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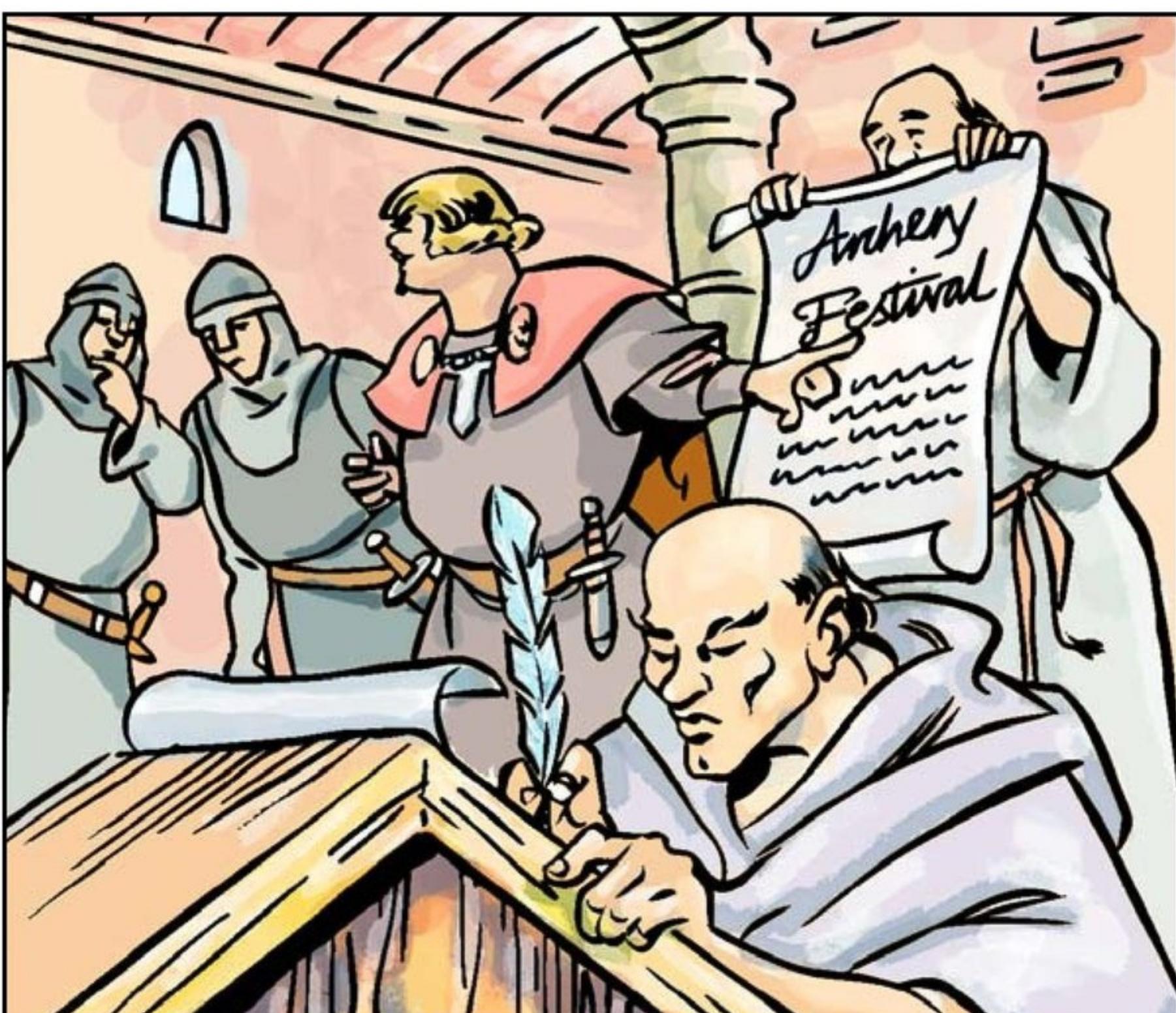
Robin Hood Wins the Sheriff's Golden Arrow



