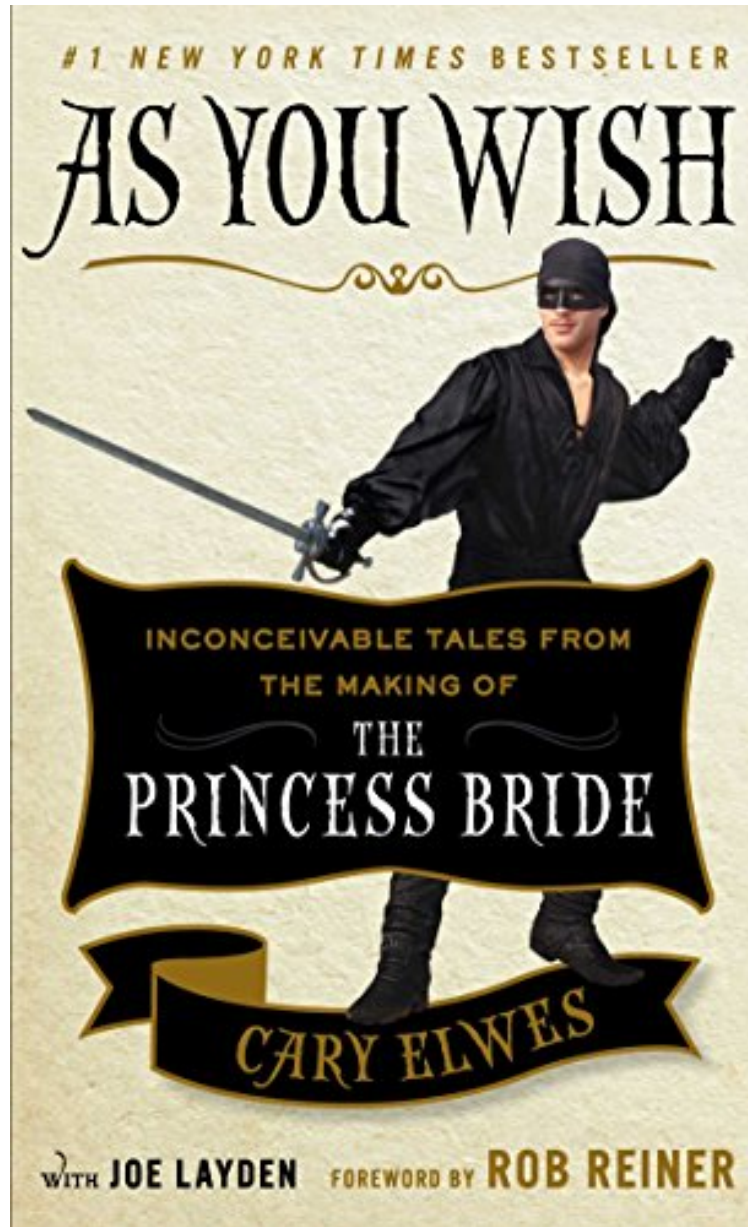


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As You Wish: Inconceivable Tales from the Making of The Princess Bride

Cary Elwes, Joe Layden

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Cary Elwes, Joe Layden : As You Wish: Inconceivable Tales from the Making of The Princess Bride before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised As You Wish: Inconceivable Tales from the Making of The Princess Bride:

300 of 308 people found the following review helpful. Buy the AUDIBLE version!By Dana WilliamsProbably the fastest I've ever listened to an audiobook. The impressions alone are worth the money, not to mention the great stories about the making of "The Princess Bride." I couldn't stop listening. What impressed me the most was the clear love and admiration the cast and crew had and still have for each other. You can HEAR it in their voices as they talk about each other. Most loved was Andre the Giant. I loved hearing the different impressions of him from Elwes, Reiner, and I believe Sarandon or Guest. You hear how much training and work went into the Greatest Swordfight in Modern History. To hear that Robin Wright and Cary Elwes wanted to keep doing more takes of the final kiss is beyond adorable. Rob Reiner sounds like the nicest guy ever, and I now want to read every book William Goldman ever wrote. I'm sure a dustcover poster is cool, but to me, hearing the actors themselves read and talk about their experiences was beyond worth it.150 of 156 people found the following review helpful. A priceless look into Princess Bride; a must for fansBy outwestFor those of us who grew up with Princess Bride and still have a habit of silently, or sometimes loudly, saying the many memorable lines of this cult classic, this book could not come soon enough. For those who haven't seen it, The Princess Bride is a movie with a bit of everything: fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, giants, monsters, chases, escapes, and wuv, twuu wuv.The book takes readers behind the scenes for the movie's most recognizable moments, and includes remembrances from numerous esteemed cast members like Wallace Shawn (Vizzini), Mandy Patinkin (Montoya), Billy Crystal (Miracle Max), Robin Wright (Buttercup), and director Rob Reiner, who each share incredible stories behind how the movie was made and what effect it had on their lives. So much great insight, humor, and congeniality between the cast and crew in the making of this magical film. Inconceivable!The book is full of wonderful behind-the-scenes stories that are bound to wow any fan. The printed edition has photographs from Reiner and Norman Lear's personal collections, plus plenty of set secrets and very funny tales backstage tales which will keep any fan in stitches.This book is an absolute must have for any Princess Bride fan, and a should have for everyone else!3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Get the audio version - not just the regular book!By PaperChase3With few exceptions, all of the characters from the movie make a vocal appearance/contribution to the audio version of this book. The story is fun and interesting for those of us who love the movie, but I can't imagine getting the same satisfaction from just reading it myself. I listened in my car on my commute to/from work and got through it fairly quickly. Def recommend!

