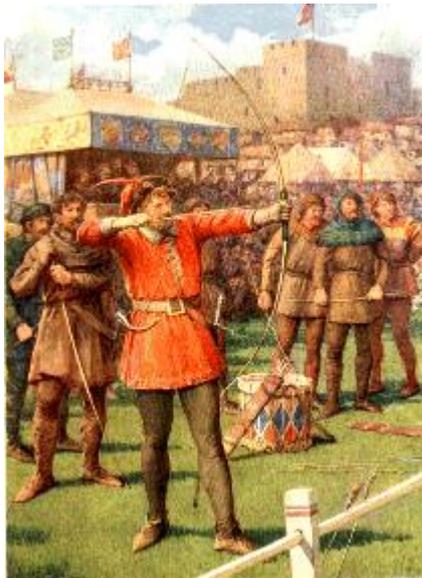


Edwinstree Middle School

Reading Journal

# *British Legends*



**Name:**

# Contents:

The Silver Arrow

The Silver Arrow Contest Newspaper Report

King Arthur

St George and the Dragon

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

The Highwayman By Alfred Noyes

Slaying the Dragon and Cheating the Devil from Brent Pelham

Humpty Dumpty and the Fall of Colchester

The Glass Knight (Saffron Walden)

## Weekly Guide

Come into school prepared to discuss your reading

### Essential Reading

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
The Silver Arrow (Text 1)	King Arthur	St George and the Dragon	Sir Gawain and the Green Knight	The Highwayman	Slaying the Dragon and Cheating the Devil from Brent Pelham

### Further ideas to choose from

Cool Chilli including essential learning	Medium Chilli	Hot Chilli
Read each essential text	Read the other texts	Read further - look on the internet for more British legends or borrow book from the library <a href="http://myths.e2bn.org/index.php">http://myths.e2bn.org/index.php</a>
Collect new words and find their meanings	Write sentences for new words you have found	Use new words in your own writing
Write a summary of a legend in no more than three sentences	Write your own questions (Use The Reading Detective in the Linking Literacy Passport)	Use PEE to answer questions
Draw a detailed picture of a setting or character	Make a model of a setting or character	Write a missing chapter for one of the knight's missing adventures
Find out 3 things about King Arthur	Write a fact file about King Arthur	Compare different versions of King Arthur stories

## The Silver Arrow (Text 1)

"You blithering idiot!" stormed the Sheriff of Nottingham. "How can you let it happen to you again? This is the second time in three weeks!! Don't you learn any sense?"

So saying, he snorted in disgust and stomped away, not waiting to watch his soldiers untie an embarrassed Guy of Gisborne, dressed in only his undergarments, strapped backwards to his horse with his own belt and reins.

"That's another secondment of taxes lost," he yelled, a few minutes later, as Guy stood before him. "I don't know what Prince John will have to say about your incompetence, when he arrives next week. You'll be lucky to keep your head! Why didn't you take a different route, like we had agreed, you nincompoop!"

"B-b-but I did," stammered the woebegone knight, "I did. I followed the route exactly as you said. But there he was again, with dozens of others, hidden in the trees, suddenly firing volleys of arrows around us and making a tremendous hullabaloo. All the horses reared and then bolted, taking most of the guards with them. I was left with just the two fellows on the wagon. Even you couldn't have done anymore." he whined and then, more boldly, "Do you think I like being made a fool of all the time?"

"What I think is of little importance, compared with what Prince John will say, unless we can come up with a plan to capture that man, and make an example of him once and for all. You had better get your thinking cap on if you want to survive the visit! Now go and clean yourself up - you look and smell revolting - you're not fit to be seen at my supper table." The Sheriff turned away, yelling at a nearby servant, "Go and get my bath ready and make sure it is hot enough this time!"

"I've got it, I've got it," Guy barged excitedly into the Sheriff's chambers, "listen .."

"I don't care what you've got, you blockhead! You don't come in here without knocking! Now GET OUT!"

"But.. but.. just listen a minute," Guy pressed on quickly, "I know how we can trap Robin Hood. We get him to come to us."

Intrigued, the Sheriff sat back on his throne-like chair and beckoned Guy to sit beside him.

"Come to us, eh? How do you propose we do that?"

"We set him a challenge he can't resist! A shooting match, in honour of Prince John, with an open invitation to all the best archers in the area to compete for a silver arrow."

"Mmmm," the sheriff ruminated, "an archery contest. Do you think he would take the bait? Won't he smell a rat?"

"Maybe, but I think he'll come anyway," Guy said eagerly. "He takes a lot of pride in people saying he is the best archer in Nottingham .. he would not want anyone else to get that crown."

"D'you know, I think you're right. For once I think you are right." The Sheriff looked at Gisborne speculatively. "Maybe riding backwards on a horse has shaken up your brains! Perhaps you should do it more often!" and he roared with laughter as Guy's humiliation flushed his face.

"However," and here the Sheriff thrust his head menacingly towards the discomfited knight. "He is bound to come in disguise. You know what he looks like - better than anyone - make sure you keep a sharp look out and don't let him slip through your fingers again!"

And, with a look of gleeful malice upon his face, the Sheriff of Nottingham strode past Guy of Gisborne into a room with a table piled high with sumptuous food.

Three days later, in a leafy glade, deep in the heart of Sherwood Forest, a group of men and women sat chatting and laughing around a fire pit, roasting a huge haunch of venison.

"So, who's our next guest to be then Robin?" guffawed a mountain of a man, "Prince John himself on his way to the Sheriff?"

"Nay John," laughed Robin, "I would rather take his taxes than his person at the moment. We will leave his downfall to good King Richard himself, when he returns. But the Abbot of St Mary's.."

"Robin, Robin," a young man came bounding into the clearing waving a leaflet. "Look at this. They're holding an archery contest - for a silver arrow."

He sank breathlessly down as Robin took the paper, read it and looked up, his eyes sparkling.

"They're honouring Prince John's visit. It's to take place on Saturday on the green outside the castle and all archers are welcome. The winner will be proclaimed the best archer in all middle England and receive the arrow from John himself."

Pandemonium broke out.

"No, Robin!"

"It's a trap!"

"You can't go." yelled from all sides.

Grinning, Robin held up his hand and the hubbub subsided.

"Of course it's a trap! The Sheriff thinks of the glory, to catch me there, in front of Prince John. I relish the idea of the triumph of making him look an abject fool, in front of his vile master. And, in any case, how can I allow anyone else to receive the title of best archer?"

He looked around the band of loyal men and women.

"Come friends, let us get our heads together and plan carefully. That blockhead Gisborne knows many of us well, to his great distress and our great merriment."

The whole band burst into laughter remembering his discomfiture on the horse.

"Marion, what disguises do we have within our store? Will, Alan, you are the two best archers, please enter the contest too, so you can be in the enclosure with me. Little John, you and..." and so the planning went on throughout the day and well into the next.

