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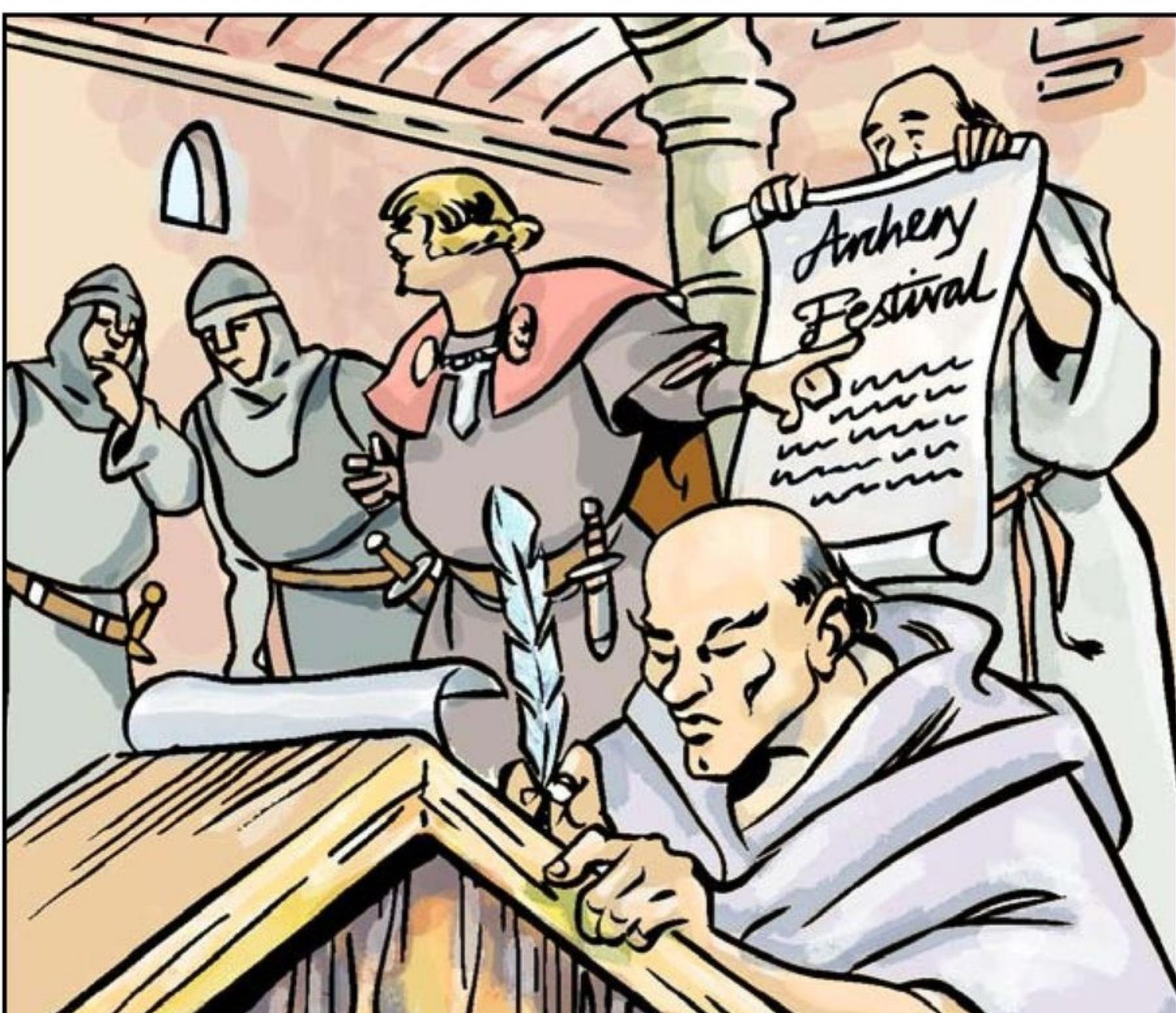
# Robin Hood Wins the Sheriff's Golden Arrow



