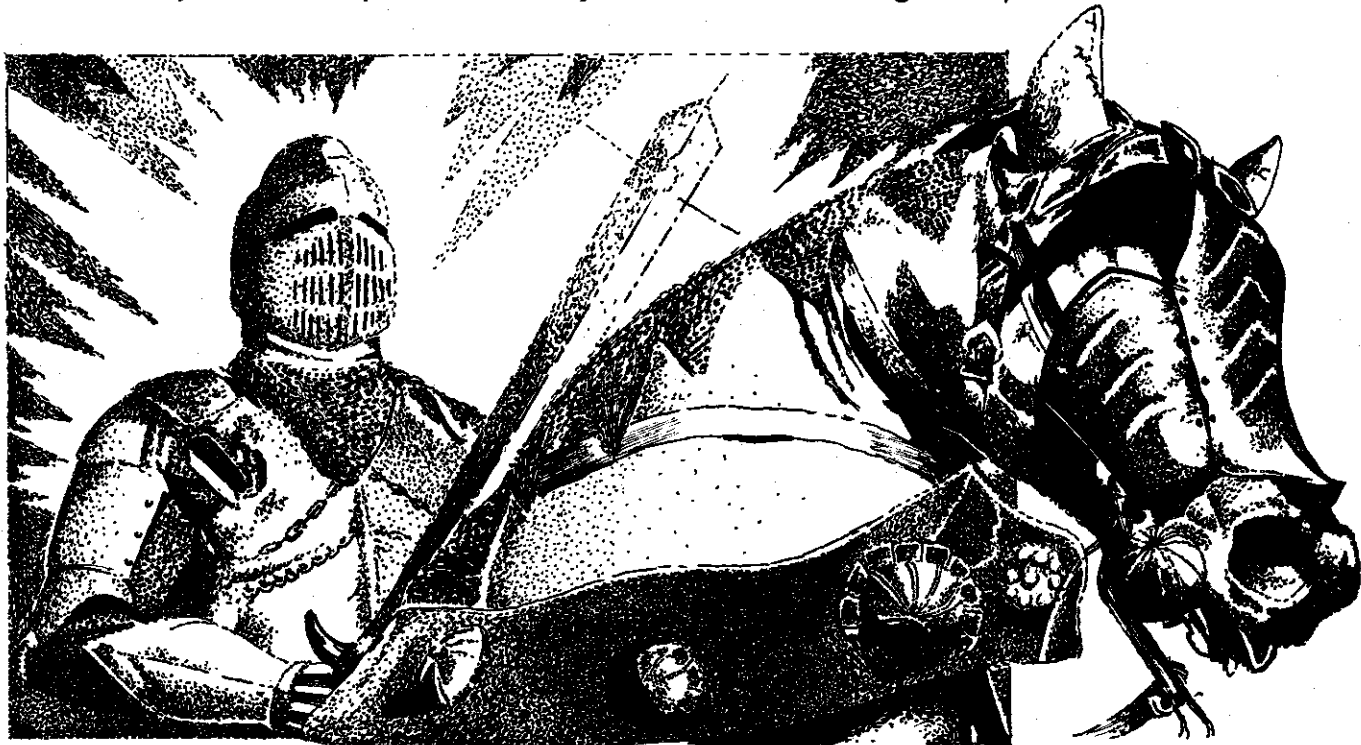


*From The Middle Ages by R. Stark*  
**Becoming a Knight**

A knight was required to furnish his own equipment: a war horse, his armor, a shield, a lance, and a sword. He was also expected to provide a retinue of soldiers to accompany him in battle. All of this was extremely expensive! Because the knight had to pay for all of this from the profits from his estates, he usually came from a wealthy family.

It took many years of training to become a knight. If a boy was expected to become a knight, he would probably be sent to live with a noble family—often his father's lord—when he was about seven years old. There he would serve as a **page**, along with other young boys. Not only would he run errands and act as a servant, but he would also learn good manners and social skills and be taught to read and to write. The physical activities enjoyed by him and the other pages were intended to strengthen and toughen them in order to help prepare them for knighthood.