Meanwhile, whilst the contest was being organized, the Sheriff and Gisborne were laying their traps.

Prince John and his entourage arrived at Nottingham to be welcomed by a fawning Sheriff and a grovelling Guy of Gisborne. When informed of the contest and its reason, the prince guffawed with delight. He loathed the outlaw Robin Hood, both for his successful attacks on the guards carrying his taxes and also for Robin's loyalty to his hated brother, King Richard, whom he wished to depose.

On the day of the event, people arrived from far and near - some as contestants, many to watch and, not a few, hoping to make an honest living plying their wares, taking advantage of the holiday mood of the crowd.

The pennants fluttered in the breeze. The highly decorated royal stand displayed at its fore a beautifully crafted silver arrow. The targets were set up and the contest stewards were all in place. During the morning, those taking part gave their names and livings to the recorder.

The heats started at midday and, amidst cheering from the onlookers, over 100 archers were whittled down to 40; amongst those were a number wearing hoods, making it difficult for the watchful Gisborne to see their faces.

The targets were moved 10 yards back and the second round began. The crowd's excitement mounted as archer after archer hit the rings around the bullseye. A band of old, ragged bystanders cheered as loudly as the rest, despite needing to lean on thick staves to hobble about.

Only 10 contestants had managed to get the bullseye, including two Norman knights and 3 hooded yeomen.

Again the target was moved backwards and the contest began in earnest. Three arrows each were allowed. A hush fell over the crowd as each archer carefully pulled back their bowstring, aimed and let go, to send their arrows flying towards the target. A low moan escaped the mouths of the onlookers if one failed to reach the centre circle. Each bull's eye was greeted by a hearty cheer.

When the shooting finished, the arrows were counted and allotted to their archers; only 4 managed to get 3 bull's eyes: a knight, an archer from York and two hooded yeomen. Once again the target was moved, once again three arrows each were allowed. Finally only the knight and one of the hooded men had managed to send all arrows to the centre.

Guy of Gisborne was almost dancing with delight, so sure was he that the hooded man was his target today, and that this was a contest he would win!

The target was moved to its final distant position and each man chose one arrow only. The Norman knight aimed carefully, waited and ... let go.

The crowd drew in their breaths and held them as the arrow whizzed straight and true and thudded into the very middle of the bull's eye. An 'Ooooh' of amazement ran through the onlookers, followed by a groan from many who had hoped to see the Norman beaten. But there was no chance now to better that winning shot.

However, the yeoman stepped forward, slowly and deliberately pulled back the bowstring, looked carefully along the shaft of the arrow and 'twang', the arrow shot from the string and sped forward.

Again the watchers drew in their breaths, their eyes fixed on the flight. 'Thwack!' the arrow hit and cleaved in two the Norman's shaft burying its head into the very centre of the mark. A moment's stunned silence was followed by an almighty roar, as the crowd erupted into jubilation, yelling, shouting, jumping, hugging and yelling again. The Norman knight glowered, but the hooded yeoman stood still amid the chaotic celebrations happening around.

An evil grin spread across the Sheriff's face and Gisborne stood hugging himself with pleasure. Their moment of triumph was almost upon them.

Prince John rose from his throne and held his hand aloft. Gradually the hubbub subsided.

"Let the winning archer step forward to receive his just reward." The Prince declared descending the steps to where the Sheriff and Gisborne waited at either side to hand him the arrow.

The hooded man slowly made his way to the steps and the crowd surged forward.

"I hereby bestow this arrow on the best archer of Middle England," proclaimed the Prince. As the yeoman reached out his hand to take it, Gisborne swiftly leant forward and yanked back his hood.

"Robin Hood," he yelled, "traitor and outlaw! I hereby arrest you for treason and robbery. Seize him!"

At the same instant, the other two hooded contestants drew their bows on the two Norman knights and snatched their weapons from them.

The band of ragged men, straightened up, swiftly fanned out and raised their staffs into the air, menacing the soldiers at the edge of the crowd.

Quick as a flash, Robin seized the silver arrow, fitted it to his bow and aimed at Prince John's throat.

"Stop!" he cried to the soldiers running down the steps to carry out Gisborne's order. "One more step and your treacherous Prince receives this arrow back!"

The men halted glancing to Gisborne and the Sheriff for orders.

"Stay where you are!" Gisborne called, "Do as he says."

"Let me and my men leave in peace," said Robin. "Then no innocent gets hurt or slain on this festive day."

"Agreed," replied Gisborne quickly, "You may all go unharmed from the ground."

Robin's eyes narrowed. Gisborne was letting his quarry slip through his hands too easily.

What else was afoot?

He backed, his eyes never leaving Prince John, his bow at the ready. All around, his men moved carefully towards him, keeping their eyes and weapons on the soldiers and knights. "Go quickly," whispered Robin, "I fear more treachery. Keep alert with weapons ready."

His men streamed from the grounds, towards the forest. Robin followed, keeping the silver arrow pointed at Prince John.

"Run," Robin yelled as soon as he was through the gates.

They were no more than a quarter of the way to the forest when the pounding of hooves was heard and the Sheriff's guard poured out of Nottingham castle.

Robin and his archers stopped and sent a volley of arrows into the horde, causing chaos with rearing horses and fallen men.

Robin's band turned and ran on faster hoping to reach the shelter of the trees before they could regroup.

Then, from nearby bushes, sprang up men wearing Gisborne's colours, firing a shower of arrows into the fleeing outlaws. Their fire was returned twofold by Robin's angered men and Gisborne's soldiers fled under the hailstorm - having even less spirit than their overlord.

But then, Little John sank to the ground groaning, "My knee, my knee. I cannot move another step." Sure enough, an arrow had pierced his knee and blood was pouring on the ground.

"Leave me, I beg, save yourselves." The big man groaned. "But don't let the Sheriff take me. Finish me off swiftly before you go."

"Nonsense", the outlaws gathered round. "We kill none of our own like a dog."

"Give him to me," said Much, "I may be small but I can carry huge sacks of flour."

Immediately the other outlaws hauled John onto the Miller's back and he staggered towards the forest, with his comrades covering his progress with sporadic waves of arrows.

Despite this, the Sheriff's men had regrouped and were galloping across the fields toward the outlaw band, halted only for a short time by each arrow volley, rapidly nearing their quarry. There was no way Robin and his men could reach the forest in time.

Robin started to plan how some of them would take a stand, to let the others escape, when the thunder of hooves was heard in front of them.

"Surrounded," groaned Robin.

"No," yelled Alan, "look!"

Out of the forest charged Marion and small band of women on horseback, leading more than a dozen horses, streaming at full pelt towards the beleaguered band.