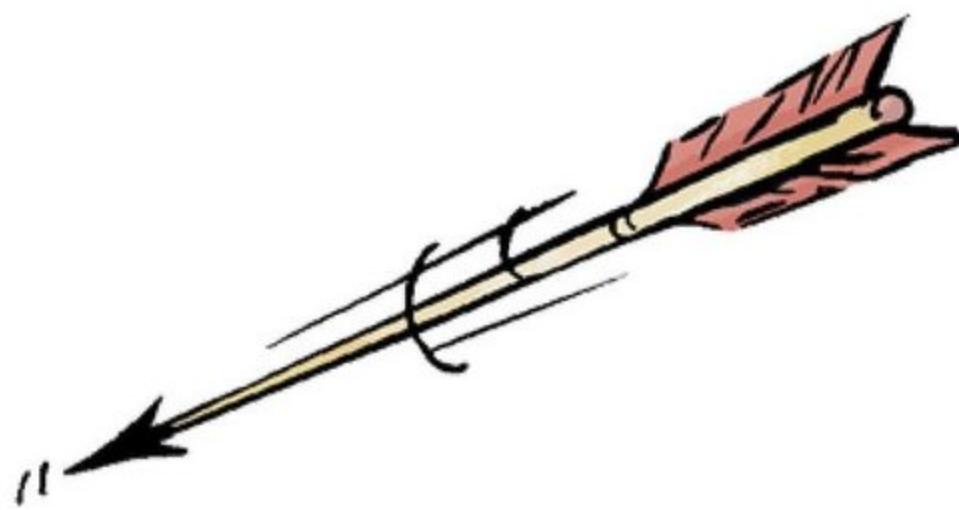
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An English Folktale Adapted by Karina Barrentine  
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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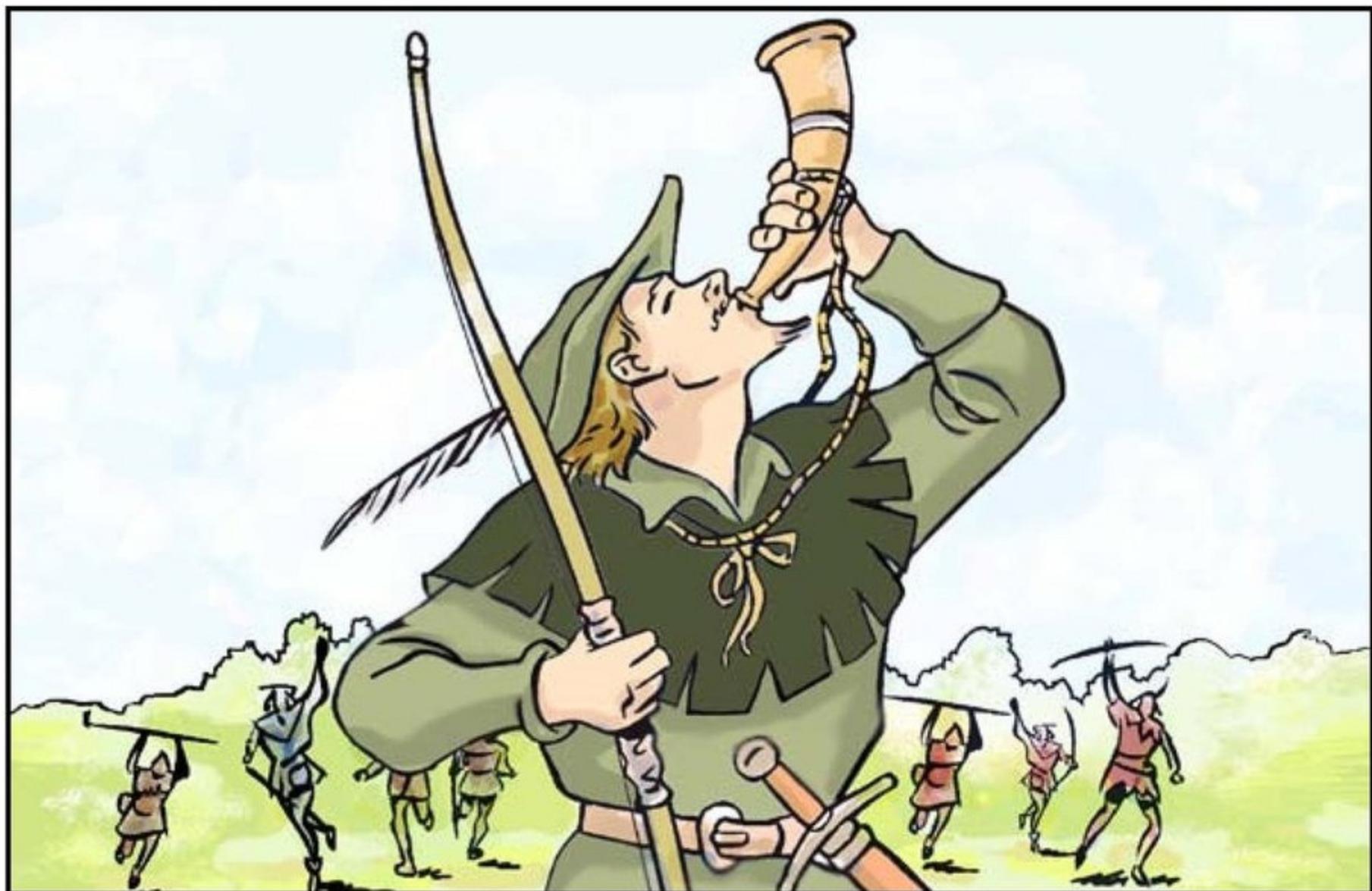
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## Introduction