From actor Cary Elwes, who played the iconic role of Westley in The Princess Bride, comes the New York Times bestselling account and behind-the-scenes look at the making of the cult classic film filled with never-before-told stories, exclusive photographs, and interviews with the cast and crew. The Princess Bride has been a family favourite for close to three decades. Ranked by the American Film Institute as one of the top 100 Greatest Love Stories and by the Writers Guild of America as one of the top 100 screenplays of all time, The Princess Bride will continue to resonate with audiences for years to come. Cary Elwes was inspired to share his memories and give fans an unprecedented look into the creation of the film while participating in the twenty-fifth anniversary cast reunion. In *As You Wish* he has created an enchanting experience; in addition to never-before seen photos and interviews with his fellow cast mates, there are plenty of set secrets and backstage stories. With a foreword by Rob Reiner and original artwork by acclaimed artist Shepard Fairey, *As You Wish* is a must-have for all fans of this beloved film.

"Fans who want to maintain a fairy-tale image of how 'The Princess Bride' was made will find that his gentle recollections serve this goal perfectly. Watch the movie all over again with newfound knowledge." (New York Times Book)"An engaging memoir that charts the film's tumultuous journey from a project stuck in development hell, to charmed production, to flop, to classic." (Chicago Tribune)Cary Elwes' book recounts the wacky antics of Billy Crystal, Rob Reiner, and others behind 'The Princess Bride'. [A] delightful remembrance of the three months he spent making the unsung movie that went on to become a family classic. (New York Daily News)A tender, comical behind-the-scenes look at the 1987 classic. (US Weekly)Designed to hit all fan-service sweet spots for folks familiar with the film, as its stuffed with photos, recollections, and interviews with relevant parties. The books dust jacket is even a Shepard Fairey print, for crying out loud. I never had a chance. (The A.V. Club)Filled with fun tidbits from the cast about making a movie that became an unlikely classic. (Los Angeles Magazine)This is an entertaining tale of how 24-year-old Elwes learned how to ride a horse in the Rob Reiner adaptation of William Goldmans screenplay (and original, brilliant book). (Flavorwire.com)[A] fascinating memoirCary Elwes has proved that he is as adept with the mighty pen as he is with the powerful sword. A treasure trove of fascinating behind-the-scenes accountsAs You Wish is thoughtfully and seamlessly compiled. (New Orleans Living Magazine)The movie 'The Princess Bride' achieved a certain cinematic magic, which Elwes (Westley) captures in his warm and revealing behind-the-scenes account. (Publishers Weekly)Even if you dont have a crush on Cary Elwes, youll enjoy this vivid behind-the-scenes account of the making of 'The Princess Bride'. His stories, especially those involving Andre the Giant, will leave you in stitches. Robin Wright, Mandy Patinkin, Billy Crystal, and others also recount their experiences. An amusing account of a group of performers who came together to make a heartfelt film that is loved by many. (Library Journal)About the AuthorCary Elwes is a celebrated English actor who starred in The Princess Bride before moving on to roles in Robin

