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Of Stalks and Diamonds. Simulation Studies of Membrane Fusion and the Role of Fusion Peptides

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Preface

Groningen? Where is that?

the Author

When a colleague in my previous group suggested I apply for a position in Groningen, I was skeptical, to say the least. During my further search for a suitable group, topic and location to obtain my doctorate, however, I found myself strangely attracted to this small city in the north, and the idea of leaving Germany for the Netherlands appeared less and less unreasonable.

Now that I am writing these lines, I have finished a four years contract in Groningen and can say that the idea was quite reasonable indeed, and that although living here was not how I had imagined (except for the weather which exactly matched my expectations), it was well worth it. Groningen is a beautiful city inhabited by a fascinating mixture of Dutch, Frisians, and almost any other nationality, which I have found to greatly enrich my life by exposing me to very different mentalities and temperaments. While this internationality makes English a viable option for communication, I personally found that in order to get the most out of your time in the Netherlands, knowledge of the Dutch language greatly helps to get to know the locals. As an additional benefit, words like *knuffelbeest*, *stapelslaper*, *gratismonster* and *bommelding* make learning Dutch a very entertaining experience, at least if you happen to be German. The fact that Groningen is a student city served to provide opportunity for many interesting discussions and the broad spectrum of courses offered in and around the city gave me ample opportunity to pursue different interests. The only thing a bit lackluster is the landscape around Groningen, but fortunately the province Drenthe is close enough to provide a quick fix of trees and naturally running water if needed, and in case that that is not enough, the island Schiermonnikoog is only a short bus ride and ferry transfer away.

Scientifically, I spent most of the time in Groningen studying the topic of lipid membrane fusion, which turned out to be interesting and challenging, as will be described on the following pages. I learned a lot, both from conducting my research and from my once-per-year supervision of an exercise group for students.

As a project of considerable size and duration, many people contributed in one way or another to the completion of this thesis, and I wish to express my gratitude for the help and stimuli I received, and for the great time I had in general.

First of all, I would like to thank my promotor Siewert-Jan Marrink for having been a very approachable and pleasant-to-work-with supervisor whose impres-

sively positive outlook on life would have been worth coming to Groningen all by itself, and my copromotor Alex de Vries, whom I have found to be a genuine admirer of the beauty of science and who was always willing to unbiasedly discuss my many questions.

I would also like to thank my colleagues: Durba for using her skills in social intrigue for (mostly) noble purposes, Jelger for being Jelger (which is meant as a compliment), my roommates Frans and Martti for being great guys to share an office with, with special thanks to Frans for his tirelessness in talking Dutch with me, and special thanks to Martti for his exceptional helpfulness, and all of my other fine colleagues, Andrzej, Djurre, Magda, Aldo, Tsjerk, Ying, Marlon, Lars, Somer, Martin, Hao, Renee, Daniela, Cesar, Xavier, Monica, Ruud, Kamil, Pieter, Hilda, Jolanda, Nicu, Katy, Samuli, Klaas, Alia and Meike, each of which has made my life in Groningen a bit more special than it would otherwise have been, including the inevitable one or two that I forgot to name.

Another important group I wish to thank is the many inspiring teachers I had the pleasure of learning from, both during my stay in Groningen and before I came here.

In direct connection with the completion of this thesis, I am grateful to the members of my manuscript approval committee for the time they spent on reading my thesis and to Djurre de Jong for helping me with the Dutch summary.

Special thanks go to my paranympths. Nai-Hua, I consider myself lucky to have met you and am very thankful for the support you have given me in the last years. You are definitely one of the reasons I enjoyed my time in Groningen as much as I did. Martijn, we should have talked more often.

Zu guter Letzt möchte ich auch meinen Eltern herzlich danken, ohne die dieser Arbeit wichtige Grundlagen gefehlt hätten.

Marc Fuhrmans

Groningen, April 2010