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An English Folktale Adapted by Karina Barrentine
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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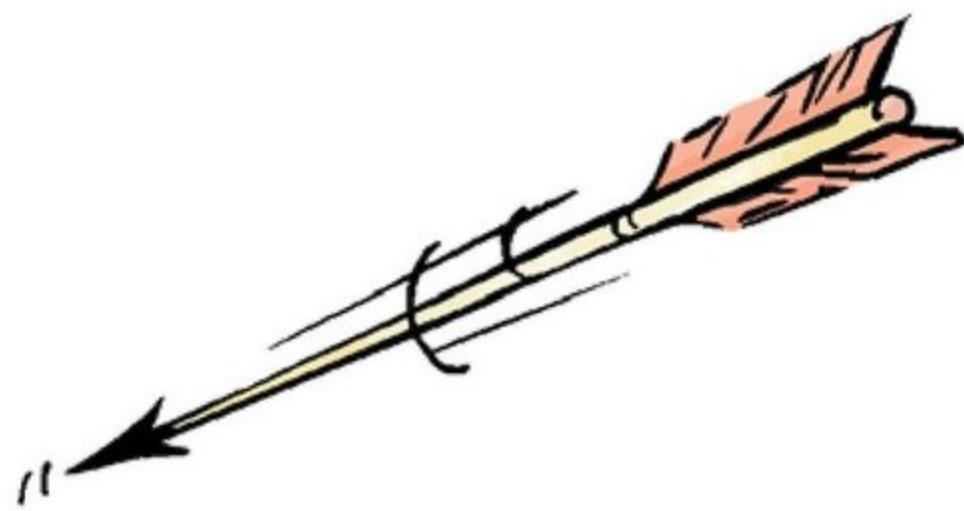


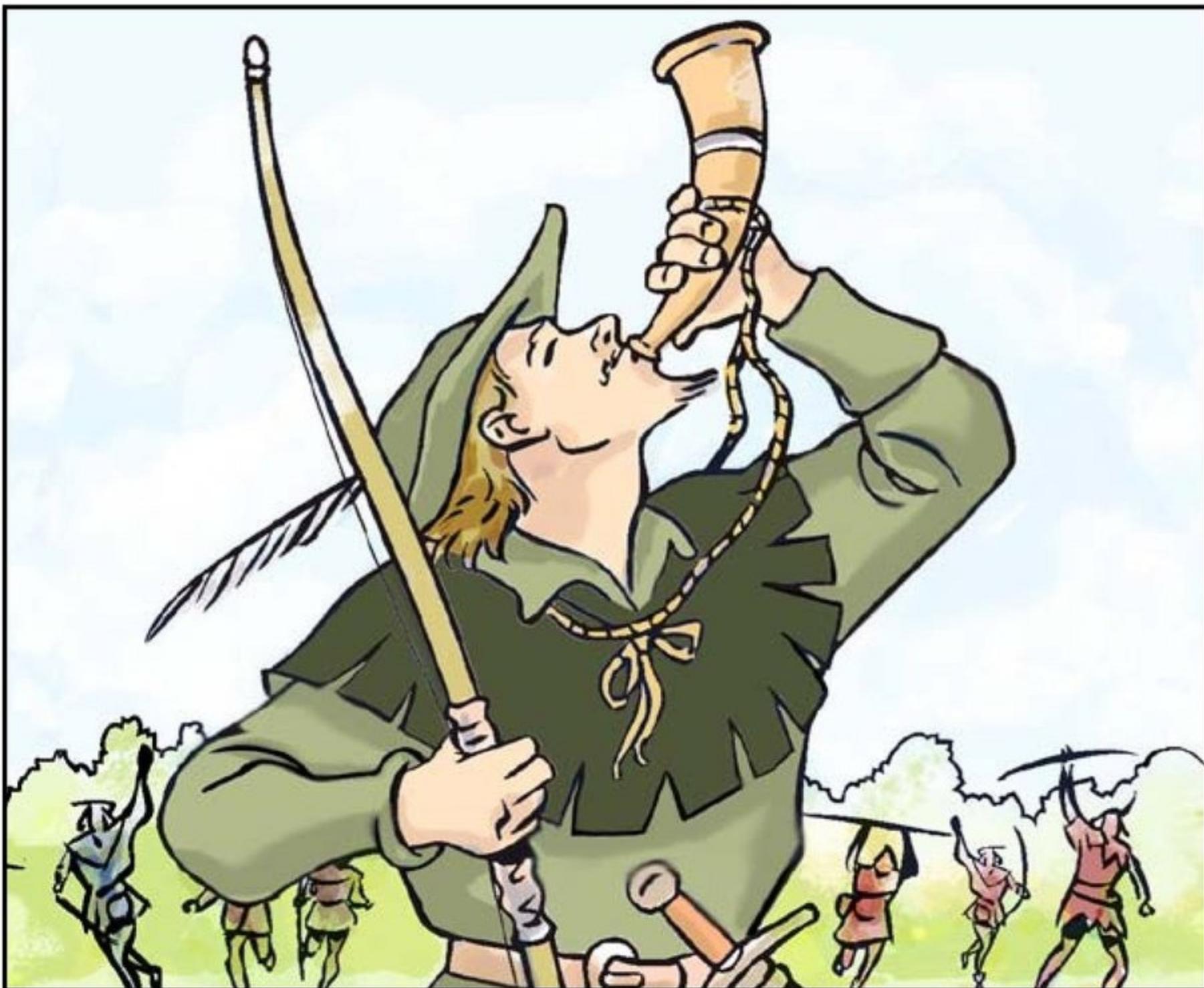
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Introduction

