

# Literary Characters: 1

## The Pied Piper

OK raise your hands if you know the Pied Piper story....What? It's been awhile? A little fuzzy on the details? OK, here's a quick summary...

In the early 17th century, the German town of Hamlin (sometimes spelled 'Hamelin') was being plagued by hordes of voracious and really annoying...rats! The town fathers had tried everything to get rid of the pests, but nothing worked. Finally, a stranger appeared in an oddly colored coat and carrying what turned out to be a magical musical instrument (something like an oboe). Anyway, he said he could rid the town of the noisome rodents if the mayor and the town council would pay him for his services. A price was agreed on, and the prince of pipers went to work.

Walking through the infested streets of the town, the piper played his magical tune...and the rats responded, leaving houses, stores, alleys and haunts and following the piper as if in a sorcerous trance—as, indeed, they were. Wherever the piper would lead, the rats followed...right down into the churning waters of the river Weiser.

When the Pied Piper returned to the town council for payment, they reneged and refused to pay him (politicians never change!). The piper left, warning of dire consequences. Once again he played his tune, only this time it was the town's children who followed his music. The piper led them into a mountain, and they were never to return.

Now, what you may *not* know, is that the story of the Pied Piper is supposed to be a metaphor for the Sixth Crusade in the Middle Ages.

The Fifth and Sixth Crusades in the 13th century were aimed, as all eight of those crusades were, at getting back the Holy Land from the Moslems. The Fifth and Sixth, though, were unique in that they were the 'Children's Crusades. In 1212, a 12-year old French boy began announcing that he had had a vision wherein an angel told him to gather the children of France, and God would make them victorious in their war against the Moslems. Tens of thousands joined him and they were all eventually captured by Moslem pirates and sold off into slavery, never even seeing the Holy Land. The Sixth Crusade was almost an exact duplicate of the Fifth, except it involved German children who left their homes (i.e., Hamlin) and were never seen again.

Today, Hamlin, Germany, has annual festivities marking (cashing in on) the occasion.

