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opening extract from

Sir Gadabout

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published by

Dolphin

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The Court of King Arthur

A long, long time ago, even before television was invented, there lived a knight called Sir Gadabout. This was in the days of the famous King Arthur and his Round Table. It was an exciting and mysterious time to live in, especially for a knight.

In a misty and remote corner of England stood the castle called Camelot, and there King Arthur gathered the best knights in the land to sit at the Round Table. These knights had to be prepared to go out at a moment's notice and fight villains, dragons, people who drop litter – and generally keep the peace.

If you could travel in time and visit Camelot, you would find the gallant King Arthur, tall and brave, much loved and respected. By his side would be the Queen – Guinivere, beautiful, graceful, and a dab hand at woodwork. Around them you would find all the great knights, whose names might seem odd to us now: Sir Lancelot, Sir Gawain, Sir Dorothy

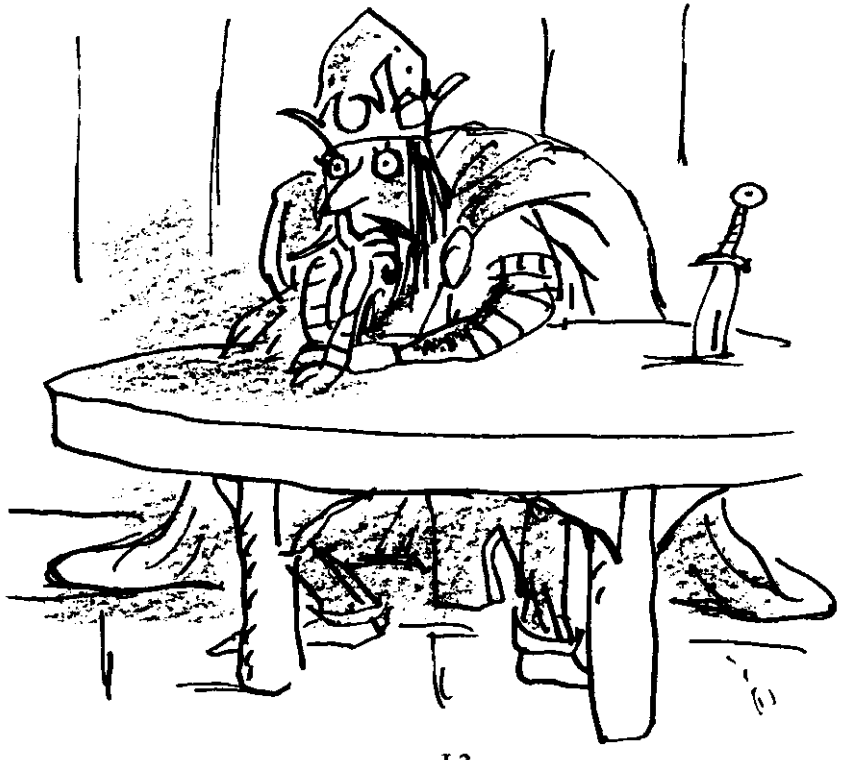
(his name seemed odd even then) and Sir Gadabout.

Now, although Sir Gadabout sat at the Round Table with the best of them, he wasn't quite one of the best knights in the land. It has to be said that he was indubitably the Worst Knight in the *World*. In fact, the March edition of the magazine *Knights Illustrated* voted him the "knight most likely to chop his own foot off in a fight".



His armour was held together purely by rust – and anyway, he'd grown out of it by the time he was eleven. His spear was bent and only good for throwing round corners, and his sword was broken in five places and fixed with lots of sticky tape; it wobbled alarmingly in a stiff breeze. His horse, Pegasus, was knock-kneed and about ninety years-old.

King Arthur felt sorry for Sir Gadabout, who was hard-working and polite. That was



probably why the King allowed him to join the otherwise glorious company of the Round Table.

To be honest Sir Gadabout had not performed as many heroic deeds as the other knights. He'd hardly performed any, unless you count the time when he accompanied the fearsome Sir Bors de Ganis on a mission to rescue the fair maid Fiona from the Isles of Iona. Then he got lost in the eerie mists and ended up in Tipton, some three hundred miles from where Sir Bors was having to get on with the rescue all alone.

Sir Gadabout did once get a dear old lady's cat down from a tree. It wasn't stuck, as it happened (but *he* wasn't to know that) and it only took Sir Tristram three hours to get Sir Gadabout back down again . . .

One day at Camelot a tournament was announced. This is where knights gallop towards each other on horseback from opposite ends of a field and try to knock each other off their horses with long spears. People loved to watch jousting, as it was called, and it was a chance for the knights to show how fearless they were.

