

ROBERT MUCHAMORE'S
**ROBIN
HOOD**

PIRACY, PAINTBALLS & ZEBRAS

HOT
KEY
BOOKS



NEWS UPDATE

'Good afternoon, this is Channel Fourteen serving the Central Region. I'm Lynn Hoapili with your local headlines.

'Our top story is that traffic on Route 24 is still subject to severe delays after a tyre blew out on a truck filled with zebras during this morning's rush hour. The vehicle rolled onto its side and the rear doors flew open as it smashed into the central barrier.

'Eyewitnesses described scenes of chaos as weak and filthy zebras escaped the truck and stumbled into twelve lanes of busy traffic. Several vehicles crashed as they swerved to avoid the animals. Five motorists were taken to hospital by air ambulance and, while most of the animals fled into surrounding forest, vets had to destroy one zebra that was hit by a car.

'A spokesperson for the Animal Freedom Militia has claimed the zebras were being shipped to

Sherwood Castle for an upcoming trophy hunt and that cramming so many animals into a small truck is a serious breach of animal welfare regulations. Sherwood Castle management has so far refused to comment.

'In other news, there has been a surprise twist in the controversial trial of Ardagh Hood. Moments before his case went before a judge, Hood accepted a plea deal. In return for a three-year prison sentence, the Locksley man pled guilty to the theft of laptop computers and to resisting arrest.

'Scuffles broke out when news of the guilty plea reached Ardagh's supporters outside court, and police made several arrests. Hood's lawyer, Tybalt Bull, said he would have liked to continue the fight to prove Ardagh's innocence, but that his client risked a sixteen-year prison sentence if he had been found guilty after a full trial.

'Those are the noon headlines. I'll be back with our main bulletin at one o'clock.'

1. PINT-SIZED TEARAWAY

Sherwood Forest stretched across the land, from Lake Victoria to the swampy Eastern Delta. Twenty thousand square kilometres, inhabited by bears, snakes, gigantic crunchy-shelled bugs and a vast population of yellow birds that lived nowhere else on Earth.

Estimates of Sherwood's human population varied between thirty thousand and a quarter of a million, and most of them were hiding from something. Bandits, bikers, religious cults, terrorists, refugees and one twelve-year-old boy with a £100,000 bounty on his head.

To find Robin Hood you had to travel eight kilometres north from his birth town of Locksley, take a right off the twelve-lane Route 24 expressway, then hike down a road that had mostly been reclaimed by forest until you reached the parking lots of Sherwood Designer Outlet Mall.

It was more than a decade since the sprawling mall sold its last bargain kitchenware and discounted handbags. Now the abandoned H-shaped shopping centre housed

a well-organised outlaw community, protected by trip wires, motion alarms and armed guards stationed on a precarious wooden observation tower.

Although it was just after one on a late spring afternoon, Robin Hood had taken to his den on the upper level of an abandoned sporting-goods outlet. The den was eight by six metres, with walls made from wobbly shop partitions. He sprawled face down on a musty but comfortable mattress, buried under oversized cushions, two duvets and a Berber rug.

Robin's bestie, Marion Maid, had been sent upstairs to tell him lunch was ready. She only realised he was under the mound of bedding because a couple of grubby toes poked out.

'Hey, pal,' Marion said quietly, as she knelt by the bed. 'Everyone's about to eat.'

'Don't feel like it,' Robin said.

His words were clipped because he didn't want Marion to hear that he was upset. Normally she'd have dived into the cushions or grabbed Robin's ankle and tickled his foot. But today was different.

'I'm really sorry about your dad,' she said.

'I can't even visit him without getting busted,' Robin complained. 'My mum's dead. And my big brother is living in luxury at Sherwood Castle with his new mommy.'

'You've got me,' Marion said. 'And everyone here has your back.'



Robin didn't respond, so she tried a different tactic. Unfortunately it came out sounding grumpier than she meant it to.

'What are you gonna do? Stay under that mound of covers for the rest of your life?'

'I can try,' Robin snapped back.

'If you can't face everyone, how about I bring a plate up? This afternoon we can watch a movie on Netflix. Take your mind off things.'

'Internet's down,' Robin said. 'And there's *nothing* to do. I'm totally bored and I'm not allowed out of the mall.'

'What are we supposed to do? With a hundred-thousand bounty on your head, every scumbag in Sherwood Forest will be after you.'

Marion watched the mound of covers shift slightly. Dust billowed as the rug slid onto the floor and she smiled as Robin sat up, sweaty and shirtless. His eyes were gluey from crying and his hair was even messier than usual.

'What's funny?' Robin asked, as he stretched and yawned.

'You look adorable,' Marion teased, as she spotted Robin's T-shirt on the floor and flicked it towards him. 'Like a lost puppy.'

'I'm actually kinda starving,' Robin admitted, a bit more cheerful as his head popped through the neck hole of his shirt.

'You're always starving,' Marion said.





‘Growing boy,’ Robin said, slapping his belly, then creasing up his nose. ‘Why do you stink of fish?’

‘Went fishing with my cousin Freya,’ Marion said, as she sniffed her hoodie. ‘Must have got splattered when we were gutting them.’

Robin looked sour as he stood up. ‘Thanks for inviting me.’

‘We didn’t invite you cos you can’t leave the mall without guards,’ Marion said, as Robin pulled on wrecked Vans.

‘I can’t hack another week sitting around here, with nothing but schoolwork and your aunt Lucy’s sudoku books,’ Robin said. ‘I need an adventure – like busting my dad out of jail.’

Marion laughed. ‘We’re twelve, and Pelican Island is the most secure prison in the country. So ten out of ten for ambition, but a fat zero for practicality.’

‘So I sit around here, getting older, doing nothing?’

‘We get bossed around by grown-ups, do boring schoolwork and try to have fun when we can,’ Marion said. ‘That’s basically what being a kid is.’

‘Who wants to be an ordinary kid?’ Robin asked determinedly as he grabbed the carbon-fibre bow hooked on the wall beside his bed. ‘I’m not ordinary, I’m Robin Hood.’

Marion cracked up laughing as she opened the den’s wobbly wooden door.

‘What’s funny?’ Robin asked.

‘You,’ Marion laughed. ‘You’re so full of it!’