The women surrounded the outlaws, leapt from their horses and started firing deadly volleys into the pursuing horsemen. The men hauled Little John over the back of one horse, mounted the others as swift as lightning and the women leapt up behind them keeping up their barrage of arrows. They galloped to the forest edge and into the trees at a speed others could not follow, down tracks others could not find. Soon they reached their hidden glade and Little John's wound was tended to. "That wasn't part of my plan," said Robin sternly to Marion, "you were meant to stay hidden in the forest!" "And if we had?" laughed Marion.

"Three cheers for our womenfolk," Little John called gruffly. "I for one, be very glad this day that they be true women, not like those spineless Norman dolls!"

## **The Silver Arrow Contest Newspaper Report**

Marian Fitzwater reports on the Silver Arrow Contest that took place at Butt-dyke outside Nottingham's town walls and the chaos and mayhem that followed. The Silver Arrow was won by Robin Hood but there then followed a ferocious battle between the Sheriff's men and Robin's band of outlaws.

In the Uproar and Confusion amid flying arrows and clashing swords, panic broke out with women shrieking in fright and children being trampled underfoot. The Sheriff had sparked off the fight when his men tried to arrest Robin Hood only moments after he himself had presented Robin with the winning Silver Arrow. The outlaws, led by Robin Hood, left a trail of wounded Sheriff's men in their wake as they fought themselves out of the ambush and fled into the forest.

### **Silver Arrow**

The archery contest started peacefully enough with not the slightest hint of the mayhem to come. Fields around gleamed brightly with coloured tents pitched by traders and competitors who had come from afar. Young men had brought their fighting cocks and watched them do battle while others held contests in leaping, wrestling, putting the stone and throwing the thronged javelin beyond a mark - all done with plenty of gusto and in a sporting spirit.

In one corner of the field, a laughing crowd assembled around some lads engaged in a 'grinning match'. Many of the younger lads and lasses danced around a garlanded maypole. Hawkers of drinks, sweetmeats and pasties walked amongst the crowd, crying their wares; a palmer recently returned from the Holy Land tried to sell his sacred relics - it was just like any ordinary fair.

Most people ignored the bull and bear baiting. In this so-called sport, great bulldogs attack these fine animals which are tied to a stake. The bull and bear, with no means of escape, defend themselves with all their force and skill, sometimes injuring and killing the dog, though this is not the end of the 'contest'. The organisers supply fresh dogs and sometimes whip the bear to provoke its fury. You have to be bloodthirsty to watch this so-called sport. Most people had come to witness the archery contest and so the largest number of spectators gathered around the archery butts. The local knights and their ladies, surrounded by their entourage of waiting-women, children, squires, pages and hounds, occupied the best seats in the stand, over which an awning had been placed in case the sun became too hot. You could feel the excitement in the air. Expecting to see some fine shooting, no one was disappointed. Two of the Sheriff's men had already paced out the hundred yards from the marksman's stand to the butts and placed two targets made of wheat-straw faced with cloth and painted with black, yellow and white rings. An anticipation had been mounting from the very first day the Sheriff had announced the great contest for all the archers of the North. Who would prove to be the best archer in the North of England? Everybody believed him to be Robin Hood but weren't sure whether he would come. They hoped he would. Everyone wanted to see the great archer shoot and, safe to say, all the locals wanted to see him win. Never mind the North, wasn't he the best archer in all England? All the money being wagered proclaimed he was.

Whoever shot furthest and straightest at a pair of targets would win the magnificent arrow like no other in England with its tip and shaft made of white silver and feathers of rich red gold.

Many bold archers were already shooting when Robin Hood did arrive. Six of his men had arranged to shoot with him, but unknown at the time, seven score of his men with their bows at the ready were amongst the crowd. Robin Hood obviously did not trust the Sheriff. The shooting was best described as incredible. For an arrow to miss the bull's eye was a rarity. Unblinking, intensely focused with strong arms, the archers pulled the strings back from their bows, and the thudding of arrows unerringly into the target was closely followed by rousing cheers from the crowd. The crowd bubbled over with expectation when Robin stepped up to the mark to shoot and cheers were long and loud when his arrow found the bull's eye.

As their excitement grew, the crowd strained forward for a better view. The air grew hotter and so did the contest as Gilbert with the White Hand also hit the bull's eye every time, just the same as Robin Hood. The apparent ease with which this feat was achieved caused the onlookers to hold their breath in amazement. Little John, Will Scarlet (pictured right) and Much shot well, but not well enough, and had to drop out. Archers were eliminated one by one till Robin Hood and Gilbert were the only two left in the contest.

A willow wand replaced the targets and the crowd became hushed - you could hear a pin drop. Robin Hood split the wand with his first arrow. Gilbert, for the first and only time that afternoon missed, and it was enough to lose him the contest. Robin Hood split the wand with both of his next two arrows to prove he was the best archer in the North of England.

The crowd cheered heartily as Robin stepped forward to courteously accept the gift of the Silver Arrow prize presented to him by the Sheriff.

### **Uproar and Confusion**

Up to this moment it had been a grand sporting occasion, the finest archery contest you could ever be privileged to watch. Everything then turned into chaos. The Sheriff shouted to his men: 'Hold Robin Hood!'

This order was immediately followed by horns being blown, cries and loud shouts. 'Woe is the treason!' Robin shouted at the Sheriff. 'And woe to you, proud Sheriff, for making light of your word in the forest! If I had you back in the greenwood now, you would give better pledge than good faith!' The truth is that the Sheriff had earlier sworn on his bright sword not to harm Robin Hood or any of his men.

Unparalleled uproar and confusion then followed. Men were shouting, women shrieking and children screaming as bows bent to the full and arrows flew fast and furious. Many a kirtle was rent and bodies fell wounded. The outlaws shot their arrows so powerfully that the Sheriff's men could not get their hands on Robin, who fought his way towards his own men. Then led by Robin, fighting with both sword and bow, the band of outlaws broke out of the Sheriff's ambush and headed for the greenwood.

A hail of arrows from the Sheriff's men followed them and Little John fell wounded with an arrow in his knee (pictured right). Sadly, he could neither walk nor ride.

'Master,' Little John pleaded with Robin, 'if you have any love for me and for the rewards of my service to you, don't let the Sheriff catch me alive. Take out my bright sword and smite me so deep and wide that no life is left within me.'

'I could not cause your death, John, if all the gold in merry England was heaped in front of me,' answered Robin.

'God forbid, Little John, that you should part our company,' cried little Much who lifted the big man on to his back and carried him a good mile into the greenwood, stopping every now and then to lay him down and shoot off an arrow.

The whole band of outlaws disappeared into the greenwood with the Sheriff's men not far behind. A witness later reported that he had seen the outlaws heading for the castle of Sir Richard at the Lee with the Sheriff's men still in hot pursuit.

A day containing all the skill and pleasurable excitement that anyone could wish for had ended in innocent people being injured. A great sporting contest, indeed a grand spectacle, had been turned into an ugly battle and no doubt where the blame lay - at the Sheriff's door. Robin Hood won the Silver Arrow but all the Sheriff gained was infamy.