Robin Hood and his band of Merry Men lived a rugged, outdoor life deep inside Sherwood Forest. While such conditions could be difficult at times, the men found it pleasant to live among the trees, birds, and other animals of their realm. They had built sturdy shelters of logs and bark as protection from the cold and rain, and they didn't mind the lack of soft beds or fine chairs and tables. When it wasn't raining, they slept on deerskins, out under the stars. For their meals, the hearty band cooked over a roaring fire and ate sitting on the ground or on fallen logs.



Robin Hood's followers numbered more than one hundred, and all were considered to be hunted outlaws by the ruling lords of the land. While it was true that they broke the unjust laws that had been placed upon the people, they knew that they were in the right. Each man in his band was devoted to Robin Hood and his cause, and obeyed his every word. Robin needed only to lift his horn to his lips and play a note, and the men would appear, ready for a new task or adventure. They were strong and determined, and they 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 bad in England, for the French had conquered the country and had ruled it harshly for many years. The English monarch, King Richard, spent many years at war far away, and his absence allowed the lords to rule the land to their own benefit. The king knew nothing about what was happening to his people while he was away. These **cruel** (KROO-uhl) lords took full advantage of the situation and became rich by overtaxing the poor, sometimes taking their farms and everything a family owned. They also were in league with **corrupt** churchmen, who misused the trust and faith of the common people.