When the boy reached about thirteen or fourteen, he was made a **squire**, and his training intensified. He spent more and more time riding and caring for the horses, studying the arts of hunting and falconry, and handling weapons. Archery was an important activity. Another was tilting at a quintain.

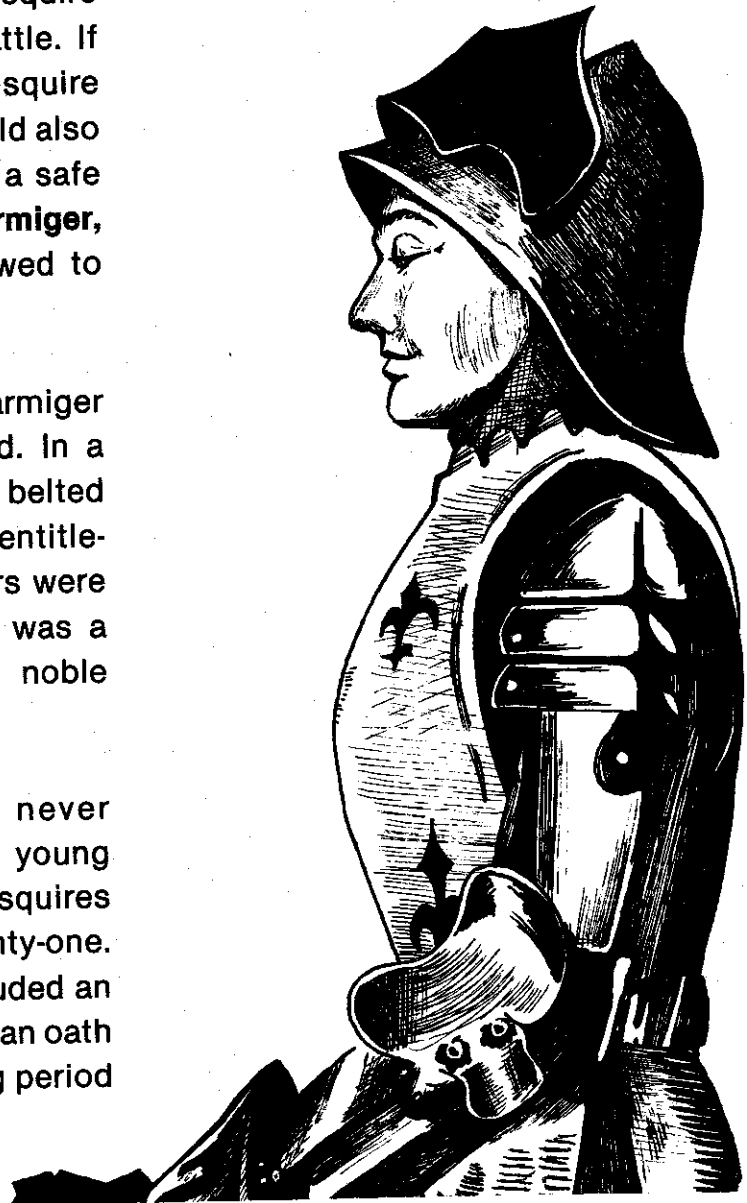


Because the lance was the basic weapon of the mounted soldier, it was crucial that the squire become skilled in the use of that weapon. The quintain was a device created for that purpose. It was a post that had two revolving arms. With his lance braced against his side, the squire rode at the quintain and attempted to hit it squarely. If his aim was less than perfect, the target would swing around and—unless he was very quick at dodging it—would hit him squarely!

In time the squire would be given more specific tasks. He might be assigned to serving at the table; he might become a squire of the stables; or he might become a body squire, or personal attendant. The body squire would follow his master into battle. If his master were unhorsed, the squire would help him re-mount. He could also help rescue him and get him to a safe spot. Until he was made an **armiger**, however, a squire was not allowed to fight in a battle.

Although still a squire, an armiger represented entry into manhood. In a simple ceremony, a sword was belted on the squire, symbolizing his entitlement to partake in combat. Spurs were fastened to his heels. Now he was a warrior and a member of the noble class.

Although some squires never became knights, many of the young men who trained as pages and squires were knighted at about age twenty-one. A special ceremony, which included an overnight vigil, a ritual bath, and an oath of loyalty, was held. The training period was over!