## King Arthur

Arthur was the first born son of King Uther Pendragon and heir to the throne. However these were very troubled times and Merlin, a wise magician, advised that the baby Arthur should be raised in a secret place and that none should know his true identity.

As Merlin feared, when King Uther died there was great conflict over who should be the next king. Merlin used his magic to set a sword in a stone. Written on the sword, in letters of gold, were these words: "Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone is the rightwise born king of all England." Of course all the contenders for the throne took their turn at trying to draw the sword, but none could succeed. Arthur, quite by chance, withdrew the sword for another to use in a tournament. Following this he became King.

He gathered Knights around him and fought back against the Saxons who, since the Romans left Britain, were slowly but surely taking the country over. After many great battles and a huge victory at Mount Badon the Saxons' advance was halted.

Arthur's base was at a place called Camelot. Here he built a strong castle. His knights met at a Round Table. They carried out acts of chivalry such as rescuing damsels in distress and fought against strange beasts. They also searched for a lost treasure, which they believed would cure all ills - this was the 'Quest for the Holy Grail'.

Under the guidance of Merlin, Arthur had obtained a magical sword from The Lady Of The Lake. This sword was called 'Excalibur' and with this weapon he vanquished many foes.

Queen Guinevere, Arthur's beautiful wife brought romance to the story while his equally beautiful half-sister Morgan le Fay added a dark side.

Unfortunately, as peace settled over the country things turned sour within the court of Camelot and civil war broke out. In the final battle at Camlan both Arthur and Mordred, Arthur's traitorous nephew, were mortally wounded. Arthur was set upon a boat and floated down river to the isle of Avalon. Here his wounds were treated by three mysterious maidens. His body was never found and many say that he rests under a hill with all his knights - ready to ride forth and save the country again.

## St. George and the Dragon

The story of a knight, a maiden, and a dragon has all the makings of a fairy tale, but of course the most famous dragon-slaying tale is the legend of St. George.

The story was popular in the Middle East and it was picked up by the Crusaders when they went out to that part of the world. Ever since St. George has been associated with knights and chivalry. He is patron saint of England where his popularity has revived recently, but he is shared with many other countries and cities around the world. In England, St. George's day is April 23rd. In Eastern Europe he is usually celebrated on May 6th.

St. George stands for courage and chivalry. Chivalry is the code of honour which knights in armour used to follow. They had to swear to be brave, fair, true to their word, and to protect the weak and the poor. Of course not all knights kept the code - but St. George did.

He is the patron saint of England, and the red cross of St. George is on the national flag. In England, his day is the 23rd of April. He is also the patron saint of several other countries; including Canada, China, Greece, Russia, Portugal, Palestine, Ethiopia, Serbia, and Montenegro. One country is even named after him - and that's the Georgia which is situated between Russia and Turkey.

He is often painted as a knight in armour from the Middle Ages, but was in fact born long before those times, when the Romans still ruled much of the world.

One thousand and seven hundred years ago, in the time of the Roman Empire, there was, just outside the City of Cyrene in North Africa, a large stagnant, smelly pond. In this pond there lived a dragon. Whenever the dragon breathed on a person or an animal, they died on the spot. At first the dragon breathed on all the sheep that lived in the fields around the city. Then he started to attack the people, and threatened to kill them one and all.

The people of Cyrene had no choice but to come to terms with the dragon. They agreed to give him one person every month, so long as he left the others alone and unharmed for the rest of the time - but how were they to decide which person to sacrifice?

The king decreed that the names of every citizen should be scratched onto pieces of pottery, and kept in a great urn. Each month, one of the names would be drawn out of the urn, and that person would be given to the dragon. In this way men and women, both rich and poor, were chosen to be fed to the evil beast.

Then one day, the name of the princess was shaken out of the urn. According to the King's own law, his daughter must be sacrificed. He called the people together and offered them gold and treasure if only they would agree to spare her from the dragon. The judges who oversaw the lottery said that it must be completely fair, or else the people would no longer

accept it. And so, much saddened, the king said to the princess, "My dear, I shall never see your wedding day."

A week went past, and the day arrived when she must meet her fate. The palace servants dressed her in her wedding gown and placed a crown of flowers on her head. They led her out of the city in a procession, and headed for the lake where the dragon lived.

As they were on their way, a Roman soldier came riding up to the city. His name was George and he was a Christian from Cappadocia in Turkey. George stopped and asked why such a beautiful young woman was looking so sad on her wedding day.

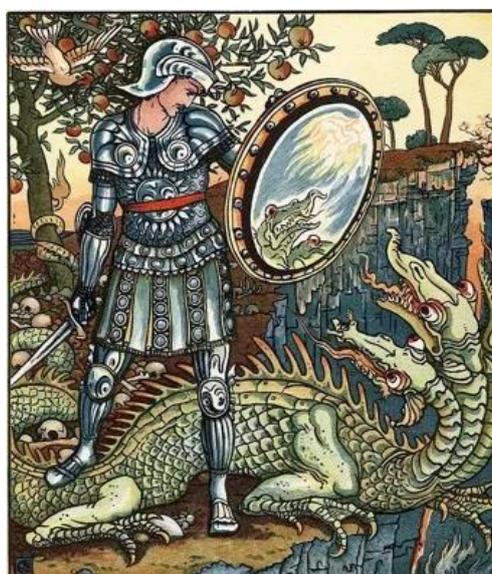
A citizen replied, "Because according to the law, she must this day marry the dragon who lives in that lake, and her wedding gift shall be death."

George immediately replied, "If that really be the case, then let me slay the dragon."

The citizens warned him that nobody stood a fighting chance against such a ferocious, plague-breathing lizard, but George was determined to save the princess.

The people tied her to a tree by the lake, and left her to meet her fate. George saw the dragon emerge out of the swampy waters, and he charged up on his horse and flung his spear into its shoulder. The dragon let out a piercing shriek. It was wounded, but not fatally. While it was writhing in pain, George managed to cut the princess free from her bonds. The dragon was enraged and rounded on his attacker. George retreated and called out to the princess to take off the belt from around her waist and to throw it at the dragon. This she did, and by a miracle, the belt wrapped itself round the dragon's neck like a collar. Immediately the dragon became as peaceful as a lamb, and the princess was able to lead it by her belt back to the city.

When the people saw the princess and George leading the dragon back to their walls, they became angry and afraid, until St. George drew out his sword and slew the dragon. Then the people knew that from then on they could live safe and unharmed.



## Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Long ago, in a place called Camelot, the great King Arthur was celebrating Christmas. Sharing the King's celebrations were the Knights of the Round Table, the most honourable men in all the lands. They were known far and wide for their bravery and courage. The youngest of these knights was Arthur's own nephew, Sir Gawain.