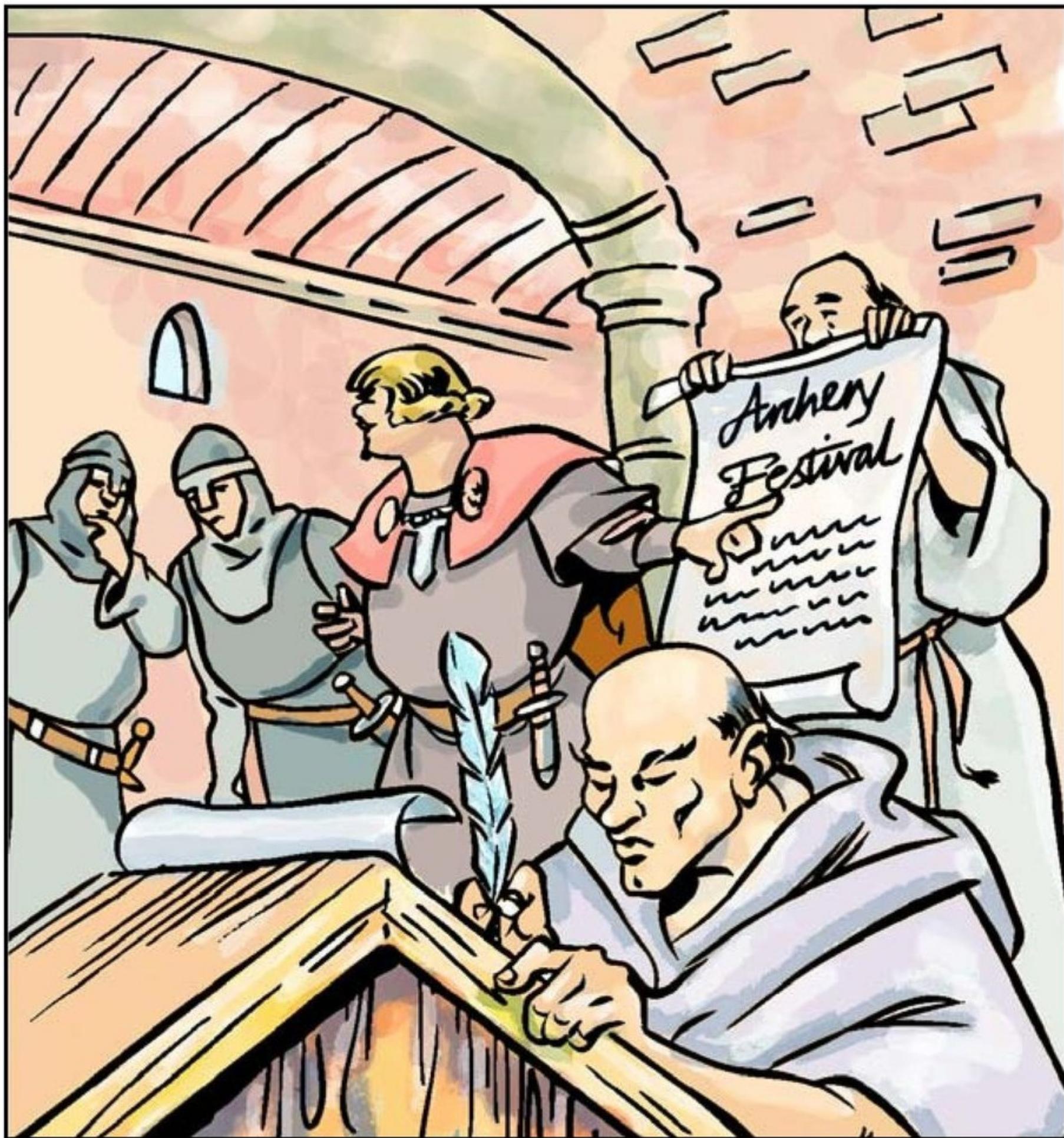
After witnessing these injustices for so many years, Robin Hood launched a campaign to steal back what had been stolen. To accomplish this, Robin and his men would rob wealthy travelers who ventured along the roads near Sherwood Forest. They also stole back unjust taxation money. On some occasions, they would invite corrupt officials into the forest with the promise of a feast. When the lords came to dine, Robin and his men would rob them of their bulging purses and then return the gold they collected to the English people. To his enemies, Robin and his men were hated and feared robbers; to the common people they helped, they were beloved heroes.



The Sheriff of Nottingham

The Sheriff of Nottingham hated Robin Hood with a dark and vengeful heart. He hated that the people loved Robin and protected him. His intense hatred burned inside him, and fueled his anger, often causing him to think unclearly. He wanted nothing more than to catch Robin Hood and hang him in public.

Time after time, Robin escaped the Sheriff's traps. One day the Sheriff sent a stout guard with a **warrant** to arrest Robin Hood. Robin met the guard on the road and invited him to join a feast in the forest. The guard ate so much that he fell asleep. While the guard slept, Robin stole the warrant right out of his pocket! Without a warrant, the guard couldn't arrest Robin Hood and his men. The guard had to return to the Sheriff empty-handed—but well fed.



No matter how often he failed, the furious Sheriff of Nottingham would not give up his hunt for Robin. He knew it was no use sending more guards, no matter the number. "I've got it," said the Sheriff of Nottingham. "I'll catch him by trickery. I'll hold a great archery festival. All the best archers in England will come here to shoot for the prize I'll create, a gold-covered arrow. Surely that will draw Robin Hood and his men to the contest. Then I can arrest and hang them."

Robin Hood and his men prepared to go to the archery contest. They knew that they couldn't wear the familiar green suits they wore to **camouflage** (CAM-oh-flawjh) themselves in the forest. Instead some dressed as barefoot **monks**, some as traders, and others as farmers and peasants. Robin Hood was the hardest to recognize, as he was disguised from head to toe in the tattered clothes of a beggar.