Name \_\_\_\_\_

# The Many Roles of a Knight

**1. A knight was a nobleman, born or accepted into a noble class. How was Beowulf a noble?**

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**2. A knight was a vassal, who promised to serve a lord or king. Whom did Beowulf serve?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. A knight was a professional warrior. His whole life was dedicated to fighting. How did Beowulf show that he was a professional fighter?**

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**4. A knight was also a lord. He gave parts of the land he had received from his lord to his vassals, who promised in turn to serve the knight. In the story, who are Beowulf's vassals?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**KNIGHT THOUGHTS:** In your opinion, what was the best part of being a knight?

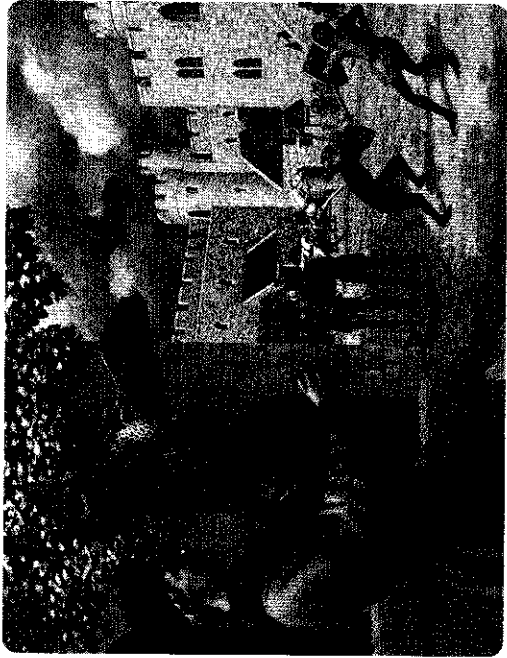
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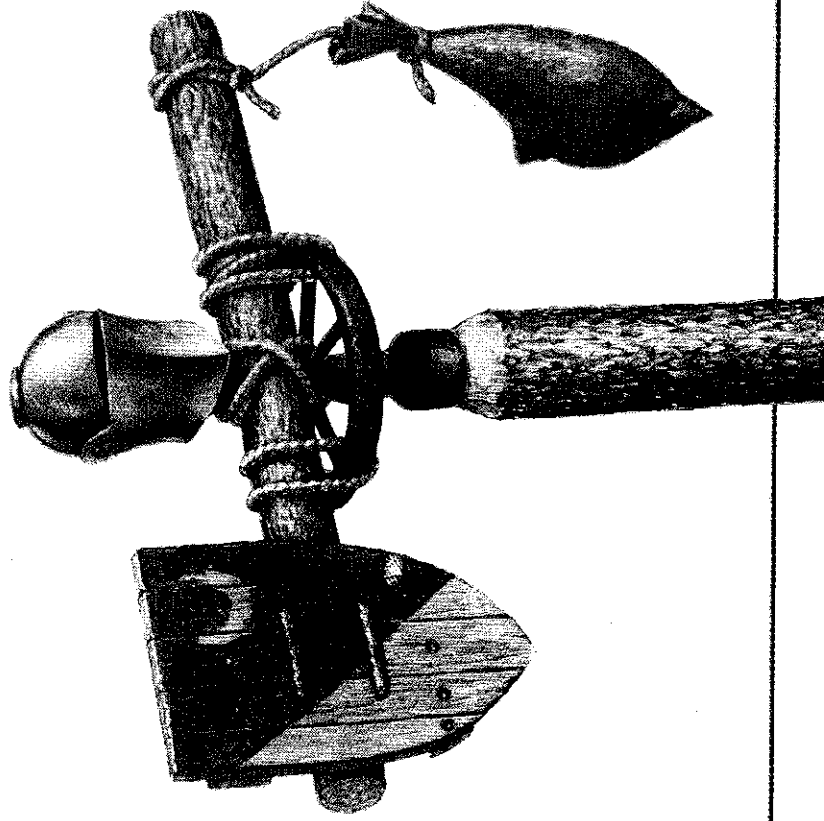
# A Knight's Training

Boys from wealthy families began training to be knights when they were about seven years old. They started as pages, learning to ride horses, put on armour and use a sword. When they reached about 14 years old, each page became a squire (an apprentice) to a particular knight.

