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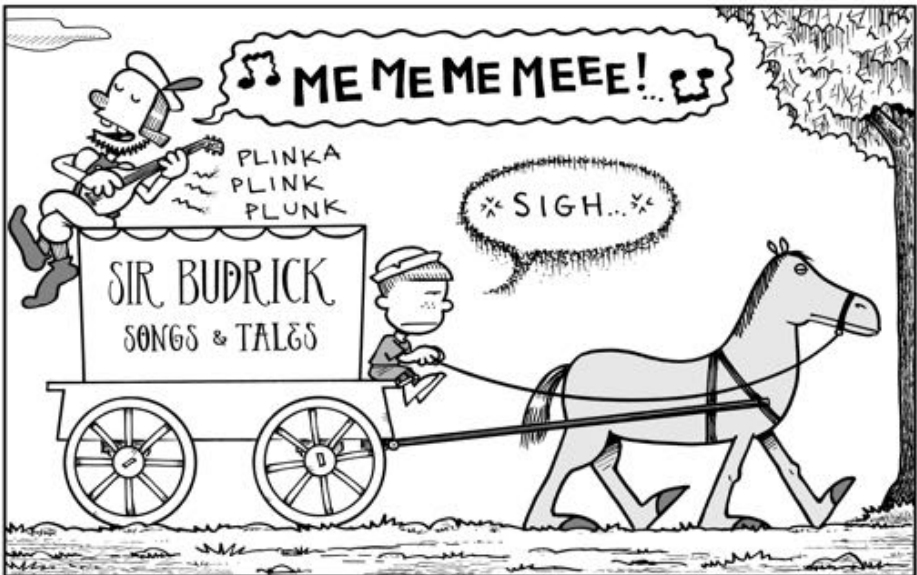
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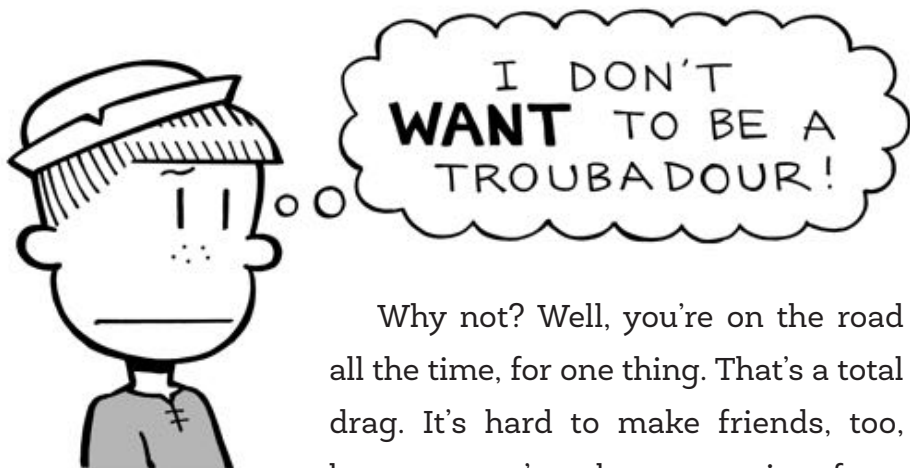
I'm going to tell you a secret: being a troubadour kind of stinks.



You know what troubadours are, right? They're travelling entertainers. And it's actually my uncle Budrick who's the troubadour, not me. He does all the singing and juggling. I'm just along for the ride.



You could call me his apprentice, I guess. I'm supposed to practise the lute (the instrument he's playing that looks like a giant chicken leg), learn all the songs, and prepare myself just in case Uncle Budrick sprains a tonsil. But here's the problem:



Why not? Well, you're on the road all the time, for one thing. That's a total drag. It's hard to make friends, too, because you're always moving from

village to village. And this wagon we live in isn't exactly a four-star hotel. What else? Oh, yeah . . .

It's the MIDDLE AGES!

Yup, we're talking fourteenth century. That means a lot of important stuff hasn't been invented yet. Like paved roads, the toothbrush, and a little convenience known as indoor plumbing. It's a tough life, and—sorry, Uncle Budrick—I can't see how a few songs or some lame magic tricks will make it any easier.