A field was prepared outside Camelot castle for the great event. Tents were put up, sand-



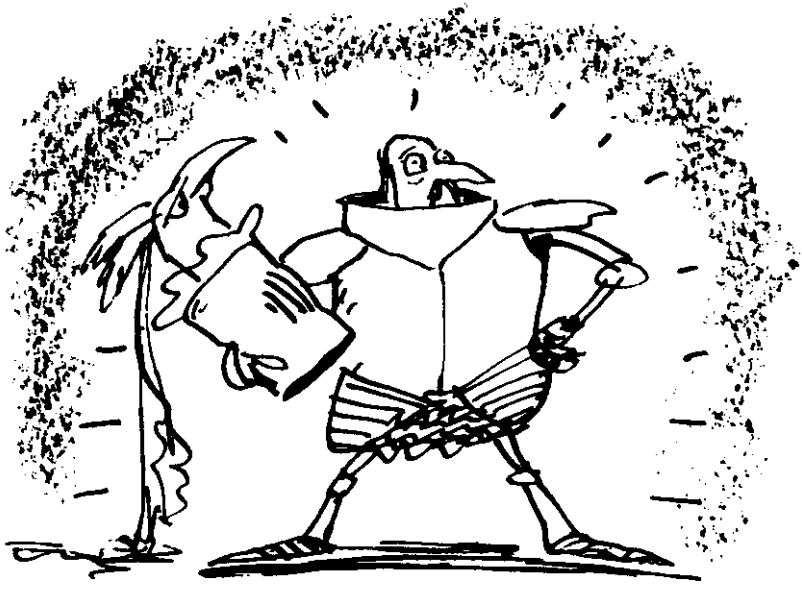
wiches and those little sausages on sticks were laid on. A row of seats was provided for the King and his important guests. People came from miles around, and soon a large crowd had gathered. It was rather like a football match, with people supporting their favourite sides and cheering or booing. It would certainly have been on "Match of the Day" if television had been invented – but as I've mentioned already, it hadn't.

King Arthur eventually rose from his seat and announced that it was time for the tournament to begin. The crowd grew more excited

than ever, and soon all you could hear was a chorus of "Rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb".

Suddenly a voice cried out: "Look! here comes Sir Lancelot!"

Sure enough, he entered the arena on his fiery warhorse and the "rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb," grew awesomely loud. Sir Lancelot was wearing splendidly polished silver armour that shone and glinted in the sun. Beneath his armour he had curly blond hair and an impressive suntan. He sat up straight in the saddle (even famous knights had to sit up straight) with his squire (a kind of personal servant) trotting beside his horse. The squire



carried Sir Lancelot's spears. It was a glorious sight.

Then came Sir Gadabout – for he was to be Sir Lancelot's opponent.

Sir Gadabout was not in his usual rusty armour, and on the outside he actually looked a fine figure of a fighting man. But on the inside it was a different story.

He had borrowed his brother's armour for this special occasion. The trouble was that Sir Gadabout was considerably smaller than his brother, who was called Sir Felix le Flab. There was so much room inside the suit of armour that when Sir Gadabout got an itch on his knee (which was quite often for some reason) he was easily able to reach down inside and scratch it.

His arms didn't even come near to the end of his armour's arms, and his head barely came half-way up the helmet. The suit was so roomy that he even had his cheese sandwiches (which he was saving till lunch-time) tucked inside the breastplate – the bit that goes round the body like a metal coat. However, it soon became hot inside the armour, and after a short time the cheese began to smell rather strongly.

Trotting proudly alongside Sir Gadabout was Herbert, his loyal squire. He was carrying

his master's spears, although Sir Gadabout only had two: the bent one and the one belonging to Sir Felix le Flab which was a bit greasy and tended to slide backwards through his hand rather than knock the opponent off.

Herbert had been with Sir Gadabout for many years and was absolutely devoted to his master. He was a short and stocky young man with thick black hair which came to a fringe almost covering his eyes, rather like an old English sheep-dog. He wasn't very clever, but he had a mighty punch. Few people dared laugh at Sir Gadabout when Herbert was nearby.



The two knights came to a halt at opposite ends of the grassy arena. The squires gave them each a spear, and the crowd chattered "Rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb" expectantly. The two horses pawed the ground impatiently, awaiting the charge.

Then King Arthur rose, produced a red silk handkerchief from his pocket, and waved it in the air. The crowd fell silent, holding its breath in anticipation . . .

King Arthur blew his nose on the red silk handkerchief with a loud "PAAARP" and then started to chat to Guinivere about what was for dinner. The crowd had to start breathing again, since they were beginning to turn blue in the face. Someone nudged King Arthur to remind him that he was supposed to be starting the tournament.

"What? Oh, yes!" He was about to hold up the silk handkerchief again, but just in time he remembered what he'd done with it. He hastily stuffed it into his pocket.

He took a deep breath: "Ladies and gentlemen!"

The crowd held its breath once more. The horses snorted and the knights steeled themselves.

"Let the joust commence!"