The hardest part of a squire's training was jousting against a quintain – a dummy knight on a pole. The squire had to hit the quintain right in the middle to make it fall over. If he missed, the dummy spun round and hit him on the back with a bag of sand.



*Squires learnt how to hunt small animals using specially trained birds called falcons.*



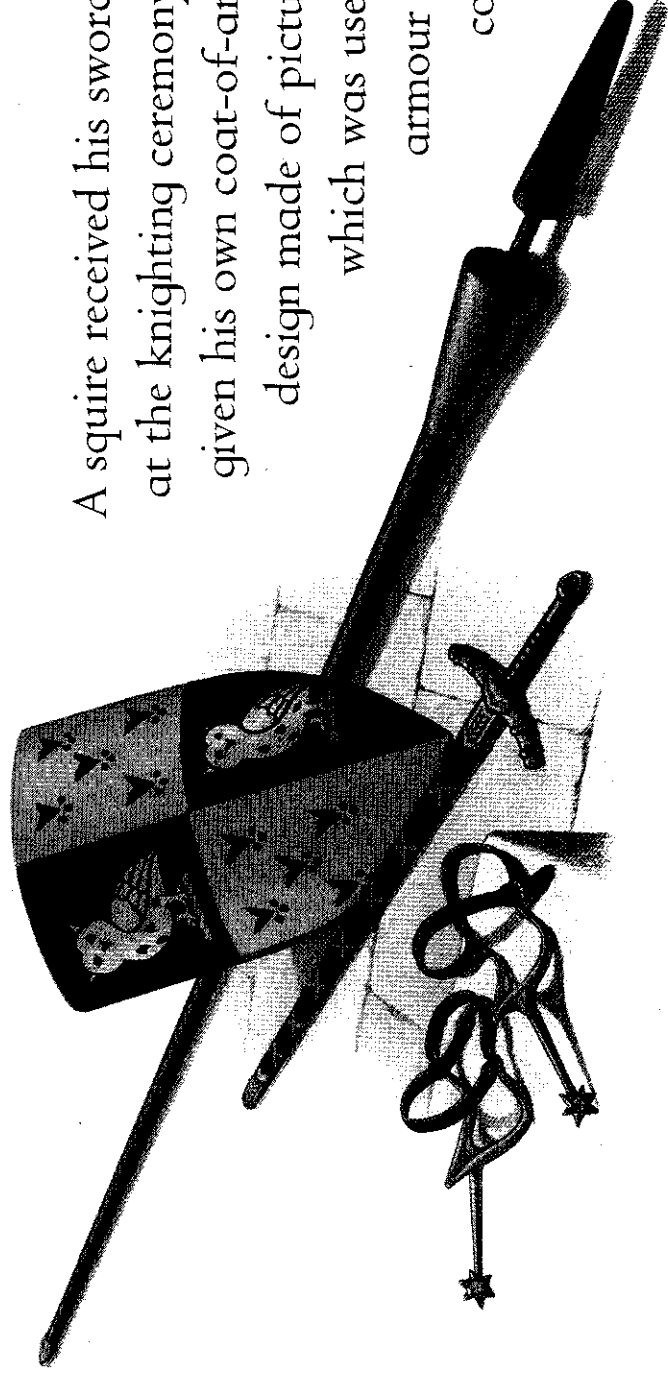
# The Knighting Ceremony

If a squire completed his training successfully (not all squires did), he was ready to be 'dubbed' a knight. Knighthood was usually granted at a castle ceremony by a lord touching a squire on the shoulder with a sword. If a squire showed outstanding bravery in battle, he could also be knighted immediately on the battlefield.