... ESPECIALLY
WITHOUT AN
AUDIENCE!



HM? WHAT'D YOU
SAY, MAX?

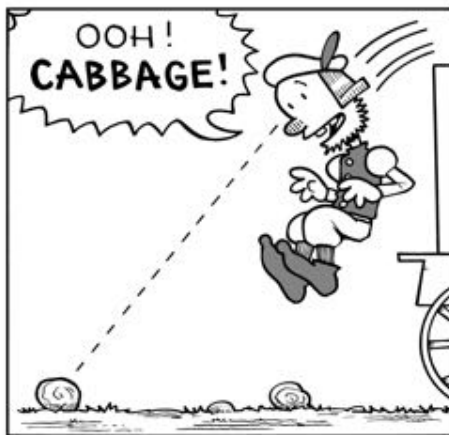


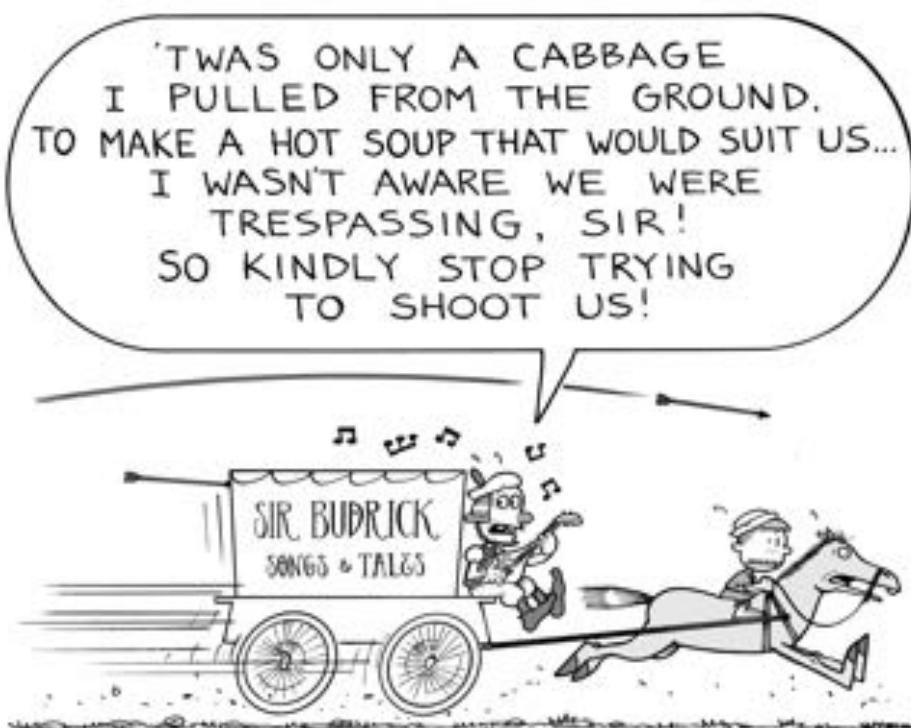
I SAID
THERE'S **NO-**
BODY HERE!



See, here's how this troubadour thing is SUPPOSED to work: You roll into some random town. A crowd gathers. You put on a show. The crowd applauds and throws money in a basket. You take the money and use it to buy food and avoid starving to death.

Sounds simple enough, right? It's a basic business transaction. Except Uncle Budrick is a lousy businessman. He doesn't focus on the money. He gets distracted by other things, like ...