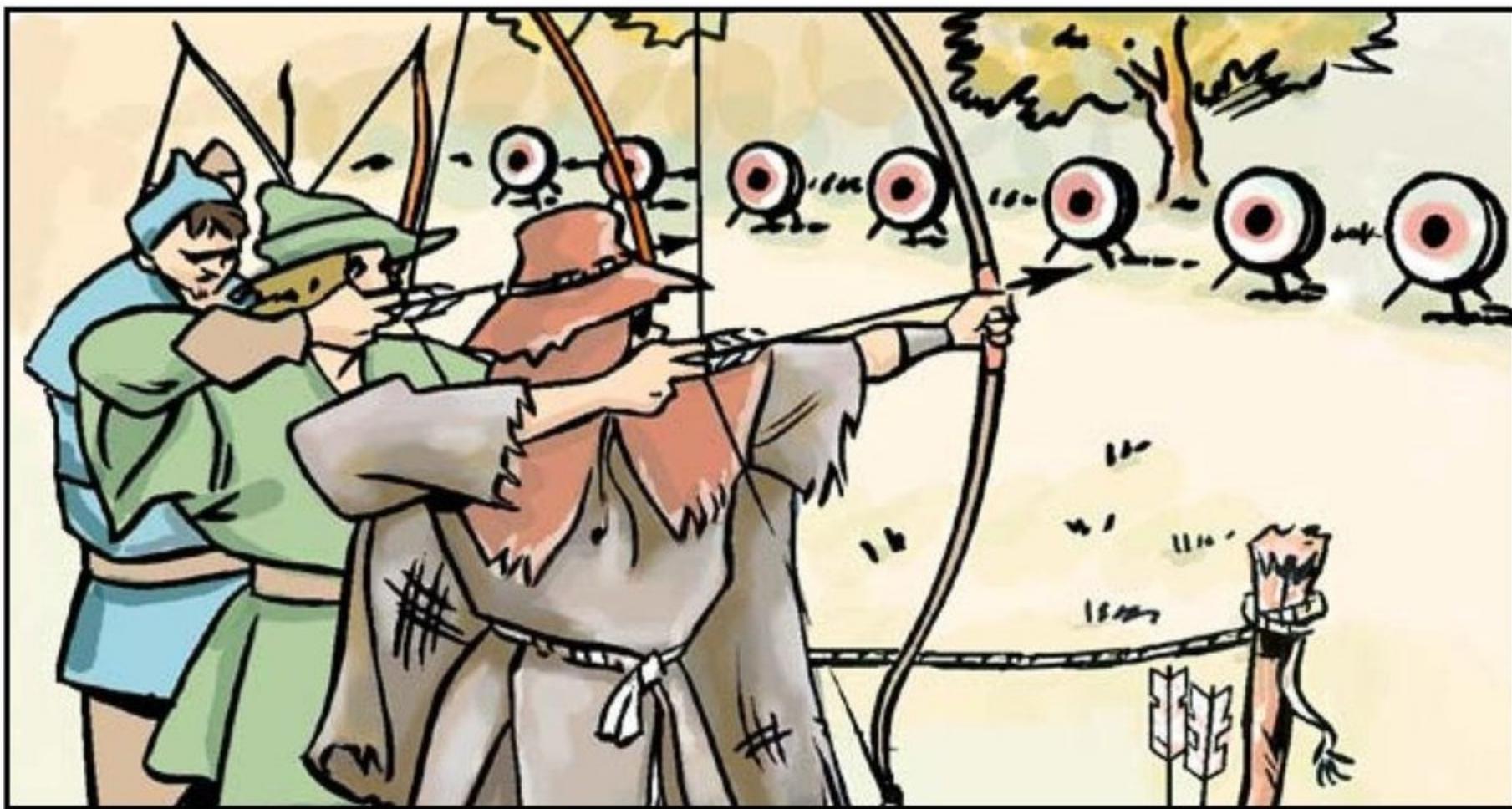
Yet even though Robin was well disguised, his loyal men were worried about his safety. They begged Robin not to go to the festival. "This contest is a trap," warned Little John. Will Scarlet agreed. "The Sheriff and his guards will know you by your hair and eyes, even if you are wearing those old clothes."

Robin Hood just laughed at his band's concern for him. He wasn't afraid. "Why, as to my yellow hair, I can darken the color with walnut stain. As to my eyes, I can cover one of them with a patch so my face will look different in the crowd. The Sheriff of Nottingham and his guards don't scare me. In fact, a bit of danger will make it all the more fun."