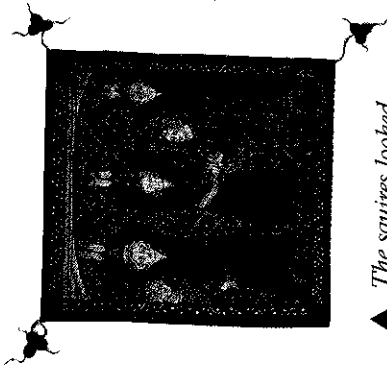


*When a squire was knighted, he was given the title 'Sir' in front of his name.*

A squire received his sword, lance and spurs at the knighting ceremony. He was also given his own coat-of-arms (a special design made of pictures and symbols), which was used on his shield and armour so that everyone could recognise him.



# What was a knight?



▲ *The squires looked after their knights. They helped them dress and cared for their weapons and horses.*

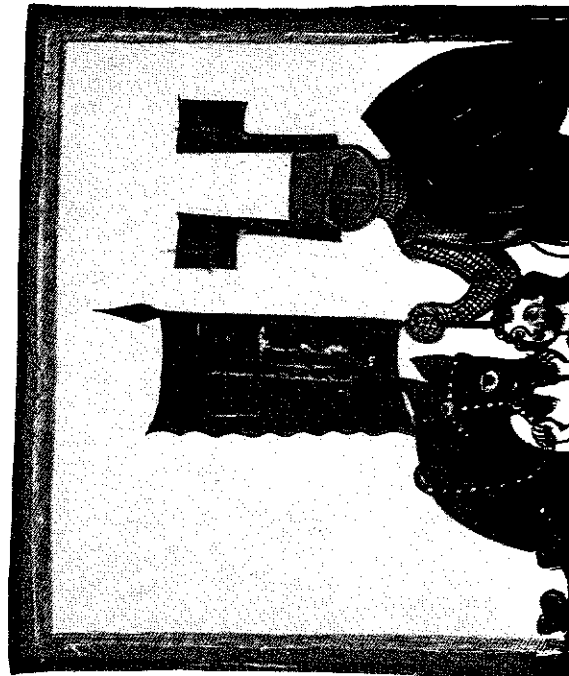
A knight was a well-armed mounted soldier. Becoming one took bravery and devotion – knights were keen to fight in wars to prove themselves.

**T**he first knights appeared in Europe in the eighth century when a new invention, the stirrup, arrived from the Orient. This device was a foot support which allowed soldiers to remain in the saddle while charging

down their enemy and hitting them with force. It changed the whole nature of warfare, and as a result, medieval knights became the most important soldiers in an army. With their armor, they were the equivalent of tanks today.

As kings relied on their nobles' support to rule their lands, so the lords expected their knights to be loyal to them and support them in battle. Knights were rewarded with land or money.

**The price of knighthood**  
Knights were not as rich and powerful as the nobles, but even so,



◀ *A knight dressed for battle with a sword, shield, helmet, and coat of mail. His shield and banner carry his coat of arms. His squire leads his horse, which is also dressed in the knight's coat of arms.*

only the wealthy could afford to be knights. They wore expensive armor and rode large, expensive horses, and they needed squires and servants who had to be housed. Some poor knights did exist, however. If a family fell on hard times, the knight might become a mercenary (a soldier paid to fight in a foreign country) or join a knight's retinue (paid staff).

Some knights were so poor that they had to serve to arm, only great knights could afford to be the king himself. Some knights were poor enough to be mercenaries.