Hood: Men in Tights, Glory, Days of Thunder, Twister, and Saw, among many other acclaimed performances. He will always be indebted to The Princess Bride, he says, for changing his life and giving him a career that has spanned decades. Joe Layden has authored or coauthored more than thirty books, including multiple New York Times bestsellers. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. As You Wish MEETING ROB, BERLIN, JUNE 29, 1986 The note simply read: IMPORTANT. It was a message from my agent, Harriet Robinson, that had been slipped under my door by a bellhop at the Hotel Kempinski, where I was staying. I immediately picked up the phone and dialed her number. This would be the call that actually changed my life. After I reached Harriet on the line she began to tell me that she had arranged an important meeting for me. That the director of This Is Spinal Tap, Rob Reiner, and his producing partner, Andy Scheinman, were planning on coming to Berlin to see me. Really? Yes. What for? She said they were hamstrung by a tight preproduction schedule and were still looking for an actor to play the pivotal role of Westley in a film version of The Princess Bride. Not The Princess Bride by William Goldman? I think so, yes, came the response. I couldn't believe it. This was a book I had read when I was just thirteen. And here I was being considered for one of the leads by the director and the producer. Fortunately, for me, they did not change their plans. A little backstory on where I was at that time. I was a neophyte, just twenty-three, with only a handful of films to my credit. But I already knew what I wanted out of life. I knew I wanted to be an actor. I was born and raised in London and briefly attended the London Academy of Music Dramatic Art, one of the world's most prestigious training grounds for serious stage actors. I enjoyed studying but my ultimate goal back then was simply to be a working actor, preferably in film. Besides, I had already done plenty of studying when I moved to New York to attend the Actors Studio and the Lee Strasberg Theatre Film Institute. After leaving LAMDA, I picked up an agent, Harriet, and started going out on auditions. I'd already been a production assistant on a handful of movies, including the James Bond feature Octopussy, where I had the unique experience of being asked to drive Bond himself, Roger Moore, to work a couple of times. I was a nervous wreck, I can tell you. All that kept going through my mind was, What if I killed Bond on the way to work in a traffic accident? How'd that be? It would certainly put a halt to my burgeoning career in the film industry. I could already see the headlines: Lowly Production Assistant Kills Bond! During one of our early-morning drives, Mr. Moore actually looked up from his newspaper and said, in that very calm and collected manner of his, You can speed up a little if you want to. By the mid-1980s, I had a rsum that was short but not unimpressive. My first movie, released in 1984, was Another Country, a historical drama based on a popular West End play by Julian Mitchell, with Rupert Everett and Colin Firth. I had costarred with Helena Bonham Carter in Lady Jane, director Trevor Nunn's period drama about Lady Jane Grey, the nine-day queen of England whose brief reign followed the death of King Edward VI. Apparently this was the film that Rob had been able to see, and the one that convinced him to take a chance on me. After I wrapped Lady Jane, Trevor Nunn offered me an opportunity to spend a year in residency with the Royal Shakespeare Company, of which he was the director. I was flattered almost to the point of distraction—most young actors would kill for such an opportunity. But by this time I was living in London, and I knew that spending a year with the RSC, as prestigious as it was, would be the equivalent of doing graduate work in theater: the compensation wouldn't even cover my rent. Nevertheless, I seriously considered the offer, as it came from a talented director whom I admired and still admire a great deal. Might things have been different for me had I said yes? Who knows? I have very few regrets about the life I've been fortunate to lead. But this much seems certain: if I had taken up residency with the RSC, I would not have been free to accept the role of Westley. In fact, I might not have even been considered. You could say I was rather lucky, for as it turned out, I happened to be in the right place at the right time. By the time Rob Reiner had started looking for someone to play his leading man, I had a body of work that was thin but perhaps worth investigating. Through fate or skilled representation or a combination of these I came under consideration for the role of the farmhand-turned-pirate, Westley—a character created in a renowned novel that had long been considered incapable of being adapted for the screen. And one that I had already read and enjoyed as a kid. How did that come to be? Well, it turns out my stepfather had worked in the literary department of the William Morris Agency in Los Angeles and, after leaving to make movies, had produced William Goldman's very first screenplay, adapted from the novel The Moving Target, by Ross Macdonald. The film version was released in 1966 under that same title in Britain but was renamed Harper for release in the United States, where it became a modest hit and helped further establish the stardom of its young lead, Paul Newman. And it wasn't bad for Goldman, either, who won an Edgar Award for best screenplay and subsequently became one of the hottest writers in Hollywood. Being a huge fan of Goldman's, my stepfather naturally kept a copy of The Princess Bride in his library and one day gave it to me to read. Needless to say, I loved it. I remember reading the author's own description of the good bits from S. Morgenstern's fictitious novel: Fencing. Fighting. Torture. Poison. True love. Hate. Revenge. Giants. Hunters. Bad men. Good men. Beautiful ladies. Snakes. Spiders. Pain. Death. Brave men. Cowardly men. Strongest men. Chases. Escapes. Lies. Truths. Passion. Miracles. Now if that didn't sound exciting to a thirteen-year-old, nothing would. When the call came from Harriet, I was in Berlin shooting a little indie film called Maschenka, based on a semiautobiographical novel by Vladimir Nabokov, the man who gave us one of the most controversial examples of twentieth-century literature, Lolita. The film was a British-Finnish-German coproduction and was being shot in both Germany and Finland. This was the early summer of 1986, only a few months after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster,