To protect themselves from the ruling lords who hunted them as outlaws and robbers, Robin Hood and his band of Merry Men lived in hiding deep within the heavily wooded Sherwood Forest. While the conditions of this outdoor life could be difficult, the men felt a strong kinship with the trees, birds, and other animals of their realm. More than a hundred men strong, the band had built sturdy shelters of bark and logs to keep out the rain and cold. When the weather was mild enough, they slept outdoors on deerskins, under the stars. They did not mind the lack of soft beds or tables and chairs. They cooked their meals over a roaring fire and ate together, sitting on the ground or on fallen logs.



Robin's men had assorted backgrounds and histories. Once, they had been common men who worked their farms or plied their skilled trades in freedom. But most had lost their homes, farms, and even their families, to the cruel laws, policies, and taxations under which the entire country now suffered as a conquered land. Each man was devoted to Robin Hood's heartfelt cause and readily obeyed his every request, and each had sworn to protect the poor and landless, as well as women and children, with their very lives. Robin needed only to sound a note on his horn, and the men would appear, ready for the next task. These hearty men were the best archers, wrestlers, and swordsmen in all of England, but every one of them knew that Robin Hood was the best archer in the land.

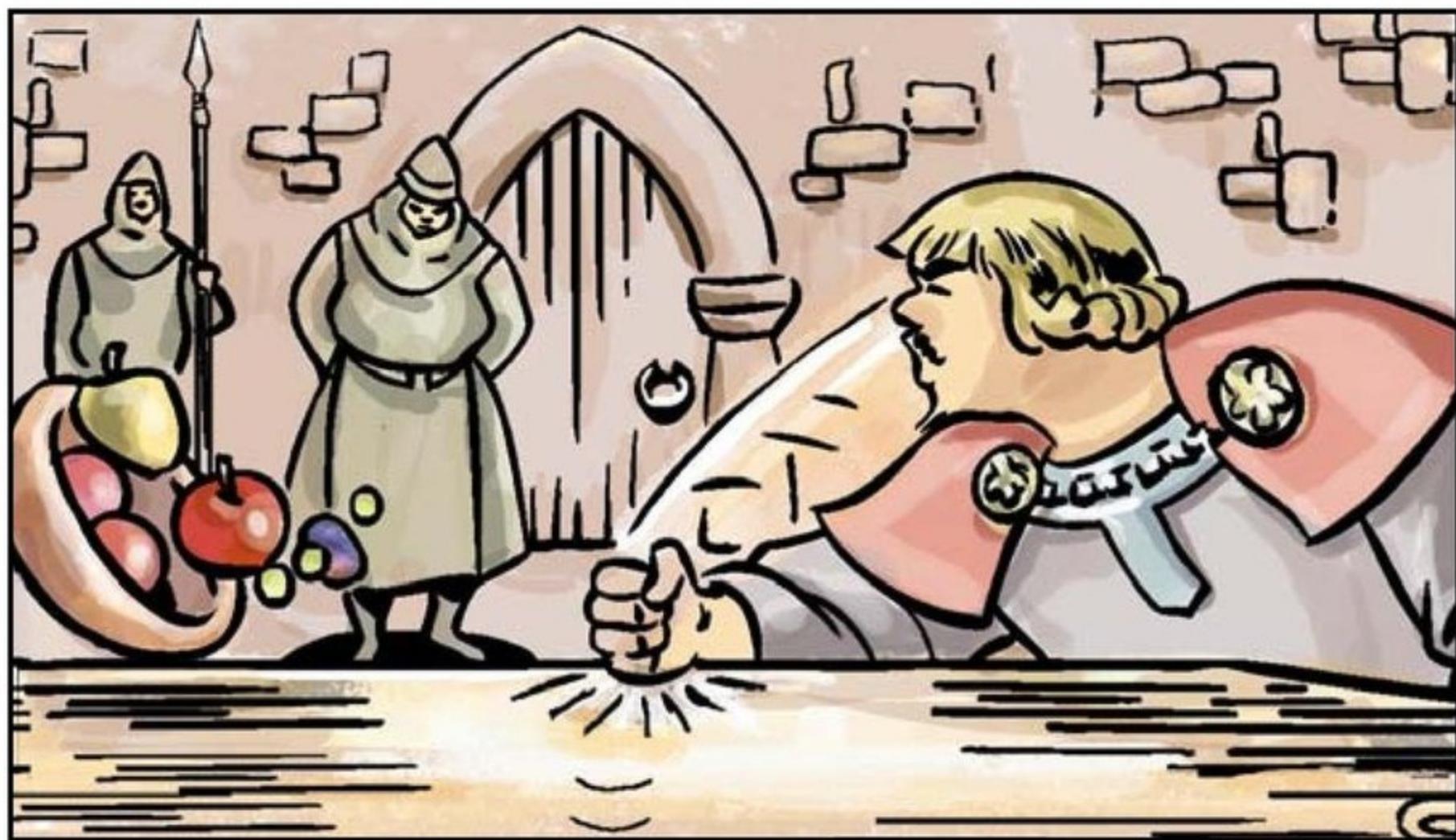


Times were **dire** in England since the French had conquered the country. The greedy men who now governed had ruled harshly for many years, without mercy or understanding, for their own benefit. The English monarch, King Richard, had been far away at war for many years and had no knowledge of how his people were treated in his absence. And so, to mount a campaign against the effects of these unjust laws and crippling taxes, Robin had become an outlaw. His reasoning and tactics were simple: he would steal back what had been stolen from the people. To this end, Robin