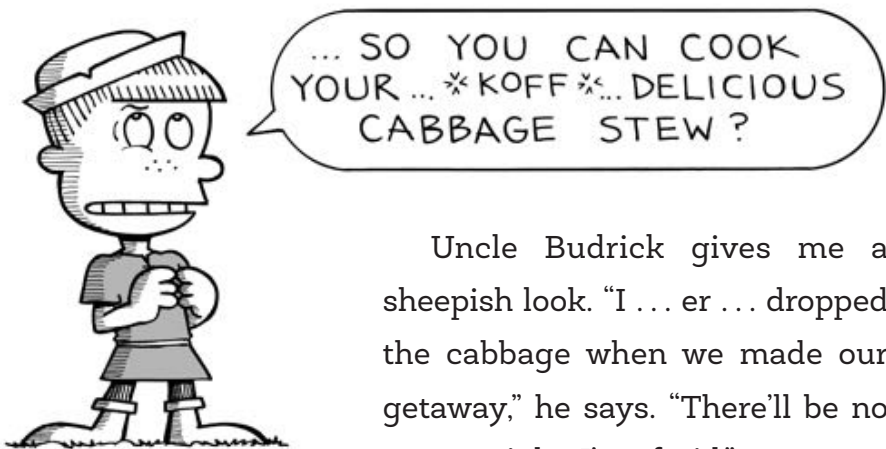




This happens a lot. I don't mean that getting shot at is part of our daily routine, but we dodge more arrows than you might think. Apparently, people don't like strangers taking shortcuts through their property. Or maybe they just hate Uncle Budrick's singing. Anyway, by the time we manage to outrun Sir Bullseye back there, it's getting dark.



Sounds good to me. We slow to a stop in a grove of trees, and I unhitch the wagon. "Want me to build a fire?" I ask.



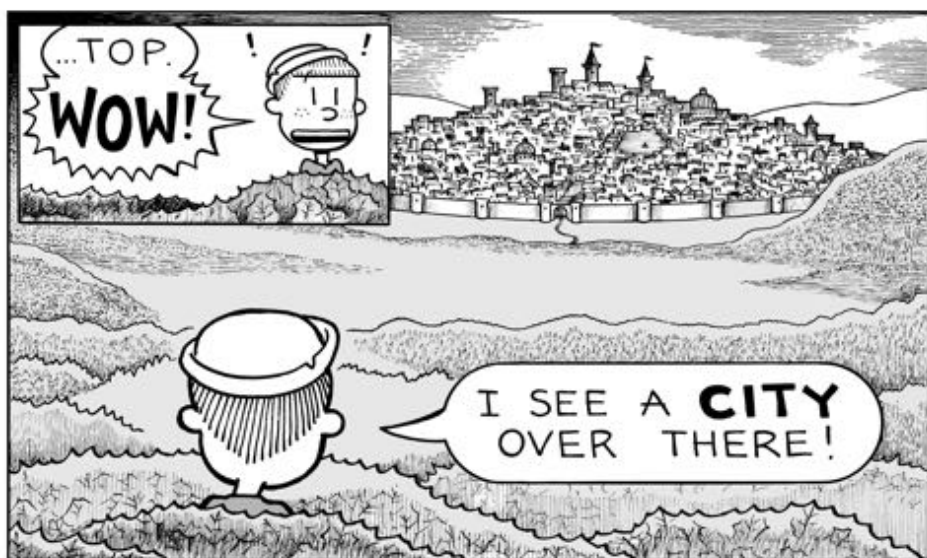
Uncle Budrick gives me a sheepish look. "I . . . er . . . dropped the cabbage when we made our getaway," he says. "There'll be no stew tonight, I'm afraid."



Uh . . . okay, I like the optimism, but . . .



Lucky for us, I happen to be a world-class tree climber. I scramble up into the tangle of branches while Uncle Budrick waits below.



"Oh, HO!" Uncle Budrick says, his voice growing excited.





Okay, THAT got my attention. “What do you mean, you HAD to leave?”

“Something unfortunate was about to happen,” Uncle Budrick answers with a shudder. “If I’d stayed in Byjovia, Max, I very well might have become . . .”



I WANT TO HEAR **MORE!**



PERHAPS THE BEST WAY TO EXPLAIN IT...



♪ OHHHHHHH... ♪
LEND ME YOUR EARS AND I'LL-





“In Byjovia,” Uncle Budrick begins, “when a young man turns ten, he has to start studying a trade. Most boys learn from their fathers. If your dad is a baker, you become a baker. If your dad is a miller, you become a miller.”



“Well, MY dad was a knight,” he continues, “but a very minor one. He wasn’t much more than a squire, honestly. Anyway, he couldn’t wait to enroll me in knight school.”

My jaw nearly drops into the campfire. “They had a SCHOOL for KNIGHTS?”