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Source: *The Horse Soldier*, by Martin Windrow Block:

The Medieval Knight

On a grey and dreary fall day in October 1415, Jean de Boisvert is riding into battle. Jean is from the region of Boisvert, given to him by his lord, the Baron Armond de Hellemes. Ahead of him is the banner of Armond de Hellemes, the lord of Hellemes. The flag of Hellemes is an alternating pattern of blue and white. On either side of Jean are dozens of other knights. Brave with all the bright colors of heraldry, glittering on their polished armor, the *crème de la crème* of the French nobility ride forward across the muddy fields of fall to fight the English.

Jean de Boisvert is part of a scouting party probing ahead of the main French army. This reconnaissance group is searching for the English army, the hated “*Goddamns”* that have invaded France. After more than one hundred years of war the nobility of France, armored knights one and all, are confidently enjoying the smell of revenge; revenge for years of English meddling in the affairs of France. The two armies will collide on the battlefield of Agincourt.

Blazon de la ville Hellemes

Jean de Boisvert is twenty-three years old. He is a splendid figure of a fighting man. He is strong, athletic, and an absolutely superb rider. As a knight, he owns seven huge war horses, each an investment of $40,000 (today’s dollars) per year. Jean raises his horses on the fief given to him by his lord, Armond de Hellemes. Jean’s fief covers over five square miles. Every year his estate earns over $600,000. Like all of the landed nobility of France, Jean is enormously wealthy and privileged. Two hundred serfs farm his land. The strongest of his male serfs have joined him to fight the English and they fight by his side as *men-at-arms.*

As an armored knight, Jean is superbly equipped for war. His armor of polished steel plate, worn over padded clothes weighs more than sixty pounds. The armor is exactly fitted to his body, and he was trained to wear sixty pounds of armor since he was fourteen. Jean is superbly conditioned. He can fight for an hour at a time before the heat of battle and the weight of his armor seriously weakens him. Jean’s weapons and armor cost more than a single war horse. The cost of Jean going to war equals what his two hundred serfs would earn in two hundred years. Since warfare is the number one concern of the landed aristocracy and since his estate earns more than what he will spend on a single battle going to war, Jean de Boisvert is unconcerned about the cost of battle.

Jean de Boisvert is a spectacular rider and his war horse is a magnificent creature. The stallion Jean rides into battle was bred from Flemish and Lombard stock, and is never ridden except to war. Jean has other horses for transportation and to work in the fields. Jean’s war horse stands a full seventeen hands high, weighs over 1000 pounds, and can reach a charging speed of thirty miles per hour. When Jean and his fellow knights attack the result is devastating. It would be the equivalent of a modern day car wreck, as over 1000 pounds of horse and knight collide with their enemies at thirty miles per hour. The sheer impact of the collision dislocates knees, shoulders, and hips. This is why Jean is so heavily armored and so well-conditioned. Otherwise, no one would survive the impact of the charge. Jean calls his war horse “Thunder” because the ground literally shakes when his mount charges into battle. Thunder’s huge hooves are protected by iron horseshoes the size of plates. Jean’s war horse is a *destrier*, the best known war horse of the Medieval era. Like all of Jean’s war horses, Thunder has been bred only for war. He comes from a line of war horses going back three hundred years. The destrier is considered *“the great horse”* and the name comes from the Latin work *dextarius*, meaning “right-sided.” This is because Medieval war horses are always led by a squire at the knight’s ride side.

Mounted on his war horse, Jean and the other French knights are a terrifying sight. His high-framed saddle and long stirrups support him almost in a standing position. This allows him to brace from the impact of his eighteen-foot lance smashing into the steel-clad body of an enemy. Sitting more than four feet off of the ground, Jean’s broadsword will have a devastating effect on the enemy below. From the saddle Jean not only has the height advantage, but also by swinging his sword downward, the killing arc of the sword will hammer through heads, shoulders, and tissue. His shield and *jupon*, the quilted jersey worn over his steel armor, are both blazoned with the blue-white pattern signifying the Duke de Hellemes. There is nothing more terrifying on the planet than a mass cavalry charge of armored knights. Riding flank-to-flank and charging at over thirty miles per hour, the ground shakes from the thundering hooves of hundreds of horses. There is no infantry force in the world that can withstand the attack of armored knights. Enemy ranks simply disappear due to the sheer weight of the attack. Armored knights attacking other armored knight is even more terrifying. Imagine two cars colliding head on at thirty miles per hour! The sound is simply awful: metal on metal; horse on horse; the screams of the wounded; the screams of the horses; the popping of dislocating shoulders and hips; the slashing of steel through bone and muscle. Medieval warfare was bloody beyond our wildest imagination.