Hood's men would stop and rob wealthy travelers who ventured along the forest roads. Or they would lure unsuspecting lords and tax collectors with the promise of a grand feast in the forest. When the lords came to dine, Robin's men would empty their guests' bulging purses, taking back the gold the lords had stolen from the people. To his enemies, Robin and his men were outlaws and robbers; to the common folk whom they helped, they were beloved heroes.



## The Sheriff of Nottingham

The Sheriff of Nottingham hated Robin Hood and hated the people who revered him. His anger fueled his smoldering rage and sometimes clouded his judgment. He wanted nothing more than to catch Robin Hood and hang him publicly, but, time after time, Robin escaped capture. The Sheriff only grew angrier and more spiteful each time he was outwitted. Once, he had sent a stout guard with a **warrant** to arrest Robin Hood. Robin met the guard on the road and invited him to a feast in the forest. The **amiable** guard ate so much that he fell asleep and, while the guard slept soundly, Robin stole the warrant right out of his pocket! Without a warrant, the guard couldn't arrest Robin Hood and his men, and he had to go back to the Sheriff empty-handed—but well fed.



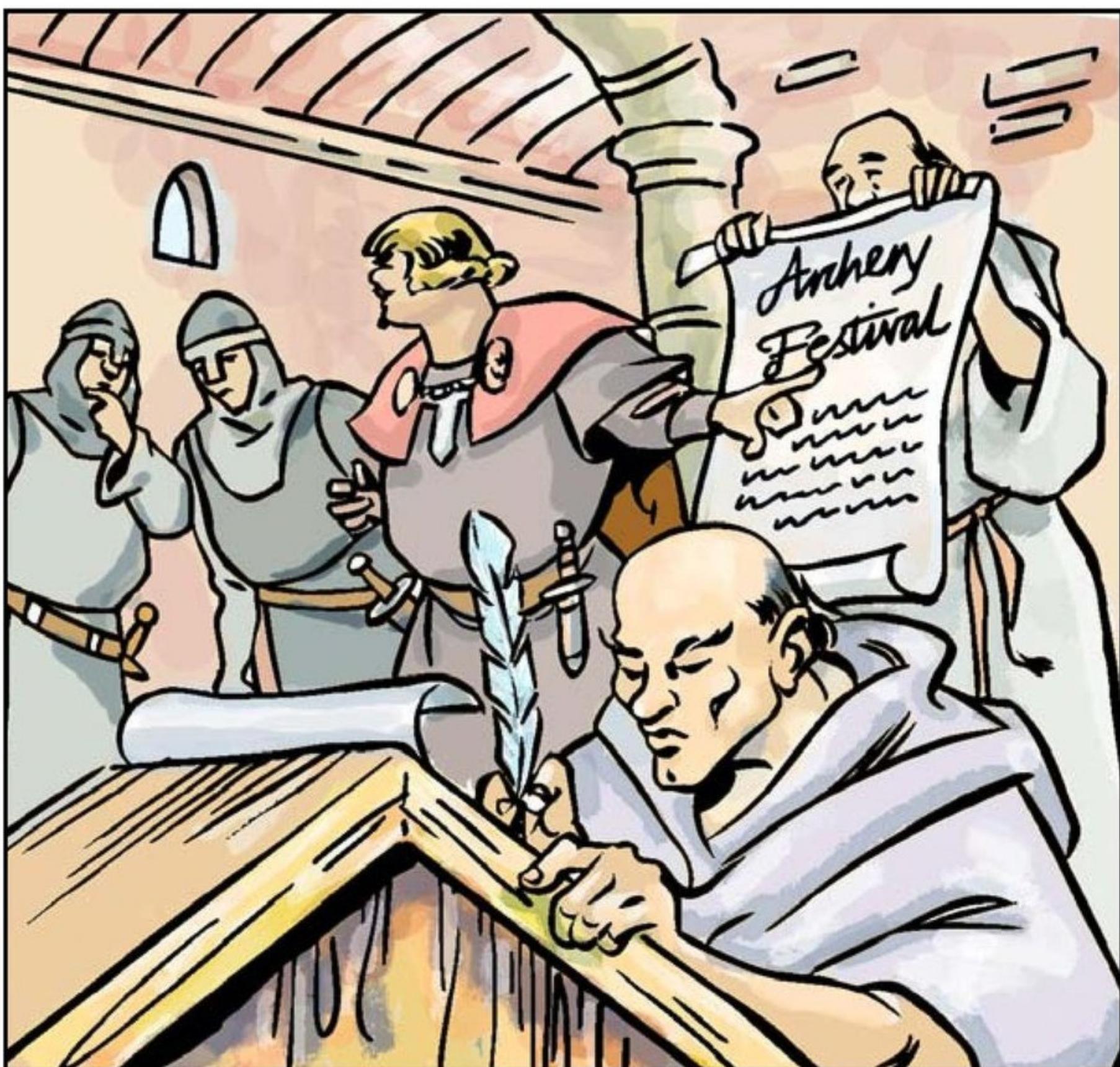
On another day, the Sheriff had tried to trap Robin Hood's band by luring them out to hunt the king's own deer. Venison, deer meat, was one of Robin Hood's favorite foods, but the deer of Sherwood Forest were considered the personal property of the king, and for common people to hunt them was forbidden by law. Commoners caught poaching deer in the forest were hanged. When young Will Scarlet shot a stag and went to retrieve it, the Sheriff's men jumped up from their hiding places to capture him. They rained arrows down upon Will, but Will was quick and escaped unhurt. Scores of Robin Hood's men, who had been in hiding nearby, returned the attack with their own arrows—but their aim was much better. Many of the Sheriff's men were wounded so, outskilled and outnumbered, they fled.



