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Opening extract from

The Black Knight of Gressingham 4u2read

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There are many tales about the Green Men of Gressingham, the famous outlaws of Gressingham Forest. Tales about their fight for what is right and about their brave deeds. Tales about their clever tricks and their brown clothes. (They liked brown because it hid the dirt better than green and they blended in with the trees.)

You may have heard about how they defeated the evil Marshal Guppy or how they went in search of dragons. But you won't have heard the tale of the Black Knight, unless you have read this book before!

Our story begins with a bang on a door ...



Chapter 1
Bang! Bang!

The bangs on the cottage door were getting louder and louder. In fact, it wasn't really a cottage. It was more of a hovel. And it wasn't really a door. It was more of a number of odd-shaped planks that had been nailed together by someone who wasn't very good at nailing things.

The person who wasn't very good at nailing things was a very small man named Squat. Right now, Squat was in bed, where he was

doing his very best to ignore the bangs on the door. Poor people didn't have proper beds in those days. Squat's bed was a pile of straw, and he had an old flour sack as a blanket. The sack covered most of him because he was so small.

Squat pulled the sack over his head as the bangs got louder. When the bangs got even louder still, he tried sticking some of the straw from his bed in his ears. It prickled. Squat gave up and got up to open the door. There was no need.

With one last, loud BANG the door gave way at last. It fell flat on the hard mud floor of Squat's hovel. It only just missed Squat, who jumped to one side.

"Sorry!" a loud voice boomed. In came a man so tall that he seemed to take up the whole hovel.

"Big Jim!" Squat gasped. He looked at his old friend, who was dressed in the brown clothes

of an outlaw. “What are you doing here?” he asked.



Big Jim lifted up the door and tried to fix it back in place. "I'm here because we need your help," he said.

Big Jim needed Squat's help? How on earth could Squat help Jim?

"Pull up a stool and sit down," Squat said. There was only one stool but Squat hoped that Big Jim would take up less room sitting down.



So Big Jim sat on the stool. His knees almost came up to his nose. He made Squat think of the frog in the pond behind the hovel.

"We need you!" Big Jim said. "We want you to join."

"Join what?" Squat asked. Squat was hoping Big Jim was going to ask him to join two planks of wood together, or two pieces of string.

"Join the Green Men of Gressingham!" Big Jim said. "Join us and become an outlaw!"

Squat had been afraid that Jim was going to say that. He was not sure that he was brave enough to be an outlaw. The outlaws loved a good fight.

"Why?" he asked with a gulp. "I can't fire a bow and arrow and I don't know how to fight with a sword or with my fists."

Big Jim looked at his friend. Big Jim made most people look small, but Squat really was tiny. Big Jim towered over him even now, when he was sitting down and Squat was standing up.

"We have a special mission and we all agreed that you are the only man for the job," Big Jim said.

"You did?" Squat said. His face went red. This was because he was glowing with pride. Squat didn't often glow with pride. In fact, he had never glowed with pride before. It felt good.

"All of you agreed?" Squat asked. "All of the Green Men?" (He wanted to hear Big Jim say it again.)

"Yes," Big Jim said. "Even Robyn-in-the-Hat agreed."

Squat glowed with even more pride. Robyn-in-the-Hat was the most famous person for

miles around. People sang songs about her, around fires on dark nights. They told tales and whispered rumours of her brave deeds.

Robyn-in-the-Hat was the leader of the Green Men of Gressingham, but she wasn't a poor peasant or a monk like her men. She was a rich lady with sparkling blue eyes. But her face was hidden by a strange mask fixed to her hat. She was a living, breathing MYSTERY. (There. I wrote the word in capital letters to show just what a big mystery she was.)

"And what is this special mission you need me for?" Squat asked. He was very proud now.

"I can't tell you," Big Jim said. "I can't tell you unless you agree to become one of the Green Men first!"

"Can I have time to think?" Squat asked. If he became a Green Man, he would have to leave his old life behind. He would have to leave this

hovel that he called home, and the friendly frog.

But time was one thing Squat did not have.