which had caused quite a fear at the time. Harriet actually told me that Rob and Andy had seriously thought about canceling their trip because of the whole nuclear thing. My recollection is that it wasn't of much concern to those of us working on our small European coproduction. I recall a crew meeting being called on a set in a place called Katajanokka, in Helsinki, only a week before and being told that there was nothing to fear because the winds were in our favor and that the fallout was likely to be blown in another direction. We were warned, however, that as a precaution we probably shouldn't drink the local milk. At least not until it had been declared safe. Like a good many of the others on the crew, I went back to work, scratching my head, wondering if we shouldn't be taking the whole thing more seriously. We were, after all, only eight hundred miles away from the accident. All I can say is that insurance policies for the film industry back then were not as sophisticated as they are now, so shutting down production wasn't really an option. Anyway, not exactly what you want to hear, but the show did indeed go on. And, as far as I know, no one got sick from the experience, thank God. The last few weeks of the shoot took place in Berlin at Studio Babelsberg, which is how I came to be staying at the Kempinski. I pressed for more information from Harriet. She said all she knew was that Rob and Andy were trying to meet as many British actors who might be right for the part, and that they were obviously interested in me. I subsequently found out that Rob had gotten a call from the casting director, Jane Jenkins, suggesting that he watch Lady Jane, and if he liked it, fly out to meet me. It seemed reasonable to think that I was in good shape if they were traveling such a long way and not only that but to a region that might be contaminated with radioactive material. I wasn't accustomed to this level of interest, and (even though it happens quite often now) no director had ever come to visit me on location before. Do I have to read for the part? I asked, dreading the answer. It's possible, since they're coming all that way, Harriet replied. As an actor you lose far more roles than you gain at readings. You learn pretty early on that most things are beyond your control, and that it is better to let go and let God and to get used to disappointment, as Goldman so eloquently had the Man in Black say in the movie. I kept trying to tell myself there would always be another film, another job on the horizon that it didn't matter. But deep down I knew I wasn't kidding anyone, least of all myself. This was far from being just another job. This was two of my heroes, Bill Goldman and Rob Reiner, working together! Although the novel was published in 1973 to immediate acclaim and passionate reader response, it was already thirteen years old by the time I was approached to play the role of Westley. Goldman's screenplay, which he had adapted from his own book, had in fact become something of a legendary property in Hollywood circles, having been declared by those in power at the studios as an impossible film to make.

ANDY SCHEINMAN We were trying to meet all the actors who might be capable of playing Westley, and I seem to remember Colin Firth was one of them. We get a call saying there's this kid you should see, he's in East Germany. So all I remember is it was right after Chernobyl. And I'm not crazy about going to East Germany. I'm looking at maps, and they have gray areas where the nuclear fallout is and I don't like it. And Rob was like, Don't go if you don't want to. But I did. I just remember running fast into the hotel, like that's going to do anything. And literally leaving a thousand-dollar jacket behind. I didn't have that much money and I certainly didn't have any other jackets like that, but I couldn't wear it anymore. I just left it. Having arduously penned the script himself, Goldman had long declared it to be his favorite among those he had written. High praise, given that by this time his oeuvre included Marathon Man, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, and All the Presidents Men, the last two earning him Academy Awards for screenwriting. And yet, despite Goldman's impressive résumé and passion for the piece, the project seemed destined to languish in what is commonly known in the business as Development Hell meaning it had been passed around the studios a lot with all of them either unable to get it made, or simply uninterested. As Goldman himself once famously put it, Even François Truffaut couldn't make this movie.

WILLIAM GOLDMAN I was going to California on a trip, and I told my daughters, I'll write you a story; what do you want it to be about? And one of them said, Princesses! and the other said something about brides. And I said, Okay, that will be the title. I went out and wrote the first two pages and then I stopped. And then years later I went back and finished the book. It became this legendary unproduced script, even being mentioned in the prestigious French film journal Cahiers du Cinéma as such. And so it seemed that the author's favorite work was destined never to see the light of day... that is, until it fell into the right hands. For those of you unaware, it should be noted that Rob Reiner's career was on a clear upward trajectory by this point. No longer merely a sitcom star, he'd proven himself to be an A-list director with a deft ability to meld genres with his work on The Sure Thing and especially This Is Spinal Tap, released in 1984. Everyone who cared about rock music or comedy instantly fell in love with the movie and memorized its largely improvised dialogue. It was the first and maybe the best of what would become a new category of film and television: the mock documentary (or mockumentary), and it was Rob who steered the project expertly from its conception to the cult status it now enjoys, even among musicians. Tom Petty once declared his fondness for the dim-witted, aging rock stars by revealing that he and his bandmates routinely gather and recite lines from the film before going onstage. Rob also told me that when he met with Sting about playing Humpertinck, the musician told him he had watched Spinal Tap over fifty times and that every time he didn't know whether to laugh or cry. For a director or writer (Rob's coauthors on that film were Harry Shearer, Michael McKean, and Christopher Guest, who would be among the Princess Bride ensemble), that has to be just about the highest praise imaginable. Around this same time Rob was putting the finishing touches on Stand by Me, an adaptation of a Stephen King novella that would be recognized as one of the best coming-of-age stories