**KNIGHT**

and fighting  
they became  
and leaders  
knights  
squires, and  
squires

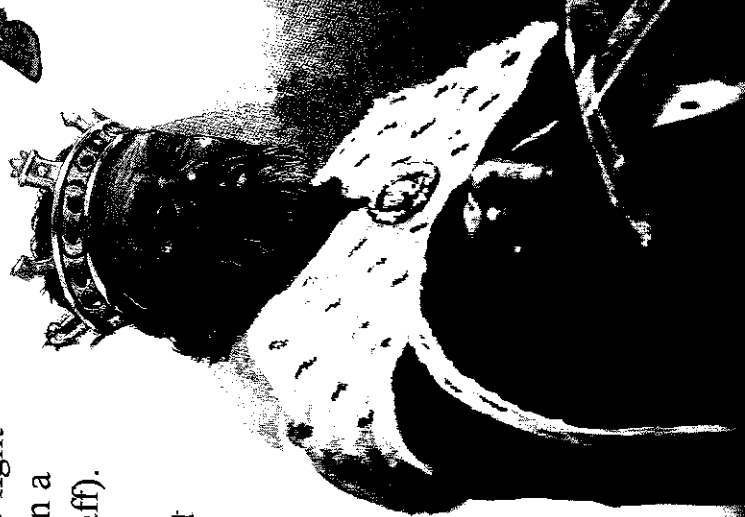
**WARRIOR MONKS**

In the 12th century, during the Crusades, a group of knights was formed to protect Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land. They took monastic vows and became known as the Knights Templar, after their headquarters near the Temple in Jerusalem. At about the same time, other monks who had been looking after the sick were formed into a fighting order known as the Knights Hospitaller. These warrior monks were unquestionably brave in battle and were the mainstays of the Crusader armies.

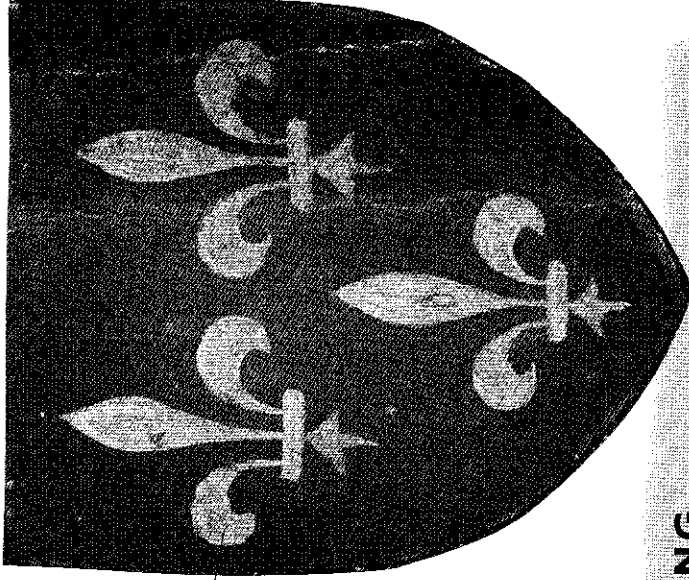
◀ The seal of the Knights Templar showed two knights mounted on the same horse to indicate their original poverty.



Squire being made a knight



◀ Chivalry emphasized bravery, and knights were supposed to be fearless in combat. They were also – according to the ideal – to be pious, pure of heart, loyal, and generous. Chivalry also had rules governing the compassionate treatment of defeated enemies.



Fleur de lys

symbolized his knightly values and codes of behavior.

### The codes of chivalry

From about 1150, one of the most important of these codes of

conduct was “chivalry,” named

after the French word *chevalier*

(knight). At first it meant just the skilled horsemanship of an

armored warrior, but

it soon became a

way of life based

on “fair play”

and

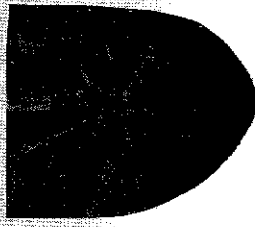
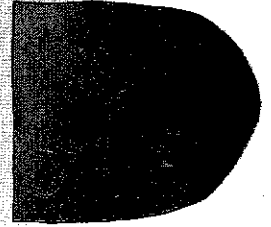
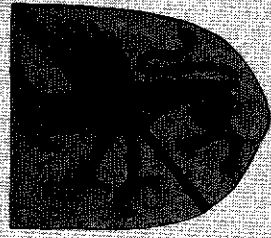


Christian values. Chivalry stressed bravery, protecting the weak, and, especially, gracious manners toward women, who were admired from afar.

### READING THE SHIELD

Some identifying designs on shields, such as the golden fleur-de-lis (the badge of royal France), were simple. Others were more elaborate. Designs on coats of arms used animals, birds, flowers, castles, and weapons.

The coats of arms here are from a list made in medieval times of King Edward III of England's entourage (attendants).



Chivalric stories Songs, poems, and tales of chivalry were written

echoing this way of life. Entertainers

called troubadours traveled from castle

to castle singing of

knightly valor and

good deeds. But

chivalry was an

ideal which few

knights lived up to.

In fact, many of

them were cruel

and bloodthirsty.