Like all of the nobility of Medieval Europe, European knights belong to the warrior class of the landed aristocracy. The main purpose of Jean’s life is war. He has sworn to protect his lord, Armond de Hellemes. Jean has trained his entire life for war. When he was seven, Jean was sent to the castle of a neighboring knight as a page. A page boy, or page, is a young male servant of noble blood. The page was an attendant to a specific knight that was responsible for his training. Jean served as his personal servant to the knight Pierre de Vieux. Until he was fourteen, Jean polished armor, delivered Pierre’s messages, groomed the massive war horses and served as a personal servant to the knight responsible for his training.

When Jean was fourteen he became a squire. A squire is responsible for the armor and weapons of the knight that he serves. He carries his shield and equipment to war and he is the knight’s personal aid. As a squire Jean was trained to be a noble aristocrat and how to fight as a knight. He learned how to read and write; he studied the Bible; he memorized all of the verses of the New Testament; he learned how to read and write Latin; he learned how to read music; he memorized the knight’s code of Chivalry; he learned how to play a musical instrument; he learned how to sing; he learned how to dance; he learned how to ride; he learned how to fight with sword, shield, mace, and lance; he conditioned every day for the next five years in sixty pounds of armor; he rode every day for the next five years in sixty pounds of armor. When Jean was nineteen he took the oath of homage and fidelity to his lord, the Baron of Hellemes. The Baron “*knighted*” Jean and in return, Jean received a fief of over five square miles. What follows is Jean’s oath of homage to his lord, the Baron Armond de Hellemes:

*I Jean de Boisvert, lord of Boisvert, acknowledge to my lord the Baron Armond de Hellemes, the following castles and manor houses: Limeuil, Monpazier, Dome, Belvés and Saint Amand. In exchange for all of these fiefs that you have awarded me, I swear that I will always be a loyal and faithful vassal to you and yours. I will defend you, my lord, against all invaders. I will love whom you love; I will love what you love; I will hate whom you hate; I will hate what you hate. In return for my fiefs, I swear to honor you, my lord and to serve you, my lord, all the days of my life. I am your loyal vassal and I am your* homme *(man) to do with as you please.”*

At nineteen Jean joined the 200,000 members of the French noble class—1% of the population in France—in whom all power and wealth resides. The other 99% of the French population were commoners; impoverished serfs of non-noble blood. The serfs are poor agrarian peasants that are tied to the land of the landed nobility.

Jean lives his life by the Code of Chivalry. All European knights, regardless of national origin, swear an oath along with their homage oath, to uphold the Code of Chivalry. The Knight’s Code of Chivalry is a moral system that states all knights should protect others who cannot protect themselves, such as widows, children, and elders. All knights need to have the strength and skills to fight wars. Knights not only have to be strong, but they are also extremely disciplined and are expected to use their power to protect the weak and defenseless. Knights vow to be loyal, generous, and of “*noble bearing.”* Knights are required to tell the truth at all times and always respect the honor of women. Knights not only vow to protect the weak but also vow to guard the honor of all fellow knights. They always have to obey those who were placed in authority and are never allowed to refuse a challenge from another knight. Knights live by honor and for glory. Knights are to fear God and to maintain His Catholic Church. Jean de Boisvert is a Catholic. He believes Jesus died for man’s sins; he believes Jesus is the son of God; he believes absolutely in Heaven and Hell; he believes absolutely in the words of the Pope; he believes absolutely in the words of the Pope; he believes he can get to Heaven by either paying money to the Catholic Church or by the participating in certain rituals; he believes the Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus Christ, for the plague and for all other disasters that befall mankind. For these reasons Jean hates the Jews.

Waiting for Jean de Boisvert on the muddy field of Agincourt is an illiterate English archer named Tom Shepard. He is one of 6000 English long bowmen. He is armed with a yew longbow and twenty-four arrows, each one a yard long. Tom Shephard’s bow and arrow cost less than Jean de Boivert’s steel helmet. Like Jean, Tom has trained his entire life for war. Unlike Jean, Tom is a commoner; unlike Jean, Tom fights behind sharpened stakes pounded into the muddy ground; unlike Jean, Tom is not a knight but an English man-at-arms; unlike Jean, Tom can kill from over one hundred yards; and unlike Jean, Tom will survive the day. By the end of the day the best of the best of French nobility will lay dying in the mud.