Hollywood has ever produced. Later on, after I arrived in London, he arranged a private screening for me at Pinewood Studios, and I remember being deeply moved by it. I hadn't seen that kind of honest acting from kids since watching Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*. It was clear to me that from *This Is Spinal Tap* to *The Sure Thing* to *Stand by Me*, Rob was basically on a winning streak. His films were all very different in tone and genre, and they all ended up doing very good business. He was a director with a unique vision who made memorable films. There was really no one else doing the kind of work that he was doing. So with that impressive body of work behind him, Rob had earned the right to choose his next project based primarily on what he wanted to do rather than what was expected of him. Essentially, he was given *carte blanche*. As I understand it, the conversation between Rob and the then head of Columbia Pictures, which was releasing *Stand by Me*, went something like this: Anything you want, the studio head told him. Anything at all. Really? Anything? Rob responded with glee. Yes. In that case I want to do my favorite book, Rob replied. What's that? *The Princess Bride*. Anything but that! came the instantaneous response. And so for a while the project seemed to stall. But, to Rob's credit, he was steadfast. Although he has an extraordinarily warm and generous spirit, and is not at all prone to the sort of rampant ego that is not uncommon among some of the upper echelon of Hollywood talent, he is hardly a pushover. In fact, it was his sheer determination and his vision that were largely responsible for making the film happen. Time has obviously proven that Rob was the right man for the job. Like most people who read it, he had been a huge fan of the novel. He also had supreme confidence in his ability to blend all the different genres that filled its pages: romance, adventure, fantasy, drama, comedy, action. He would take these elements and turn them on their heads. He would have fun doing it and, in turn, create a movie that would be fun for others. To accomplish that task requires a very sure hand, and I don't believe many filmmakers then or now could have pulled it off. **ANDY SCHEINMAN** By this time, Rob's dad, Carl Reiner, had already been approached by Bill Goldman about doing the project. But Carl either didn't have time or couldn't figure out how to do it, or whatever. For whatever reason, it just didn't happen. It was about thirteen years later that Rob said to me, I think it's a great book and I think we should see if we can pull it off. At one point we had almost had it set up at Columbia Pictures. That's when I heard one of my favorite lines in the movie business. The head of Columbia said, You've got to be careful with William Goldman scripts. He tricks you with good writing. With apologies to Bill Goldman, who dislikes the term, Rob really was, for lack of a better description, a young auteur. One whose success had left him with nearly complete artistic control over his projects. He was able to release his films the way he wanted them to look, as he had final cut in the editing rooms, something that hardly exists today. And he used his clout not to accumulate staggering wealth with superficial blockbusters, but rather to tackle something far more ambitious. Something near and dear to his heart. **ROB REINER** I had been a huge fan of Goldman's from the first book he ever wrote, which was *The Temple of Gold*, and then *Your Turn to Curtsy*, *My Turn to Bow*. I read literally every book he had ever written. He was doing a book about one season on Broadway in 1968 called *The Season*, and my dad had had a play on that year, titled *Something Different*, which Bill had devoted a chapter of his book to. Shortly thereafter, Bill finished *The Princess Bride* and sent it to my father to see if he was interested in making it into a movie. But he really didn't know what to do with it. I don't even know if he ever read it or not, but he gave it to me because he knew I was such a big fan of Goldman's. I was in my twenties at the time and I hadn't directed anything. I read it and it was just one of those experiences when you're reading something, you think the writer is in your head. Everything in the book was like, Oh, my God, I'm so in sync with this sensibility here. I mean, I just fell in love with it. It was like the best thing I'd ever read. And so time goes by and I'd done *All in the Family* and then I started my directing career. And after the first couple of movies I started thinking, Well, they make movies out of books, and I started thinking about what book did I really enjoy, and I remembered *The Princess Bride* was my favorite book of all time. So I naively said, I wonder if we could make a movie out of that. I had no idea at the time that a lot of people had already tried: Norman Jewison, Robert Redford, etc. It was in one of those cinema books as one of the greatest screenplays ever written that had never been produced. I had my agency get in touch with Bill to see if he would be willing to meet with me. He had seen *Spinal Tap*, and I was just finishing up my second movie, *The Sure Thing*. It was still in a rough-cut form, but I arranged a screening for him to see it. This was all just for Bill to agree to meet with me. How could one not admire that? Apparently the same studio head at Columbia ended up telling Rob, You'll never get the rights anyway, as Goldman will never let anyone make it! So Rob decided to go ahead and try to meet with Goldman, who by that time had reacquired the rights to his own novel, to see if he could convince Goldman to let him have the material. He took with him the person who accompanied him to all his meetings: his producing partner, Andy Scheinman. It turned out the studio head had indeed been accurate in describing Goldman's reticence to let the movie be made. As Rob and Andy were to soon discover, the writer had evidently nearly lost all enthusiasm for the movie business. He hadn't liked the way the studios had dealt with him in the past, especially when it came to this, his favorite project. Nor had he had any luck with them, or with anyone else for that matter, trying to get it made. In order to better understand Mr. Goldman's frame of mind I should perhaps furnish you with a little history about the various attempts to make the picture. As I understand it, at one point the project was initially a go at 20th Century Fox, which had purchased the book before it was even published, with Richard Lester (famous for the Beatles movies *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*) attached to direct. That was when who Goldman refers to as the Greenlight Guy (i.e., the person who decides which projects are to be made for the studio)

