

## **JESTER-KNIGHT** by Joey Madia

**Plot Synopsis:** Alde, the main character in JESTER-KNIGHT is from jester stock. His father, Elde, is the jester to King Dylwyn. Because of his father's position, Alde is raised beside the King's daughter, Anastasia, and given many privileges.

The story begins when Alde (a sharp-witted, charming 14 year old given to pranksterism) and his best friend Ralin, a page, take a day off from their studies to go hunting in the forest, following the latest and most serious of Alde's "pranks." As they hunt, Alde hears a cry for help. An Elven boy has been trapped in quicksand. Ralin, who is nearing his review for the squirehood, decides not to stay and help, thinking he will be penalized if he returns to the castle after dark. Alde, however, follows his heart and rescues the boy. When he returns to the castle he is lauded for his good deed. The Elf is the son of the High Priestess of the Elves; his act has strengthened the Alliance between the races.

Because of his perceived cowardice, Ralin is dismissed and Alde is given the chance to study for the knighthood as his replacement. Struggling with guilt and not wishing to forsake his lineage he agrees, provided he can continue his jester training. His intelligence and agility serve him well and he becomes one of the top squires, incurring the jealousy of his peers, especially Garamin, son of one of the five barons of Galleneye. The King realizes that Alde is being persecuted and decides to hold a tournament for the senior squires. The victor will forego his last year of training and be knighted.

Alde acquits himself well during the competition and faces Garamin in the final event—a three-touch duel for the knighthood. Garamin scores two quick touches, injuring Alde's knee. Alde uses his combined training to see him through and scores three unanswered touches to win. He gains the knighthood and a lifelong enemy in Garamin.

In tribute to his becoming the first Jester-Knight, the King gives Alde the new name of Aldemere, for he is "more than he once was." Alde's success serves as catalyst for the romantic feelings between he and Anastasia. Her love does not prevent the King from sending Aldemere on a dangerous journey to the mountains to defend the borders from marauders. Although successful, the mission costs many lives and Aldemere's innocence. He sees firsthand the carnage of war and political unrest that has permeated the kingdom, a result of the greed of the barons who wish to wrest control from the king.

Following Aldemere's return, there is news of a two-headed dragon in the northern barony. Aldemere is sent north, much to the dismay of Anastasia and his parents. The dragon tests his mental and physical resourcefulness to their max, but Aldemere ultimately prevails. While recuperating from his wounds, including a vision-filled bout with fever, in the dragon's cave, he discovers ancient pictographs on the walls. Most important there is a figure of a dragon formed from amber imbedded in the cave wall.

During his absence, the political situation in Galleneye has continued to deteriorate. Garamin has become de facto head of the Eastern Barony, and Ralin, whose father has been murdered, has declared himself Baron General. Trade meetings have been suspended and personal armies, which had been outlawed by the King, flourish. Realizing that a confrontation is unavoidable, Dylwyn sets out with his army. With the aid of the Elves, whose borders have been threatened, Dylwyn devises a two-pronged attack on Filgrith and Garamin. Alde is left in charge of the castle's defenses, including a small number of soldiers.

Although the King assumes Ralin will place his loyalty with the rebels, Aldemere decides to visit his old friend and try to rekindle the good in him. He finds Ralin cold and bitter, with no love for either side of the conflict. He still bears a deep wound from his dismissal from service. He also believes that it was Garamin or Filgrith who murdered his father after the Baron refused to join them. Aldemere convinces Ralin that the best thing for his people is to defeat the rebels. As a Baron, it is his duty to make certain the kingdom prevails, despite his bitterness. Ralin gives most of his army to Aldemere and rides with a small force to Filgrith's stronghold, where he takes the Baron hostage and rides for the castle, which he discovers is under surprise attack.

Meanwhile, the king and his Captainguard, Laurel, are defeating what they believe to be Garamin's forces. They soon discover that the forces are a diversion while Garamin attacks the sparsely protected castle. Aldemere, who has also figured out the ruse, returns to the castle before the gates are breached and engages Garamin's surprised army from the rear. Once Laurel's men arrive, the tide begins to turn against the rebels, though Garamin refuses to give up. Despite Filgrith's capture and the destruction of his battering rams, Garamin continues his attack, fatally wounding Laurel and killing Filgrith. With the help of Kal-Gadras, the boy who Aldemere had saved and now a trusted friend, Aldemere kills Garamin, just before the rebel is able to get to the King.

Although the rebellion is over, new terror plagues the land in the form of an unrelenting wind and early snows. Darkness prevails day and night. The religious advisors have no answers and the King is faced with the destruction of the lands and the starvation of his people. Once again he calls on Aldemere, who is now Captainguard, to save them. Using the drawings from the dragon's cave as a guide, Aldemere enlists the aid of Kal-Gadras to help him find the only one who can end the darkness—the Ambir Dragon.

Travelling through dense snows and desert, Aldemere and Kal-Gadras reach the coast, where they buy a boat with fake gold. The winds hamper them but they make it at last to the Isle of the Nine Winds, after a series of adventures on three other islands, including a run-in with a hungry dragon. After days of waiting they meet the Ambir Dragon, who explains to them that it is the darkness in their races that is creating the weather that threatens their world. The Humans and Elves will not be saved until they can come to terms with their darker selves. He further explains that Aldemere and Kal-Gadras were chosen because they embody the balance between light and dark. The dragon assures them that the darkness and snows have reached an end and provides them with safe passage home. The heroes return to find their lands damaged but the spirit of their peoples high. The rebuilding has already begun. The Barons Council is restored and Aldemere marries Anastasia. The book ends with another of Aldemere's fits and visions, cluing the reader that there is more for the jester-knight and his companions to accomplish in their lives.