On another occasion, the Sheriff did manage to catch three of Robin Hood's men. The Sheriff planned to hang the men publicly in the town square of Nottingham as warning to others who might want to help Robin Hood. But Robin and his forest band came to the rescue of their comrades. His Merry Men disguised themselves as townsfolk and took places amongst the crowd, while Robin dressed as the hangman. He wore all black, with a hood hiding his face. As the well-disguised Robin walked his captured men toward the gallows, he secretly placed weapons in their hands as he cut the ropes that bound their wrists. Robin Hood and all of his men then fought their way out of the square and back to safety in Sherwood Forest. All the townspeople present that day saw that Robin had outsmarted the Sheriff once again.

But the most humiliating defeat for the Sheriff had occurred right in his own home. Robin had disguised himself as a butcher, and Robin's right-hand man, Little John, wore the clothes of a servant. In the Sheriff's home—right under his nose—the two outlaws robbed him of his best silver dinner plates.

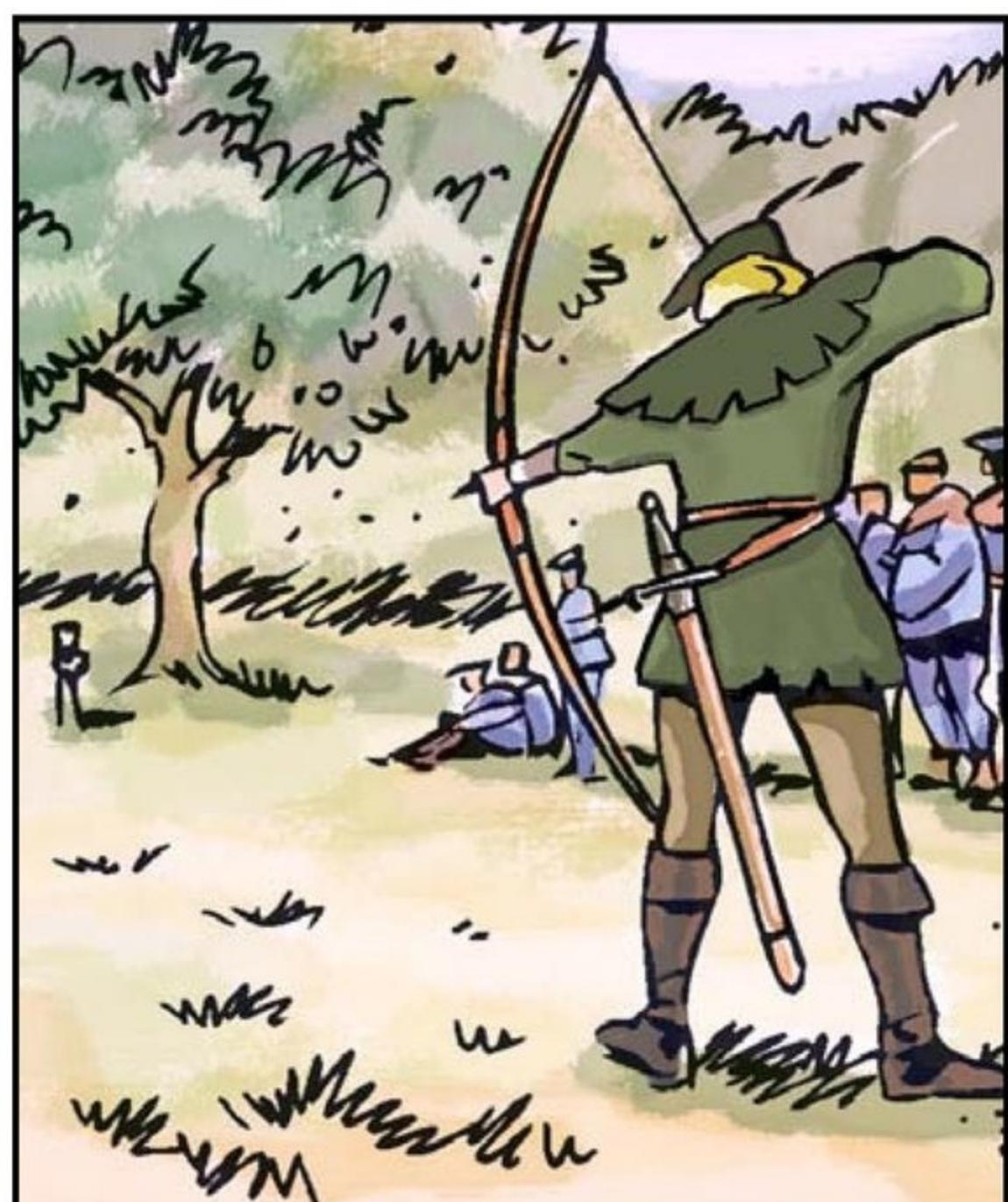
Little John left in the middle of the night, taking the silver plates with him, but Robin Hood remained in the Sheriff's home, still disguised as a butcher. The next day, he escorted the Sheriff out into the countryside under the **pretense** of showing him a herd of cattle he wanted to sell cheaply. The greedy Sheriff followed along, unwittingly, right to the edge of Sherwood Forest. Suddenly, Robin blew a signal on his horn and the Merry Men appeared, surrounded the stunned Sheriff, and drove off his hapless guards. Deep in the woods, they sat him down at a delicious feast—served on the Sheriff's own stolen silver plates! After the feast, Robin Hood sent the Sheriff home, humiliated but unharmed. For no matter how cruelly the Sheriff was treating other people, the Merry Men were political outlaws, not murderers. Being sent home with his life intact did nothing to soften the resolve of the furious Sheriff. He vowed again to capture and hang the hated Robin Hood.