was fired at Fox. Then, as luck would have it, the next Greenlight Guy proceeded to clear his desk of all his predecessors work (a surprisingly not uncommon occurrence in our business) so that he could start with a clean slate. Which is when Goldman bought the rights to his book back from Fox (unheard of to this day, I imagine), to protect his cherished work and prevent them from letting someone else rewrite the script. As Bill wrote in the twenty-fifth-anniversary edition of the book, he felt he was the only idiot who could destroy it now. By this time no other major studio was willing to touch the material but one. And believe it or not, the Greenlight Guy was in the middle of negotiating with Goldman when he, too, was fired over the weekend just as the deal was about to close. Another small movie studio literally folded during negotiations. At one point Norman Jewison, famous for having directed Jesus Christ Superstar, Fiddler on the Roof, and Moonstruck, was going to make it as an independent film but he couldn't raise the money even with a then virtually unknown Arnold Schwarzenegger attached to play the role of Fezzik. After that, John Boorman, Robert Redford, and even Francois Truffaut tried their hand at getting the movie made but somehow couldn't get it off the ground. And so it made sense that Goldman was naturally reticent to let his heart get excited all over again only to be potentially disappointed. I guess he hadn't gotten used to disappointment when it came to this particular project. Fortunately for Rob and for us all, he finally got Goldman's blessing, which was a feat in itself. He then went to his mentor, producer Norman Lear (the genius behind Rob's successful sitcom All in the Family, and many other classics like Sanford and Son, One Day at a Time, The Jeffersons, Good Times, Archie Bunkers Place and Maude), to ask if he might produce the film. Lear read the script and immediately agreed to finance the movie. The project was to be the second feature at Lear's new company, Act III Communications, the first being Stand by Me. Lear's only prerequisite was that the movie had to have a distribution deal at a major studio, otherwise he would be out of pocket for possibly the most expensive independent movie ever. To everyone's relief Rob then successfully pitched the project back to 20th Century Fox. And, after a few false starts, Fox reluctantly agreed to distribute the film, whereupon Rob immediately set about the task of assembling a cast.

ROB REINER So I went with Andy to Bill's apartment in New York and he opened the door and said, This is my favorite thing I've ever written in my life. I want it on my tombstone. And essentially the subtext was What are you going to do to it? And so we went into his den and we talked through what I felt should be done with the material. I had read one of the screenplays and I thought they'd gotten so far away from the book that they didn't really capture the feeling of the novel. Bill was writing some notes down, and I didn't know if he liked what I was saying or not but about halfway through the meeting he gets up and goes to the kitchen to get something to drink and I turn to Andy and I say, Geez, I don't know. I hope this is going okay. I just had no idea. And then Bill comes back into the room, and he goes, Well, I just think this is going great! He was so excited about my take on it, and I remember leaving his apartment like I was walking on air! I thought, My God, this is like the greatest! This guy that I admired so much was basically giving me a stamp of approval to go ahead. So then we went to get all the financing together and we got it made. But to me, the highlight of my career was getting William Goldman to agree to let me do this thing.

WILLIAM GOLDMAN They came to my apartment and we met for a while. Rob had done some terrific movies that I liked. I mean, he wasn't Alfred Hitchcock, but he's a great director. And I liked him personally. You don't get offered that many things by good directors. The first people Rob hired were his buddies for two of the pivotal roles: Billy Crystal as Miracle Max and Chris Guest as Count Rugen. Of course, this wasn't just a case of nepotism. Chris Guest was coming off his genius performance as Nigel Tufnel, the dim but lovable metal guitarist in Spinal Tap. He and Billy were also both stars on Saturday Night Live and Billy himself had starred in one of my favorite American sitcoms, Soap. As a young boy I had traveled on vacation to the States in the 70s with my American stepfather. After my first trip I became fascinated with all things American. There were many things to be excited about, and one of them was TV. You see, in England, we had only two TV channels, whereas in the United States the cable explosion was just under way. As soon as I arrived I devoured everything related to American TV pop culture, but I became especially fascinated with television sitcoms in particular. The Dick Van Dyke Show, M*A*S*H*, Gilligans Island, The Brady Bunch, and later on things like Soap and Taxi essentially all the classic shows from the Golden Age of television in the 60s and 70s. Including, of course, all of Norman Lear's shows. I had also listened to stand-up comedians from my stepfather's record collection, becoming familiar with the likes of Bob Newhart, Woody Allen, Richard Pryor, and Jonathan Winters. So when I got the call that Rob was coming to see me, I'm not sure what made me more excited: that I was about to meet one of Hollywood's most talented young directors, or that I was going to meet one of my TV idols. I understood exactly what was at stake in this meeting. There was no disputing the impact this role could have on my career. As is often the case when meeting with a director, I knew that I was under consideration, but I didn't have any idea whether I was a front-runner or merely one of many candidates vying for the role. A German-sounding voice came over the phone from the front desk: Zere are two gentlemen in the lobby here for you. Shall I send them up? Rob and Andy had arrived. Yes. Send them up, please, I said, hanging up. What surprised me as I opened the door a few minutes later were two of the biggest smiles I had seen in a long time greeting me. There he was: the man who had created Marty DiBergi and Meathead in my hotel room! The other smile belonged to his best friend and producing partner, Andy Scheinman, about half Rob's size but with twice the energy.