During the feast, as the king raised his cup he wished aloud that they might have some wonderful mystery or adventure. Before he had time to put his cup back on the table, the knights all gasped in astonishment as there rode into the hall the strangest man they had ever seen. The visitor was extremely tall and his face was fierce. His red eyes glowered from beneath great bristly eyebrows and over his broad chest hung a green beard, as big as a bush. His coat, hood and trousers were green as was his horse. In one hand he held a green holly bough and in the other, a huge razor sharp axe. The axe handle was richly decorated in gold and green. The knights were dumbfounded. The king invited the stranger to join them at the table but he replied that he had not come to feast but to prove, once and for all, the courage of the famous knights before him. "If it is battle you seek," replied the king, "I will gladly accept your invitation."

"No Sire," said the Green Knight, "I come not to fight but to challenge. I want to know if any man here is bold enough to fetch one blow at me with this axe, on condition that, in a year and a day, he shall stand a blow from my hand." All the knights were silent; no one cared to offer him an exchange of blows. The Green Knight looked scornfully around those assembled. Stung by shame, the King cried out that he would take up the challenge.

The Green Knight sprang from his horse and put the axe in Arthur's hand but the Knights pulled him away saying it was no adventure for a king. "Give me the chance," begged Sir Gawain. The young man was keen to help his king. The others backed him and, reluctantly, Arthur withdrew his challenge. "Nephew," said the king, "take care that you put all your heart and strength in the stroke, so he can never repay you." The Green Knight smiled grimly. "It suits me well," he said, "to take a blow from thee, but first you must swear that you will seek me out in twelve months and a day, so I can give back what I received from you." Sir Gawain gave his word and the giant pulled loose his hood and pushed aside his hair to expose his neck. Stroking his great beard he awaited, unconcerned, what was to come.

The young man grasped the heavy axe, heaved it high and delivered it with all the strength of his arm. Down came the razor-sharp axe on the brawny neck, sheering through skin and bone so the heavy head fell to the floor. But the giant stood firm and, without flinching, picked up his head and sprang on his horse. The king gasped in amazement, the queen screamed and the knights fell into a stunned silence. As he rode from the hall, head in his hands, his eyes fixed themselves on Sir Gawain. "I have thy word," he said. "Do not fail to seek me out; you will find me at the Green Chapel."

After a year has passed Sir Gawain went in search of the Green Chapel. He climbed many a hill and crossed many a marsh and river; he battled bears, wolves and serpents but kept travelling. It was a harsh winter and the brave knight often had to sleep in the open, pelted by sleet and rain. He stopped regularly to ask after the Green Knight but none had heard of such a man. Finally, on Christmas Eve, he found himself lost in a great mossy forest. He

prayed that he may be guided to a place to rest. As he opened his eyes he saw, in the glow of the setting sun, a noble castle on a distant hill. Spurring on his weary horse, he galloped towards the fortress. The lord of the castle met Sir Gawain with a hearty welcome. Sir Gawain was shown to a beautiful chamber full of rich tapestries. After he had dressed in his best attire, he joined the Christmas gathering. At the table was the lord, his beautiful lady, many knights and dames and, at the far end of the table, sat a wrinkled old crone.

For three days he enjoyed the festivities. Then he went to his host to say his farewells. He explained he must be on his way for he needed to find a place known as the Green Chapel. His host, however, assured him it was near at hand. Gawain was pleased to hear his journey was nearly at an end and readily agreed to stay for a further three days.

During the next three days, the lady of the castle who had grown to like Sir Gawain offered him her green silk scarf. When he refused, she said, "My knight, you must face many foes. This is a magic scarf; it has the power to protect whoever wears it against any weapon." So he accepted the gift.

He slept ill that night. As the cock's crow heralded the new day, he dressed carefully, taking care to wrap around him the green scarf. He waved goodbye to his host and set out in into the dark stormy morning. A bitter wind took his breath away. A servant had been provided to guide his way. Together they went by rugged cliffs and dark moor.

Eventually he came to a crag and saw in front of him the overgrown mouth of a dark cave. He tethered his horse to a tree and went inside. Immediately, there was a fearful clattering of rock and standing in front of the young man was the huge figure of the Green Knight bearing an axe - his hairy head firmly back on his shoulders.

"Welcome to my home, you have timed your travels well," said the Green Knight. "Now prepare to make good our bargain."

Sir Gawain bravely removed his helmet and bent forward but, as the axe was raised, he could not help but flinch.

"Ha," said the Green Knight, "he flinches before he is hurt."

"When my head comes off I cannot put it back," said Gawain. "But I gave my word and will not flinch again."

Once more the giant brandished the axe.

"Strike and be done," said Gawain.

"Have patience," jeered the Giant and he heaved the heavy axe up into the air. This time the knight did not flinch or cry out as the sharp axe whistled through the air and onto his neck splitting the skin.

It was a few moments before a stunned Gawain realised that, apart from a few drops blood, he was unharmed. He turned to see, leaning on his axe, not the Green Knight but the Lord of the Castle. "My brave knight, I came to see if you were a man of your word. The cut on your neck is for the scarf that you took but did not tell me about".

Sir Gawain stood confused by his own weakness and the generosity of his host. Unfastening the scarf, he offered it to his host. "Keep the scarf," said the Knight, "as a token of this adventure. The debt is cleared."



## The Highwayman By Alfred Noyes

### PART ONE

The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees.

The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas.

The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,

And the highwayman came riding—

Riding—riding—

The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.

He'd a French cocked-hat on his forehead, a bunch of lace at his chin,

A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin.

They fitted with never a wrinkle. His boots were up to the thigh.

And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,

His pistol butts a-twinkle,

His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.

Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark inn-yard.

He tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all was locked and barred.

He whistled a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there

But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,

Bess, the landlord's daughter,

Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

And dark in the dark old inn-yard a stable-wicket creaked

Where Tim the ostler listened. His face was white and peaked.

His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy hay,

But he loved the landlord's daughter,

The landlord's red-lipped daughter.

Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say—

"One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I'm after a prize to-night,

But I shall be back with the yellow gold before the morning light;

Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me through the day,

Then look for me by moonlight,

Watch for me by moonlight,

I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way."

He rose upright in the stirrups. He scarce could reach her hand,

But she loosened her hair in the casement. His face burnt like a brand

As the black cascade of perfume came tumbling over his breast;

And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,

(O, sweet black waves in the moonlight!)

Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight, and galloped away to the west.

## PART TWO

He did not come in the dawning. He did not come at noon;  
And out of the tawny sunset, before the rise of the moon,  
When the road was a gypsy's ribbon, looping the purple moor,  
A red-coat troop came marching—

Marching—marching—

King George's men came marching, up to the old inn-door.

They said no word to the landlord. They drank his ale instead.  
But they gagged his daughter, and bound her, to the foot of her narrow bed.  
Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets at their side!

