

*The Princess Bride*, book review by Morgan, FEB 2025

Like the beloved film adaptation it inspired, William Goldman's innocuous sounding *The Princess Bride* is a deceptively dense work that weaves between action, romance, and adventure with ease, underlined always by a heart and humor that few books can match.

Goldman himself was shocked by the incredible response this book received, claiming in 1979 that he received more responses (and more strangely personal letters) on this book than all his other works combined. As Goldman said at the time, "something in *The Princess Bride* affects people," and that certainly holds true today despite the many layers to unwrap at the start of the novel.

The story begins with Goldman addressing the audience and explaining the metatextual (and completely fictional) history of this story — how his father had first read this story aloud to him as a child, and upon reading it as an adult Goldman discovered his beloved adventure novel was actually a dense and overly complex political satire, which his father had chopped up into "the good parts."

Goldman sets out to "correct" the story and present only the good parts his father had left in, sprinkling a slew of asides, interruptions, and anecdotes across the story. Though this makes reading *The Princess Bride* very confusing at times, these notes overall broaden the scope of the novel — giving this fantasy adventure a modern feel and a novel sense of humor. More than that, they also capture the heart that makes this book so impactful, particularly the sections where the author discusses reading *The Princess Bride* to his own son one day.

The story within a story follows the story of Buttercup, a young girl living in the farm country of Florin, and the romance and adventure that unfolds between herself and her farm boy Westley. After Westley is presumed dead at sea, Buttercup is betrothed to Prince Humperdink — who, in true political satire fashion, only learns of her existence when Count Rugen admires Buttercup's father's cattle. When Buttercup is abducted by a bumbling trio of outlaws shortly before the wedding, it falls on a mysterious man in black to track them down and save her.

The adventures that follow are infused with the same heart and excitement as Goldman's narration, and despite its confusing nature, the books become practically impossible to put down. Buttercup is captured by the incredibly memorable outlaws Vizzini, Fezzik, and Inigo, who it turns out are employed by Prince Humperdinck to capture and murder his future bride. Their murder plan quickly falls apart when the Dread Pirate Roberts follows them and saves Buttercup, revealing that he is Westley, and didn't die at sea.

Finally reunited, Westley and Buttercup navigate a series of thrilling challenges and incredible settings. My personal favorite is when they take refuge in the dangerous Fire Swamp which is filled with fire, quicksand, and Rodents Of Unusual Size.

The two are separated again, and Buttercup is forced to marry Prince Humperdinck, who still plans on killing Buttercup. Buttercup believes Westley went back to the Dread Pirate Roberts ship, when he was actually taken to the fifth floor of the Zoo of Death by Humperdinck's evil sidekick, Count Rugen, who has six fingers on his right hand.

Buttercup falls into a depression as she wishes Westley would come back for her and doesn't want to marry Humperdinck. Meanwhile, Humperdinck sends Yellin to empty out the Thieves' Quarter with a Brute Squad so that there are no conspiracies towards harming Buttercup on the night of their wedding. Amongst the Brute Squad is Fezzik, who finds his friend, a drunken Inigo.

Buttercup and Humperdinck struck a deal that if Westley would return and marry Buttercup, then Humperdinck would let them live happily, but if Westley didn't come to collect Buttercup, then she would marry Humperdinck. Humperdinck falsely promises to send his four fastest boats in every direction to find Westley and inform him of this deal, knowing that Westley was in his Zoo of Death. When Buttercup finds out Humperdinck never sent word for Westley she calls him a coward, which angers Humperdinck.

In his anger, Humperdinck runs to the Zoo of Death and turns the dial on The Machine to twenty, which absolutely tortures Westley. His screams are so loud that Inigo and Fezzik can hear them from the Thieves' Quarter. Inigo, who is searching for revenge on Count Rugen for killing his father, has the idea to find Westley and use his superior swordship to kill Count Rugen.

Fezzik and Inigo follow the sounds of Westley's screams to the entrance of the Zoo of Death. They learn from Count Rugen's Albino henchman that Westley is on the fifth floor. Fezzik and Inigo have to walk through five levels filled with more and more dangerous animals to find Westley. They eventually make it to the fifth level alive and find Westley dead.

Fezzik and Inigo take Westley's body to Miracle Max who, with much persuasion, gives Westley a Miracle Pill that will bring him back to life. With Westley alive again, the trio can storm the castle to stop Humperdinck and Buttercup's wedding and kill Count Rugen. Humperdinck still plans on killing Buttercup on their honeymoon, but little to his knowledge Buttercup plans on killing herself after the ceremony.

Westley, Fezzik, and Inigo manage to sneak into the castle, and get separated. Inigo goes off to kill Count Rugen, and Fezzik follows him, leaving Westley, who can barely walk, alone. Inigo succeeds in killing Count Rugen, and Westley leaves them to find Buttercup. Westley fails in stopping the wedding, but appears in Buttercup's room, and stops her from killing herself, and are finally reunited, and tie up Humperdinck as they run away.

In the end, Buttercup and Westley are free from Prince Humperdinck and can marry each other. Inigo achieves his revenge by killing Count Rugen and is reunited with his friend Fezzik. *The Princess Bride* is a clever story that has a balance of action, romance, and adventure. I rate this book a 10/10!