ROB REINER Well, I try to get people who I know can do a part. I wouldn't just hire friends for the sake of hiring friends. But if they're right for the part, absolutely. The problem I had with The Princess Bride was

that I had to get a young, dashing, swashbuckling kid, and a young girl to play opposite him. Oh, and a giant. So it wasn't like I had a lot of friends that could fit those bills. I believe there was only one person that could play each of those parts. The movie has that kind of formal English, fairy-tale feel to it that in the days of yore kind of thing. And so I wanted them to have an English accent. At least Westley and Buttercup... Prince Humperdinck and Count Rugen and so on. I had seen Cary in *Lady Jane*, but that picture wasn't a comedy. I thought, He certainly looks right. He resembles a young Douglas Fairbanks Jr., and he's so handsome and he's a terrific actor. But I didn't know if he was funny, and this is like a very specialized kind of acting, where you have to kind of be very real and earnest, but at the same time there's a slight tongue-in-cheek thing happening. You have to strike the balance. So we flew over to Germany, where Cary was filming a movie. What struck me about these guys was their beautiful friendship. They seemed to finish each other's sentences. I was immediately taken not only with their personal charm, which was considerable, but also with their passion for the project. Rob was not only legitimately funny (which is hardly surprising, since his father is Carl Reiner) but also very sweet, with an infectious laugh that could be heard in Detroit, as I like to say. In fact, the man I met was far from the beleaguered son-in-law of Archie Bunker. And man, was he a born storyteller. He was clearly very intelligent and a voracious reader, which is how he knew of Goldmann's work. As it turns out his father had also given him a copy of *The Princess Bride* to read as a kid just as my stepfather had done for me. Now, that didn't exactly make us unique, but it certainly inspired a sense of kinship. I knew the story, and I knew a little about the history behind the attempts to translate it to the screen. I also knew that in the right hands it had the potential to be both hilariously funny and heartwarming. I sensed that Rob, given his body of work and his sensibility, was the right man for the job. I offered them each a bottle of water from the minibar. I have a distinct recollection of Andy being unnerved by the very prospect of being so close to Chernobyl, that he didn't want to touch anything, let alone drink the water. So as you probably know, were making a movie about *The Princess Bride* and we think you'd make a great Westley, Rob said, after settling into a chair. Rob has that easy way of getting straight to the point in a funny manner. The as you probably know sounded almost lyrical, almost as if he were dragging it out in a singsongy way. I think my response was something fairly innocuous, like Yeah, I heard. That's great! In my mind, I was thinking, Please don't make me have to read. Well, were prepping in London already, and we'd like to talk to you about coming on board. This was getting better by the minute. His demeanor was casual and friendly. He had a wonderful way of putting you at ease, and as we began to chat, my anxiety slowly melted away. Rob seemed surprised to learn that I had spent considerable time in America and was intimately familiar with the world of 1970s television. Here I was, a British actor working on a film in Berlin, and our conversation revolved largely around my recounting favorite episodes of *All in the Family*. We segued into a larger discussion of comedy and pop culture, then Bill Cosby came up and somehow I don't quite recall how I found myself doing a Fat Albert impersonation, which Rob seemed to like. I explained to them that I had gone to Sarah Lawrence College, as well as having attended the other prestigious establishments in New York. We talked about *Saturday Night Live*. Again, Rob seemed pleased that I was such a fan of SNL. I didn't understand at the time why this was so important to him, but it wouldn't be long before I'd get the point. I knew a certain look was required for the role of Westley, and I suppose I fit the bill in that regard, but, then, so did a thousand other young actors. But they were also looking for someone with a sense of humor. And maybe I had a chance at being able to make these guys laugh. Which I had surprisingly accomplished with the Fat Albert impression. It was looking good, right up until tragedy struck. Look, I already think that you might be the right guy for this, Rob said. But do you mind if we just read a couple of lines? Just so I can hear it? Why? Why did he have to make me read? It was going so well up to that point. Okay, here goes... the moment of truth. Reading the lines. The fact of the matter was that I had gotten more work from straight offers than from auditions. But I couldn't think about that now. I had to put on a brave face. Rob reached into an envelope he had brought with him and pulled out a copy of the script. He opened it to one of Westley's monologues—the one in which he recounts to Princess Buttercup how he became his alter ego, the Dread Pirate Roberts—and handed it to me. I cleared my throat and slowly began to read. I was cold and unprepared, but luckily I knew the story and the tone of the novel. I also knew that many of the film's best lines would have to be delivered with a barely perceptible wink. After just a few sentences, Rob held up a hand. Okay, that's enough, he said. I wondered for a moment whether I had blown it already. I had barely read half a page. Really? Are you sure? I replied. Yeah. So how much longer do you have left on this movie? he asked. I took a deep breath, trying to hide my excitement. A couple of weeks, give or take. Perfect, Rob said. We're going to have a lot of fun making this movie, and hopefully, if the studio agrees, we'd like you to be a part of it. I stammered out something in response, the basic gist of which was Yes, I'd love to. Thank you! Was that an offer? Oh, my God, I think it was! But then again, he had said if the studio agrees. Why would they question Rob Reiner, a man who had already shown great skill at casting his other hit movies? I quickly changed the subject, trying to act as cool as I could. I asked them both when they were headed back to London. Maybe I could get them to stay for dinner and convince them that, even though I knew the reading sucked, I was still the right guy for the part. But Rob replied that they were in fact on their way to Paris that very afternoon. This was a whirlwind trip for him and Andy. It turns out they were in the process of trying to track down a world-famous wrestler for the role of Fezzik. Which is about all they could tell me. When we get back, we'll get in touch with your agent, and if all goes well, we'll see if we can work it out, Rob said. If that's all right with you? If that's