There was death at every window;

And hell at one dark window;

For Bess could see, through her casement, the road that he would ride.

They had tied her up to attention, with many a sniggering jest.

They had bound a musket beside her, with the muzzle beneath her breast!

"Now, keep good watch!" and they kissed her. She heard the doomed man say—

Look for me by moonlight;

Watch for me by moonlight;

I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way!

She twisted her hands behind her; but all the knots held good!

She writhed her hands till her fingers were wet with sweat or blood!

They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the hours crawled by like years

Till, now, on the stroke of midnight,

Cold, on the stroke of midnight,

The tip of one finger touched it! The trigger at least was hers!

The tip of one finger touched it. She strove no more for the rest.

Up, she stood up to attention, with the muzzle beneath her breast.

She would not risk their hearing; she would not strive again;

For the road lay bare in the moonlight;

Blank and bare in the moonlight;

And the blood of her veins, in the moonlight, throbbed to her love's refrain.

Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot! Had they heard it? The horsehoofs ringing clear;

Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot, in the distance? Were they deaf that they did not hear?

Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of the hill,

The highwayman came riding—

Riding—riding—

The red coats looked to their priming! She stood up, straight and still.

Tlot-tlot, in the frosty silence! Tlot-tlot, in the echoing night!  
Nearer he came and nearer. Her face was like a light.  
Her eyes grew wide for a moment; she drew one last deep breath,  
Then her finger moved in the moonlight,  
    Her musket shattered the moonlight,  
Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned him—with her death.

He turned. He spurred to the west; he did not know who stood  
Bowed, with her head o'er the musket, drenched with her own blood!  
Not till the dawn he heard it, and his face grew grey to hear  
How Bess, the landlord's daughter,  
    The landlord's black-eyed daughter,  
Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died in the darkness there.

Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the sky,  
With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier brandished high.  
Blood red were his spurs in the golden noon; wine-red was his velvet coat;  
When they shot him down on the highway,  
    Down like a dog on the highway,  
And he lay in his blood on the highway, with a bunch of lace at his throat.

And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in the trees,  
When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,  
When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,  
A highwayman comes riding—  
    Riding—riding—  
A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.

Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-yard.  
He taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked and barred.  
He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there  
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,  
    Bess, the landlord's daughter,  
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.



## Slaying the Dragon and Cheating the Devil from Brent Pelham

When was the last time you saw a dragon, then? A real, live, roaring, terrifying, blood-curdling dragon; the stuff of nightmares: long tail, sharp talons, huge teeth and breathing fire. You've never seen one? Well, to be honest, not many people have. Once upon a time, they were quite a common sight in England and Wales, but it's an age since anyone last saw one. In fact, the last time one was seen in my neighbourhood was almost a thousand years ago!

Not only were dragons a common sight in times past, giants were a part of everyday life as well. Some were good, some were bad, some fierce, others friendly.

The county of Hertfordshire had its share of giants and was home to one of the better ones. He went by the name of Piers Shonks. He stood twenty-three feet tall, even without his great boots on. His home was on an island in Shonks' Moat, Peppsall Field. From here, as Lord of the Manor, he ruled his land and its people fairly and with kindness.

Returning from his travels late one day, Piers Shonks was shocked, dismayed and angry at what he saw. The crops in his field, which had been growing tall and strong, were now a blackened, smoking mess. It took him only a moment to realise what was behind the attack. "This is a dragon's work," he rumbled. "I'm not going to stand for this. If I don't deal with the problem immediately, my people will find the coming winter even tougher than usual." Gathering his best men around him, he armed them all and set off that evening to hunt the dragon. The quest would be full of danger, they could even be killed, but there was no choice. If they failed to tackle the monster once and for all, then it would return to wreak more death and destruction.

Now, finding a dragon is not as difficult as you might think. At forty feet long, from nose to tail, and standing as much as fifteen feet high, there are very few places a dragon can hide. Not only that, but the smell of sulphur, and the stench coming from the half-eaten carcasses of the farmer's sheep, are always a sure sign.

So, only a few hours after setting out and as dawn was about to break, Piers and his men came face to face with the creature as it lay outside its cave, asleep. Sprawled on the ground, tiny puffs of smoke drifting up from his nostrils, a half-smile on its lips, the dragon looked about as dangerous as a pet cat. But Piers was not one to be fooled so easily and, as the dragon opened one eye, he knew things were about to turn nasty.

In less time than you could blink, the dragon was on its feet, eyes wide open, talons extended, teeth bared and its enormous tail swishing from side to side. As Piers charged, lance held high, the dragon lifted its head, opened its great jaws and breathed out a terrifying blast of red-hot flame. Inside his armour, Piers didn't flinch. He ducked forward and struck the monster a heavy blow on its left side, which had it howling in pain.

Angry, the ferocious dragon swung round with a further fiery blast but again the powerful man stood his ground and delivered it another massive whack. Summoning up every ounce of energy, the fearsome creature reared up on its hind legs, preparing for one final, overpowering attack.

At the very moment it was about to launch its fatal strike, the sun rose above the horizon and, for just a second, the dragon was blinded by the dazzling rays.

That second was all Piers needed. As the monster flicked its huge eyes shut, Piers rushed in and thrust his mighty two-handed sword straight into the dragon's jaw. A scream of terrified pain and rage split the very sky in two, as the beast realised that it was beaten. With an earth-shaking thud, the huge creature crashed to the ground and lay there, dead. Piers turned, triumphant and smiling to his men, to find them staring ahead, eyes and mouths wide open and looks of horror upon their faces. They were looking at something beyond him, behind him.

Puzzled, he turned back to where the dragon lay and a new sight met his eyes.

There, in front of him, was the Devil himself, and he was in a rage. Little did Piers know that this dragon was not just any dragon, it was the Devil's favourite!

He raved, he ranted, he called Piers every dreadful name you could imagine and quite a few that I am sure you couldn't! He demanded payment for his loss and told Piers he would wait until the day he died, and then drag his soul down to hell.

"Whether they bury you inside or outside the church, I shall take your soul," the Devil shrieked.

Piers Shonks was a good man and a strong man. Looking the Devil straight in the eye, he told him that his soul belonged to God and that he would choose the place of his own burial and he would never let the Devil have what he wanted.

Piers Shonks went on to live a good, active life, and a very long one.

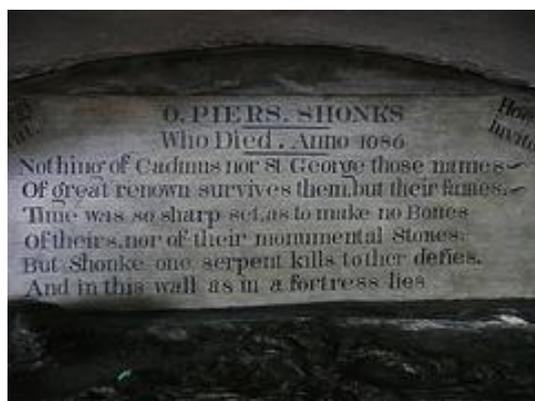
On the day he lay dying, he remembered the threat made to him by the Devil. He asked for his bow, fitted an arrow to the string and instructed his men that where this arrow fell, he was to be buried.