The Archery Festival

So the brave Robin Hood left for the contest wearing a beggar's rags, and his well-disguised men all left by different routes. The field where the contest was to be held was quite a sight. Workers had set up rows and rows of benches for the viewers to sit on. Festive glee and anticipation filled the hearts of the people in the crowd. They had all worn their very best clothes for the occasion. All the wealthy lords were dressed richly and were strutting like bright **birds of paradise**. The Sheriff had on purple velvet while his lady wore blue velvet. Both outfits were trimmed with pure white fur, and the couple wore broad gold chains around their necks that reflected their prosperity.



The Sheriff looked everywhere in the crowd for Robin Hood. Unnoticed in his rags, Robin was standing not ten feet from the Sheriff. Although he looked closely at every man's face, the Sheriff did not recognize him.

The archery targets had been set up eighty yards away from where the archers were to stand. The targets were so distant that it was difficult to make out the circles clearly. In the first round of elimination, dozens of archers took turns shooting just one arrow, and many of them missed the target completely. The ten best archers, those who had actually hit the target, were then challenged to shoot two more arrows each. The three best archers out of those ten men would then each have three more shots. The prize would go to the archer whose arrow landed nearest to the center of the target.

Finally it was time for the ten best archers to **vie** for the prize of the golden arrow. The Sheriff glared at the ten men. "I was so sure Robin Hood would be one of the final archers," he grumbled to a guard at his side. "Couldn't one of these men be Robin Hood in disguise?"



"No, 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. Of 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. His hair and beard are much too dark to be Robin Hood's, and he is blind in one eye. Robin Hood has stayed away."

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



The ten best archers aimed at the distant target and let their **quills** fly. The crowd watched in awe and cheered as each of the arrows 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. Then Robin Hood, who looked to everyone like the poorest beggar in England, shot his arrow—into the very center! The crowd gasped, then cheered. Adam o' the Dell was to shoot next. Instead, he unstrung his bow when he saw the beggar's arrow strike the center so cleanly. "I've been an archer for forty years," said the man, "and I will never be able to shoot better than that."



And so the tattered beggar won the prized gold-covered arrow. But the Sheriff's face was **scrunched** and sour when the time came to give the arrow to him. "You are the best archer I have ever seen," he said. "You shoot even better than that coward Robin Hood, who dared not show his face today. I will pay you well if you join my service."

"No, I will not," said the ragged stranger firmly, as he walked quickly away. But the Sheriff's words bothered Robin as he walked back to the wood. "I can't bear to have him think I am a coward," he said to Little John. "I will find a way to let the Sheriff know I am the person who won his fine gold-covered arrow."



The Message

The Sheriff was glum that night at the rich supper table with his wife. “I was certain I could catch that thief with this contest,” he said to her. “Perhaps Robin Hood was too much of a coward to show his face.” Right then, a **shaft** flew through the window and stuck straight into the venison roast on the table. The Sheriff jumped up from his chair and unfolded the note that was attached to the arrow. The note said that the beggar who had won the contest had been Robin Hood himself. It instructed the Sheriff to look closely at the arrow. When he did, the Sheriff 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.

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

Glossary

archers (<i>n.</i>)	people who are skilled at shooting with a bow and arrows (p. 5)
birds of paradise (<i>n.</i>)	birds found in warm climates that have feathers of many different colors (p. 10)
camouflage (<i>v.</i>)	to blend in with one's surroundings (p. 9)
corrupt (<i>adj.</i>)	dishonest; having stopped doing good in order to cheat or gain something (p. 6)
cruel (<i>adj.</i>)	mean; unkind (p. 6)
duped (<i>adj.</i>)	tricked (p. 15)
monks (<i>n.</i>)	religious people who usually wear long robes and live separately from the rest of the world (p. 9)
quills (<i>n.</i>)	feathers, especially pointed feathers used in arrows and sometimes as pens (p. 13)
scrunched (<i>adj.</i>)	squashed; wrinkled; puckered (p. 14)
shaft (<i>n.</i>)	the straight wooden part of an arrow (p. 15)
vie (<i>v.</i>)	to compete (p. 12)
warrant (<i>n.</i>)	a written order authorizing an arrest or a search (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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