all right with me? Heck, yeah, its all right. It could not have been more all right. Of course, I stammered. We shook hands warmly and said our good-byes. And Im pretty sure I was on the phone with my agent before their elevator even reached the lobby. I think Ive got this one, I said, out of breath with excitement. Okay, Harriet said. Just sit tight. Ill give them a call. As soon as I hung up the phone I immediately started having an anxiety attack. Was Rob serious? Maybe he offers roles to all the actors he meets to make them feel better? I felt he was a man who could be taken at face value. Best not to waste energy fretting, I thought. Another role would come along soon enough. But you never can fool yourself. I knew in my heart, this one was different. I really wanted it. The next morning, Harriet called again. Are you sitting down? Yes. You got it! she said. They offered you the part. ANDY SCHEINMAN Well, every once in a while weve found ourselves in a weird position. There was one woman who didnt even have to read for the part, as she was a well-known actress. She came in for a meeting and said, Im prepared, let me read for you. And after she left, Rob said, Oh no. She cant do this. But hed already offered her the role! I was speechless. This was no small leap of faith on Robs part. I was hardly a household name. They could easily have cast any number of recognizable, bankable British actors who probably would have been deemed right for the role. But they chose me. In retrospect, it almost seemed too easy. Certainly, auditions dont always go so smoothly. And sometimes a meeting is just that. Sometimes you get the job. Sometimes you dont. You just never know. I guess Rob knew what he wanted, and I was fortunate enough to be in his field of vision. ROB REINER Cary was very funny. He did a Bill Cosby impersonation. I didnt ask him to do that. He was just kind of a naturally funny guy, and I thought, Wow, this guy could really do it. He was the only guy I saw that I thought could play that part. The same went for Buttercup and Fezzik. ANDY SCHEINMAN Casting was interesting. For many of the parts, we didnt have a second choice. We didnt have someone else to choose. We didnt have a second for Buttercup, we didnt have a second for Fezzik for sure! And we didnt have a second for Westley. If we didnt find those people I believe the last of whom was Cary then we didnt have a movie. To say Cary was the last piece of the puzzle isnt quite true. Cary was the puzzle. I mean, Andr was very important, but Cary was the movie, you know? And we didnt have anyone. We wanted Errol Flynn, and he had to be funny, which I dont think Errol Flynn was. Its not that you have to be funny, but you have to get the sense of humor. Its not go out and be hysterical, but you have to play the part with a little twinkle in your eye, which Cary pulled off beautifully. I remember we sat down and Cary opens the script, and he reads maybe four words, and we go, Well... this is the guy. I dont remember exactly how long the meeting was, but it was just like, boom! Thats him! Rob does this sometimes, and hes great. I mean, it doesnt happen a lot, quite frankly. But once in a while someone will read, or theyll come in and theyll have worked like all night preparing for this big audition, and theyll be halfway through the second line of a four-page scene, and Rob will say, Thats enough. I dont have to hear anymore. You got it. Its yours. As Harriet ran through the details of my deal, I was blown away. I recall telling her to accept the offer right away, before they changed their minds. BILLY CRYSTAL I remember Rob coming back from Germany and saying, Wait till you see this guy. Hes Douglas Fairbanks Jr. but hes also really funny and he does impressions. Hes a very alive guy, Cary. A very alert guy. And, you know, I love that about him. Hes always so in tune with whats going on at the moment. When I met him, I got the same feeling as Rob: this guy was in the same ballpark with Fairbanks Jr., a young Errol Flynn; kind of your dashing, sensitive leading man, who also could hurt you if he had to.