He pulled back on the string and fired. The arrow flew straight and true and sailed through the window of the church of St. Mary the Virgin at Brent Pelham, embedding itself deep into the north wall. Satisfied, Piers breathed his last.

A week later, Piers' body was entombed, as he had requested, in the very wall of the church, neither 'inside nor outside the church'.

Piers had cheated the devil! Piers' tomb is there to this day and, if you care to visit the church, you will see the tomb of Piers Shonks embedded in the north wall.

And, if you find all this a little hard to believe, I should tell you that, in 1861, the tomb was opened for investigation. Sure enough, inside were some remains - a few rags that had once been fine clothes, small personal possessions and some human bones. Nothing so unusual about that, except the bones. You see, they were unusually large!



## Humpty Dumpty and the Fall of Colchester

Have you got a nickname? You might even have a nickname you don't like. Long ago, in the fifteenth century, people had nicknames too; Humpty Dumpty was a common one used to describe someone who was overweight.

We all know the famous nursery rhyme, telling the tale of Humpty Dumpty and his fall, but have you ever wondered who or what Humpty Dumpty was? The answer lies several hundred years ago and it may just surprise you.

Back in the 17th century, during the English Civil War, the Parliamentarians, often known as the Roundheads, and the Royalists, who were loyal to the King and were known as Cavaliers, fought many fierce battles in the towns and countryside.

Colchester was one of those towns. In 1648, the Royalist army, under the command of Sir Charles Lucas, made a surprise attack and took control of the city after a short battle. The Parliamentarians were furious. One of their leaders, Lord-General Fairfax, swiftly marched his troops up all the way from Kent and prepared to fight. However, the Royalists had strongly fortified the city in readiness and they had a very, very special weapon indeed. For, cleverly mounted on the tower of what became known as St. Mary's Wall Church, in Colchester, was a great cannon.

The cannon was very large, much larger than most cannons of the time and, like the oversized people of the 15th century, had the nickname Humpty Dumpty! A gunner, known as 'One-Eyed Jack Thompson' was in charge of the great cannon. Thompson was a battle-hardened soldier, who had fought in many skirmishes. He may have lost vision in one eye but he was still an excellent shot.

On the 13th June, General Fairfax commanded the Parliamentarians to begin their assault on the city. Troops on horseback and foot soldiers soon clashed in the areas around the town centre. As the battle continued, Thompson was kept busy firing the great cannon at the advancing troops.

At one point, the Parliamentarians reached the town gate, only to be fought back by the fierce Royalists who were determined to keep their town. As midnight came, the Parliamentarians were forced to drop back; it was a difficult struggle and they had already lost over 500 men.

General Fairfax decided they must try a different tactic. He ordered the town to be sealed. He was going to starve the people into surrender. The roads were heavily secured, so the Royalists could not break out, and warships blockaded the mouth of the River Colne, to prevent supplies being shipped in.

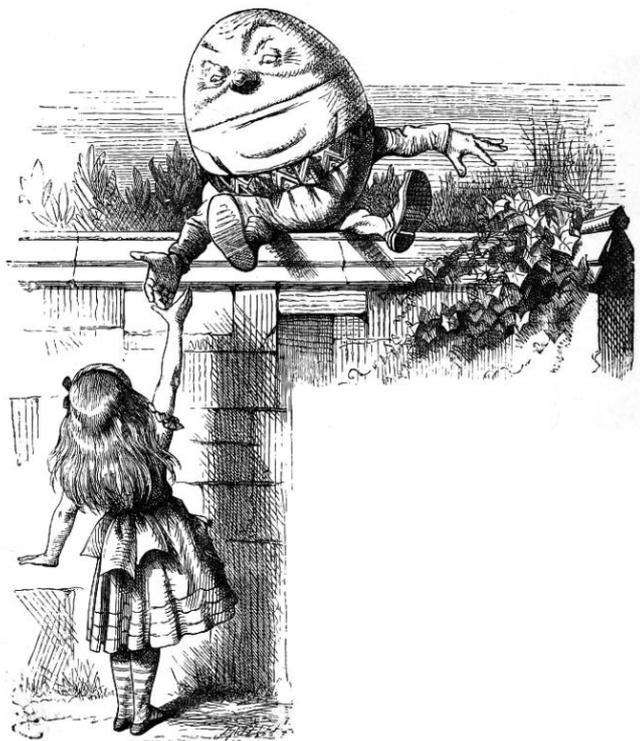
A ring of small forts was constructed around the perimeter of the town, where siege cannons were mounted to batter the town walls.

The town and its people were battered with cannon-fire day after day. Supplies ran out and the people began to starve. They were reduced to eating candles and even their pets! During one particularly hard fought battle, the cannon, Humpty Dumpty, was causing considerable damage to the Parliamentarian forces. General Fairfax commanded the Parliamentarians to aim all their fire at the great cannon.

A short while later, one-eyed Jack was busy reloading the cannon when suddenly there was an ear-splitting BANG, the building rocked and lit up with explosive flame. A shot from the Parliamentarians had hit the church tower, which supported the great cannon. The top of the tower had been blown off, damaging the wall beneath Humpty Dumpty. As the top of the building fell away, the huge cannon tumbled to the ground! The Royalists, the king's men, attempted to raise Humpty Dumpty on to another part of the wall but it was no use. The cannon was so heavy and so large; it could not be hoisted back into position, even with the help of all the king's horses. They simply could not mend it. As the nursery rhyme says: try as they might  
'All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again!'

Losing the great cannon was a severe blow against the Royalists; they never recovered. Besides, they had received news that they were now losing other battles elsewhere. So, the battle-worn Royalists surrendered the town of Colchester. Sir Charles Lucas and two other commanders were executed next to the castle. The people of Colchester were also forced to pay a fine of twelve thousand pounds. Today, the city still bears the scars of the battle for Colchester, which lasted for eleven weeks. Holes from the musket balls can still be seen in the timbers of some old buildings and children still chant a favourite nursery rhyme:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall  
All the king's horses, and all the king's men,  
Couldn't put Humpty together again!



## The Glass Knight (Saffron Walden)

One stiflingly hot August morning, in the very early hours, whilst everybody was safely asleep, an old man moved slowly through the undergrowth of a forest near the small town of Saffron Walden. He stopped, glanced at the brightest star in the sky and smiled with satisfaction. It would be a good day for magic. The old man knew this because he was a wizard. He was not the type of kindly, enchanted figure that you may have read about in books, but a sorcerer of the dark arts.

