

Les Flambeaux



Prince Rupert Hidalgo Appleby von Dinklaker, Supreme Ruler of the Kingdom of East Blammo, could command huge battalions of fierce warriors with the mere flick of a finger. Every word he uttered was speedily written down and lauded by the court documentarians. A retinue of comely courtesans satisfied his slightest whim, day and night. Multitudes of countrymen respectfully stroked their ankles when speaking his name. And yet, the prince would trade everything – the flying yacht, the elephant choir, even the weekly courtesan synchronized “swimming” demonstrations – if *only* he could juggle. Oh, he could do the basics. He could juggle balls and clubs, rings and plates, hats and canes – once he even kept five balls in the air at one time. But the prince’s main ambition had so far eluded him: he couldn’t juggle the flambeaux, the flaming torches. For hours at a time, Rupert would stand in front of a mirror and juggle unlighted torches – catch fling and release, catch fling and release – over and over. He was pretty good with three torches and could sometimes do four. But when he put a match to them, all of his confidence went up in smoke (ha). His mouth dried up; a tic settled in his left leg. He could no longer toss straight up and he had to lunge to catch his props. Still, he was determined to perform for his subjects on the next Blammo Appreciation Day. By the time that day arrived, Rupert’s juggling skills had improved, but only minimally. A huge crowd had gathered in the Kingdom Courtyard to hear the prince’s annual remarks about bee hair production and protactinium futures. Instead, Rupert abruptly shucked his royal robe. Clad now only in jugglers togs, he bowed to his audience. Then he lighted the torches (he figured he’d start with three, and *maybe* work his way up to four), silently chanted his mantra (catch fling and release), and tossed his first torch. The crowd gasped in horror as it promptly landed on his head, flame side down. Oh, the prince was not severely burned, however the worst was yet to come. Hundreds of imitators set fire to their scalps, overwhelming the Blammo Hospital Emergency Room. Dozens more taxed the Kingdom Fire Corps to its limit as they inadvertently set fire to two-thirds of the surrounding forest. And *still* the prince could not curtail his flambeaux fixation – that is, until one day ... oh, but *that’s* another story!