Every evening, the Sheriff paced before his enormous fireplace and complained to his wife, the Lady of Nottingham. He railed about the stupidity of his guards. He racked his brain, trying to think of a way to catch the thief, once and for all. “I’ve got it,” said the Sheriff one evening. “By trickery I’ll catch the **knav**e. I’ll hold a great archery festival, and hither will come the finest archers in all of England to shoot for the prize I’ll create—a gold-covered arrow. Surely, this will draw out Robin Hood and his men, and I will have them.”

## The Archery Festival

When news of the great archery festival reached Sherwood Forest, the people were very excited. Robin Hood and his men were indeed drawn to the Sheriff's contest—how could they resist? It would have been very hard for the finest archers in the land to let others compete for the honor of winning the contest while they could only watch in secret. But wisely, they realized they couldn't wear the familiar green suits they wore to **camouflage** themselves in the forest. They knew that if the Sheriff or his men recognized them in the crowd they would be seized by the guards and thrown in the dungeon of Nottingham Castle. Instead they chose to attend the festival in various disguises. Some dressed as barefoot monks, some as traders, others as farmers and peasants. Robin Hood was the hardest to recognize, for he was dressed from head to toe in the tattered rags of a poor beggar.



Even though Robin was well disguised, his loyal men were worried and begged him not to go. “‘Tis a trap for the Sheriff to lure thee to thy death,” warned Little John.