The old man carefully placed on the ground a leathery looking egg. Pursing his lips together, he made a strange noise whereupon a large grey toad appeared. The toad had been summoned to guard the egg until it was time for it to hatch. The old man left as quietly as he had come. It was 1599; in a few months a new century would dawn, but it was not going to be a fortunate time for the good people of Saffron Walden.

Nine long years passed, then, one day, the egg started to shake and the grass around it began to tremble. The nervous creatures of the forest were the only witnesses to the birth of one of the deadliest beasts of all. For the creature that emerged from the egg, and stretched its young wings, was part rooster and part serpent. Now this may sound a little weird, even funny, but there was nothing amusing about the beast into which this creature would grow.

Rapidly, its terrible form took shape. The creature did indeed have the head and claws of a rooster, but here the similarity ended for it also had the forked tongue of the serpent, the wings of a bat and a long, arrow shaped tail, that could only have come from the devil himself. All along its body were sharp barbs.

Its colour was every shade of black and yellow and on the top of its head was a white spot that looked a little like a crown. Unlike other serpents, it did not wind along the floor, instead it used its two strong clawed legs to move in an upright position, its great tail swishing behind it. However, by far the most terrible feature of this creature was its blood red eyes.

Just a couple of days after the hatching, a young farmer, up early to milk the cows, looked out of his window at the strangest sight. Part of the usually lush green forest that surrounded his land look shrivelled and dead.

"Hey George," he called to his labourer, "come and see this 'ere."

"On my word," said George. "I've never seen naught like that."

As the two men walked slowly through the blackened trees, they suddenly caught a glimpse of the back of the most extraordinary creature. A strong sense of foreboding (fear of the future) made the young farmer instantly dart behind the remains of a tree. He tried to pull his friend back with him but the young labourer knew no fear.

The creature turned and for a brief second held the labourer's gaze. With a cry of terror the young man dropped to the ground, dead. Trembling, and with his hair standing on end, the young farmer somehow found the means to get his frozen legs to move. Running as fast as he could he went straight to alert the sheriff. The sheriff dispatched his best men to find out more. They never returned and neither did those that went after them.

There was only one option left, they must consult the local wise woman. On hearing the description, the old woman shuddered.

"Do you know what we are facing?" asked the town leaders.

"Yes," said the old woman, "I fear I know what the creature is, and before this ends many, many of you will die. For in our midst is a basilisk. A rare and evil creature, created when a cock's egg is placed in the care of a toad at the time when Sirius (the Dog Star), appears in the dawn skies with the sun."

"What shall we do?" asked the sheriff. For once the old woman was silent.

"I cannot tell you what to do," she said, "only what you face. This is a creature that can burn all living matter with its terrible poisonous breath. It destroys everything it travels over and spreads poison wherever it goes; no herb can grow near the place of its abode."

"Its eyes have the power to kill even the largest beast with a single glance. It closes them not to sleep but only to drink. Worst of all, it eats humans. You cannot defeat it with a sword or spear for its poisonous blood will flow up the length of the weapon, like lightning, withering the body of the one holding it. Only the herb rue can offer some healing."

Her words were soon proved true. The monster's breath withered the local trees and rotted the fruit. Its saliva killed the birds flying overhead and it poisoned all the rivers, lakes and wells from which it drank. Soon there was little food or water left. Many tried to defeat the beast but their stones and shot became vapour in its breath. Several brave men tried to kill it whilst it drank at the river, hoping its eyes to be shut, but so alert were its other senses, they too perished.

It soon grew into an enormous man-eating monster. Its size only matched by its appetite. The basilisk killed so many, few folk were left and those that were had long given up all hope. It was just a matter of time wasn't it? How many poor folk had been consumed already? No one, they sighed could fight such a creature. The town was doomed.

Those who could not leave stayed in their houses and blocked up the windows. As the townsfolk sat trembling, awaiting their dreadful end, a wandering knight arrived at the town. The knight was very brave and had saved many other towns from terrible creatures. On hearing the story of the dying town, he vowed that he would free the people from such evil. The people shrugged in disbelief, so many had tried before.

Indeed, the more the knight heard about the beast, the more perplexed he became. It was clear that he could not get close enough to use his mighty sword, for its breath would kill him. He could not hide in his armour of spikes, because the blood from the creature would enter the suit and wither him. He could not look towards it to unleash an arrow, for its eyes were deadly.

Tired and perplexed, he almost began to agree with the townsfolk, it was hopeless, but he quickly refused to accept such thoughts. He would rather die fighting than accept that this evil could not be defeated.

The brave knight sighed and glanced toward the window. In the window there remained one cracked pane of glass, in front of the window shutter. In the glass the knight was startled to see, staring back at him, his own anguished reflection. In his eyes, he saw all the sadness that he was feeling because he could not help the poor terrified people. As he continued to look, he also saw a flicker of hope - for, at that moment, he realised why the beast needed to close its eyes to drink.

The next morning, the knight slipped out of town early. News soon spread of his departure.

"So much for promises," said the cooper.

"An impossible task," nodded the baker. "Tis no hero that can save us?"

It was just two days later, when a young man saw the most amazing sight. He ran along the road alerting everyone. Overcoming their terrible fear, the people popped their heads out of their doors to take a look.

What a sight they saw! For coming down the street was a knight in glimmering armour made from mirrors of the purest crystal glass. Reflected in the glass were the trees, the houses and the many open mouths of the people looking on in utter astonishment. In his right hand, the knight carried not a sword but a sprig of magic rowan and in his left hand, not a shield but a basket of rue.

Boldly the knight went along the town and towards the serpent's lair. He closed his eyes tight. Raising itself up the basilisk sensed the knight approaching. It flapped its mighty wings and turned to face its foe with its evil eye and rancid poisonous breath. But, as it turned, it reared backwards and gave out the most dreadful screech of utter pain and devastation. For it saw, not the knight but its own lethal reflection.

In that instant, it felt all the fear in the world penetrating its very heart. It hit the ground with a thunderous crash. Carefully the knight approached, to make sure it was really dead, and covered the beast with the protective rue from his basket. A large hole was dug, in which the remains of the creature was burned.

That night there was great revelry and celebration. The good people of Saffron Walden had been saved by a wandering knight in a suit of crystal glass.

"Do you know," said the baker, "I always knew he could do it - never give up hope - that's my motto!"

And that's exactly the message the glass knight left in the town of Saffron Walden: however desperate you feel, however great the foe, never, never give up.

I should say, before this story finishes, that Basilisks are very, very rare creatures and rest assured, you are unlikely to come across one. However, if you ever happen to be walking through the woods at dawn, when the Dog Star is high in the sky, and you see a large leathery egg, guarded by an even larger toad, just remember, as a good citizen of this country, it is your civic duty to make haste and report it straight away.









