



THE PRINCESS BRIDE

RAPIER WITS

Inigo Montoya meets his match in the man in black...

SETTING THE SCENE

► *The Princess Bride* began with writer William Goldman making up a bedtime story for his two daughters. When asked what the story should be about, one of them said "a princess", the other one said "a bride".

► After several false starts with different directors and studios, Goldman bought back the rights to the book (his favourite), reasoning, "I was the only fuckhead who could destroy it now."

► While researching a piece on Broadway, Goldman gave the book to theatre director Carl Reiner, who passed it to his son, Rob. Years later, hot from *Stand By Me*, Reiner Jr. received Goldman's blessing to make the film.

"Every frame of fighting is done by Cary and Mandy. I hold that fight up to any scene in an Errol Flynn movie."

Rob Reiner, director

The remarkable thing about this swashbuckling scene from Rob Reiner's 1987 fairytale is not the dazzling swordsmanship on display, but the way it reveals the fighters' stories. "My name is Inigo Montoya, you killed my father, prepare to die," is the mantra of Mandy Patinkin's Spanish swordsman, but Cary Elwes' masked man (actually the Dread Pirate Roberts) has a mission just as honourable, and just as heartfelt. Dancing across ruins in a blur of blades and bravado, Roberts seems to be winning until Montoya turns the tables – revealing that he's fighting with the wrong hand. But Roberts has secrets of his own and is also holding back his best fighting hand! After landing a blow with a gymnastic swing, the pirate bats away Montoya's sword – catching it before delivering what should be the coup de grâce. Instead, impressed by his opponent's skill, he simply knocks him out, saying, "I'd sooner destroy a stained glass window." Funny, unexpected and – like the rest of the movie – warm, it makes us wish Happily Ever Afters for them both.



"I did a lot of research on the various words, moves, things people did in fencing, but none of it matters if you don't care."

William Goldman, writer



THE HISTORY

Goldman's script called for "the greatest sword fight since Errol Flynn and Burt Lancaster". Stunt co-ordinator Peter Diamond had actually worked with Flynn and Lancaster and used some of their moves.

THE TECHNIQUE

Goldman bought books on fencing by ancient masters to get the technical terms right – but the actual fighting styles used by the actors bear little relation to their supposed sources.

THE INSPIRATION

Inigo Montoya is Patinkin's favourite role. On set, he imagined he was avenging the cancer that killed his own father in 1972, and he talked to his late dad all the time throughout the production.

THE LIGHTBULB MOMENT

Going upstairs, Elwes and Patinkin had to change their well-practised routine for the camera. "At that moment," says Patinkin, "we really realised we had learned a skill."

THE STUNTS

Except for the two jumps, every single frame of the fight is actors Elwes and Patinkin, rather than stuntmen – something that's completely unprecedented in a scene of this duration and difficulty.

THE TRAINING

Both Patinkin and Elwes were taught sword fighting from scratch by experts Peter Diamond and Bob Anderson. For months they took every possible opportunity to practice, learning right- and left-handed.

THE FILMING

Shot on a Shepperton soundstage, the fight took 10 days to complete. The only injury sustained throughout the entire filming was when Patinkin bruised a rib from laughing too hard during the Billy Crystal scene.



"I started writing something for my kids when the '70s started. It's the '90s now, and your kids can see it."

William Goldman, writer



"I didn't know how to sword fight. I'd never picked up a sword in my life."

Cary Elwes, actor (Westley)



"I sat with my wife watching the film, and at the end I was crying. My wife said, 'What's the matter?' I said, 'I never dreamed I'd get to be in anything like this.'"

Mandy Patinkin, actor (Montoya)