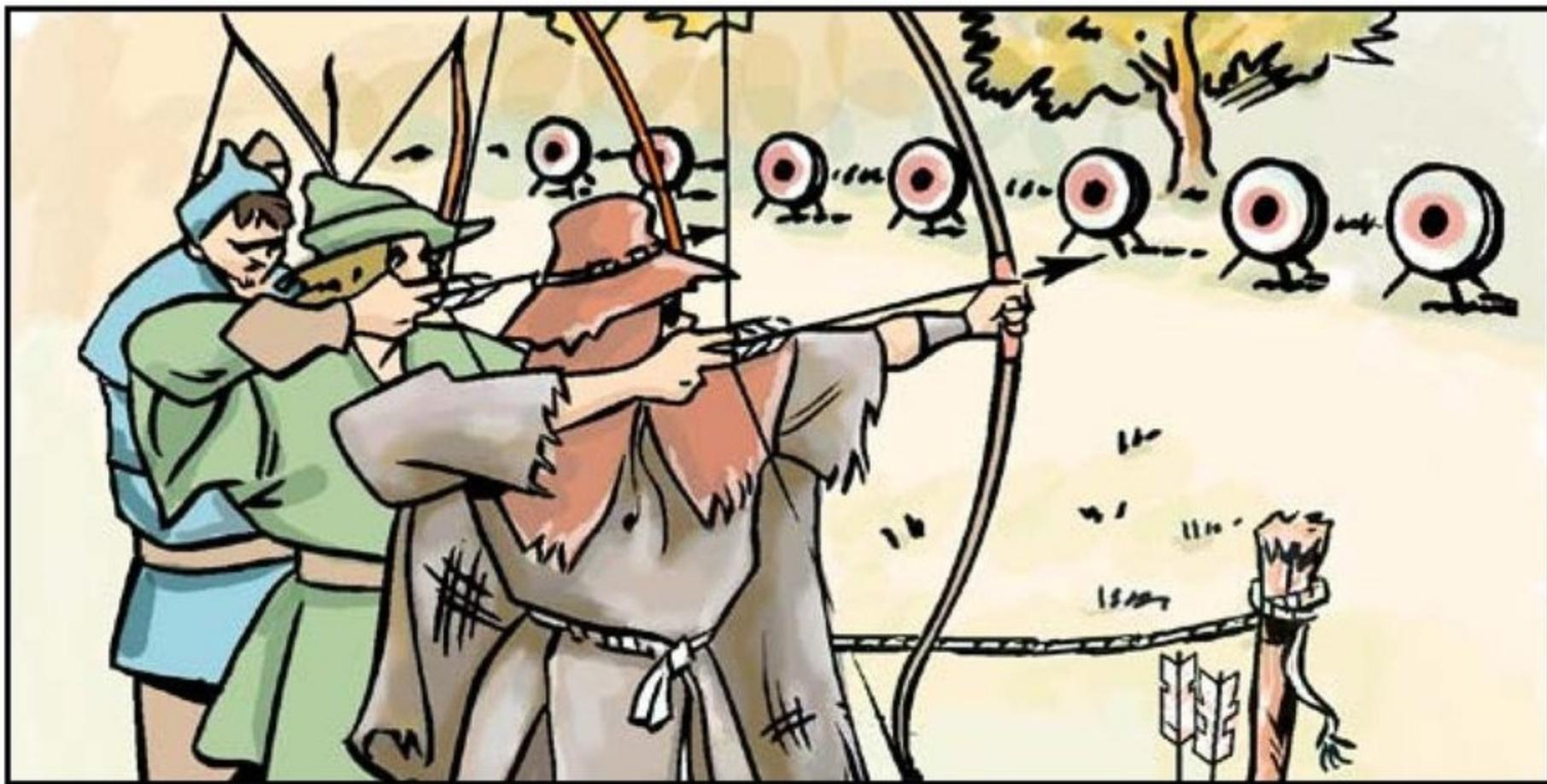
Will Scarlet agreed. “The Sheriff o’ Nottingham and his guards shall know thee by thy gold locks and by thine eyes, even if thou put on such rags. Please, please do not go to the contest, Robin.”



Robin Hood just laughed at his band’s worried concern for him. “Why, as to my yellow hair, I can color it with walnut stain. As to my eyes, I can cover one with a patch so that my face’ll not be seen in the crowd. I’ll look different enough. The Sheriff and his guards do not frighten me—in fact, a bit of danger will make it all the more jolly.”



So the brave Robin Hood left for the contest concealed in the ragged clothes of a beggar, and his men left by separate routes, each in his own disguise. They found the field where the contest was to be held a wondrous sight. Workers had set up rows and rows of benches for the viewers to sit on. Festive glee filled the hearts of the people in the crowd, and they had donned their finest attire for the day. All the wealthy lords were dressed lavishly, like brilliant **birds of paradise** strutting in the sun. The Sheriff had on purple velvet while his lady wore blue velvet, both trimmed with pure white fur. They wore broad gold chains around their necks that reflected their great prosperity.



