

The stone that blunted the sword

'Did I ever tell you about how the stone in which I pulled Excalibur from, ended up blunting the sword?'

'No Sire.'

'I was but a boy. Merlin came to me one day and said there is a sword, forged in Avalon, that I shall find resting inside an anvil atop a stone. The sword had originally been presented by Ninianne, the Lady of the Lake; and after a tussle between my father Uther Pendragon and a courtier who tried in vain to gain the throne of England, the sword was inserted into a Cornishman's anvil. Actually, the Welsh claim some rights to this legend but, ha-ha, father was definitely in Cornwall at the time!'

'What happened next, Sire?'

'Well, Merlin decided that the true heir to Uther's throne would be the person who could draw the sword from the anvil. I pulled the sword in the marketplace in London. Great cheers rang out and I was proclaimed King. Crowned in Winchester you know?'

'I was there, Sire.'

'But of course. To protect the sword against would-be pretenders, I inserted the sword into the stone and there it sat until I needed it in battle. When I drew the sword on the eve of the battle Siesia, I found the sword blunt.'

'Why Sire? The stone should have preserved the sharpness, surely?'

'Cornish slate was in the make-up of the stone notorious for blunting knives and swords, and don't call me Shirley!'

'Sabotage! Sire, have you spoken with Merlin?'

'Unfortunately, not. Merlin is on an away-day at Stonehenge and then visiting fellow wizards at a convention in Devon. I blame the Celts!'

'So that explains why you used your standby sword, Accelerator.'

'Aye, that sword is too damn quick for me.'

'I do like your yarns, Sire. Another flagon of Mead?'

(Based on *The Sword in the Stone* by T. H. White, first published in 1938).