

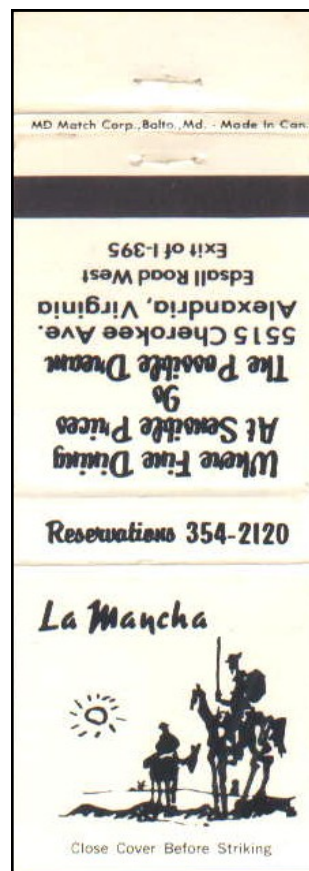
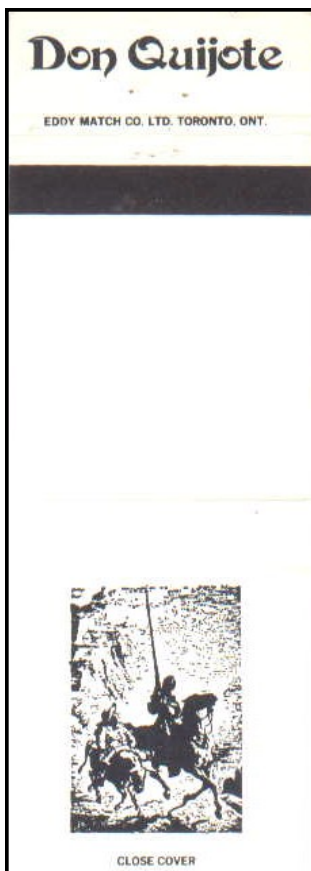
The Man From

Don Quixote! One of the most well-known names in world literature. The story has not only become an enduring classic, but it has spawned innumerable allusions, metaphors, comic books, cartoons, plays, operas...you name it. Indeed, the book, has made such a lasting mark on modern civilization that the very title, itself, has become a descriptive word in our language...*Quixotic*, referring to pointless behavior.

Written by Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes in 1605 and 1615 (he wrote it in two parts), it was an immediate success, and today *Don Quixote* is hailed as the world's first modern novel. A product of the Spanish Renaissance, it's a wonderfully satirical tale of a man chasing after impossible dreams, and often leaving a wake of destruction behind him, all of his eagerly hoped-for adventures turning into often hilarious and always entertaining *misadventures*.

Don Quixote tries to be a flesh-and-blood example of a knight in an attempt to force his contemporaries to face their own failure to maintain the old system of morality, the chivalric code. This conflict between the old and the new reaches an absolute impasse; no one understands Don Quixote, and he understands no one. Only the simple Sancho can mediate between Don Quixote and the rest of the world.

Until the 1800's, *Don Quixote* was thought of as a humorous story of a madman's adventures. But, then, it became a model for a new type of fiction with heroes who don't conform to their times. It's a comedy—it's a metaphor—it's a satire—and more! It's full of contrasts. Small, round Sancho riding on his donkey and the tall, thin Don Quixote riding on his scrawny horse, Rocinante; what Don Quixote envisions as opposed to what is; what is real and what is ideal; what's productive and what's



La Mancha

unproductive.

Distinguishing between a person's class and a person's worth was a fairly radical idea in Cervantes's time. In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes attacks the conventional notion that aristocrats are automatically respectable and noble, and there are any number of appropriate examples—the lowly goatherds and shepherds often appear as philosophers, and Sancho, despite his low social status, is wise and thoughtful. Cervantes's emphasis on these disparities between class and worth is a primary reason why *Don Quixote* was such a revolutionary work in its time.

Although it's a wonderful book for adults and youngsters alike, kids tend to avoid it like the plague—simply because it's so *big*! Ironically, only the *real* readers realize that it's the big books that have the most to offer, because when reading a *good* book—one doesn't *want* it to end! [*try convincing a seventh grader of that, though!*]

In the early 1970s, I happened to visit Spain several times (courtesy of the United States Army), and in Madrid I stumbled across a downtown park that was actually dedicated to Cervantes' endearing characters. Roaming across the park's expanse of lawns, I saw two statues prominently sitting right before me. I recognized them immediately. There was Don Quixote, mounted on his questionable steed and dressed in his aging armor, accompanied by the ever-faithful Sancho, seated on his little burro...immortalized forever in bronze.

Not surprisingly, then, references to both the book and the characters abound amidst Hotel/Motel/Restaurant covers. I have 11 such covers and boxes as part of my Literary Characters collection..so far!