The Sheriff sat uneasily, looking high and low for Robin Hood, searching every face closely while, unnoticed and unrecognized, Robin stood in his beggar's clothes not ten feet from the Sheriff's **ornate** chair. The Sheriff fumed in his eagerness. Robin would come, he was certain. The targets had been set up eighty yards away from where the archers were to stand—so distant that it was difficult to make out the circles clearly. In the first round, dozens of archers took turns shooting just one arrow, and many missed the target completely and were eliminated. The ten archers who scored best were then allowed to shoot two arrows each. From those ten men, the three best archers would qualify for the final competition. Each finalist would then have three more shots and the golden prize would go to the archer whose arrow hit nearest to the center of the target.

Finally, it was time for the ten best archers to **vie** for the prize. The Sheriff glared at the ten men. "Fie! Where can he be? I felt certain that Robin Hood would be amongst these final archers," he grumbled to the guard at his side. "Could not one of these men be Robin Hood in disguise?"

"Nay, sir," said the man-at-arms. "Six of them I know well; they are the best archers in England. There's Gill o' the Red Cap, Diccon Cruikshank, Adam o' the Dell, William o' Leslie, Hubert o' Cloud, and Swithin o' Hertford. As to the other four, one is too tall, one is too short, and one is too lean to be Robin Hood. That leaves only the ragged beggar, and too dark is his hair and beard to be Robin Hood, and he is blind in an eye. Robin Hood has stayed away, hiding in Sherwood Forest."

The guard was glad Robin hadn't fallen for the trap, for he didn't want to see Robin harmed. Robin Hood had friends in many places, and even the Sheriff's own guards had helped him get away many times.





The ten top archers now lined up, aimed, and let their quills fly. The crowd gasped as each arrow struck near the center of the target. When the time came for the last three archers to raise their bows, Gill o' the Red Cap's first arrow struck only an inch from the center. His second and third were even closer. Applause and cheers rose from the benches. Then Robin Hood, who looked to everyone like the poorest beggar in England, stepped forward and pulled back his bow. He stood there a moment, as a breeze blew by, then shot his arrow—straight into the very center! The crowd gasped and then cheered wildly. Adam o' the Dell still had yet to shoot, but instead he unstrung his bow. "An archer for forty years I've been," said the man, "and I'll ne'er do better 'n that."



And so the tattered, unknown beggar won the prized gold-covered arrow that day. But as he handed the prize to him, the Sheriff had a scrunched and sour face and was deep in tortured thought. "Thou art the greatest archer I have ever seen," he said. "Even better than that coward Robin Hood, who dared not show his face this day. Come join my service, then, and I shall pay thee well."

"Nay, I will not," said the ragged stranger, firmly, as he quickly walked away with the arrow. As he left, the Sheriff's words were running circles in Robin's mind. "I cannot bear for him to think I am a coward," he said to Little John. "I wish the Sheriff to know that it was I who won his fine gold-covered arrow today."



## The Message

The Sheriff was glum that night at the rich supper table with his wife. "I thought sure to catch that thief with this contest," he said to her. "Perhaps Robin Hood had not the **mettle** to show his face." Right then, a shaft flew through the window and stuck straight into the venison roast on the table. Jumping up from his chair, the Sheriff unfolded the note that was wrapped around the arrow. It identified the beggar who had won the contest as none other than Robin Hood himself. When the Sheriff looked closely at the arrow he realized that it was the very same arrow he had covered in gold and given as the prize! Robin Hood's men had scraped off the gold and kept it. Fooled again!

The **duped** sheriff upended the table and stormed off, madder than he had ever been in his whole life, while nearby, Robin Hood and his men had never been merrier.

## Glossary

<b>amiable</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	friendly (p. 7)
<b>birds of paradise</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	birds found in warm climates that have feathers of many different colors (p. 14)
<b>camouflage</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to blend in with one's surroundings (p. 12)
<b>dire</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	terribly bad (p. 6)
<b>duped</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	tricked (p. 19)
<b>knavery</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a person who makes mischief (p. 11)
<b>mettle</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	courage (p. 19)
<b>ornate</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	decorated with great detail (p. 15)
<b>pretense</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a pretended purpose (p. 10)
<b>vie</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to compete (p. 16)
<b>warrant</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a written order granting permission to arrest a person or search a place (p. 7)

This story is an English folktale adapted for Reading A-Z by Karina Barrentine from an original retelling by Bertha E. Bush published in 1912.

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Level Y Leveled Book  
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