John. He is the victim of some very primitive cosmetic dental practices, which have left him with a nice straight smile, but few teeth. He is a very slow eater.

JOHN WHITE is a lucid dreamer with very bad karma. He is swamped with many problems involving computers, transportation, credit cards, feet and hair. He and Kyle are co-founders of the Mutual Admiration Society.