
MAX
& THE MIDKNIGHTS

First published 2019 in the US by Delacorte Press,
an imprint of Random House Children's Books,
a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York

This edition published 2020 in the UK by Macmillan Children's Books
an imprint of Pan Macmillan
The Smithson, 6 Briset Street, London, EC1M 5NR
Associated companies throughout the world

www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-1-5290-2926-0

Text and illustrations copyright © Lincoln Peirce 2019

The right of Lincoln Peirce to be identified as the author and illustrator
of this work has been asserted by him in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means
(electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise),
without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Pan Macmillan does not have any control over, or any responsibility for,
any author or third-party websites referred to in or on this book.

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

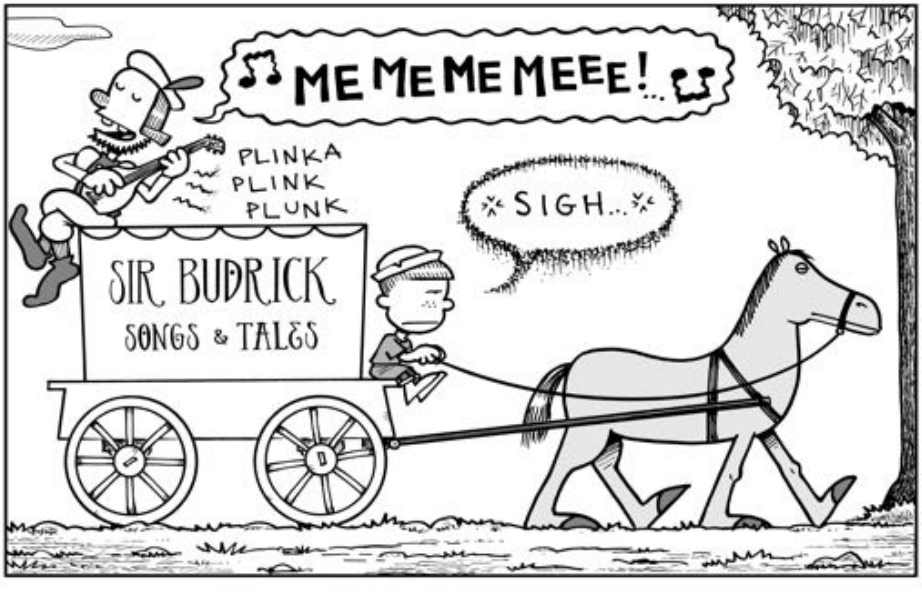
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library.

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not,
by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out,
or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent
in any form of binding or cover other than that in which
it is published and without a similar condition including this
condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

1

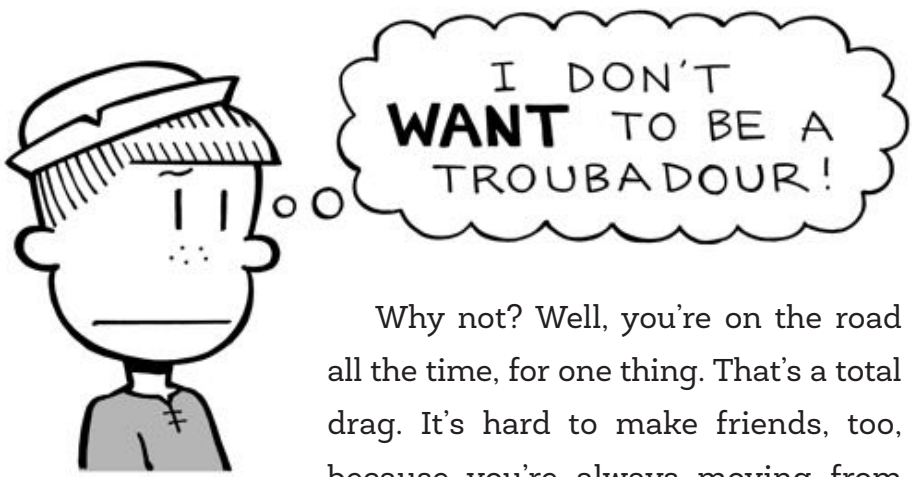
I'm going to tell you a secret: being a troubadour kind of stinks.



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:

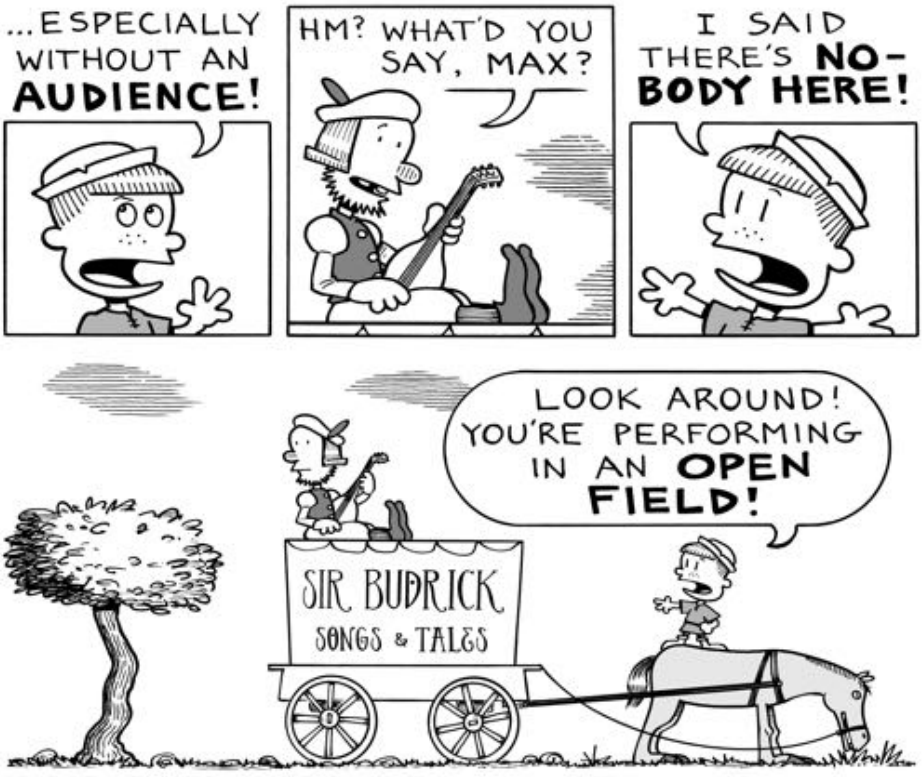


Why not? Well, you're on the road all the time, for one thing. That's a total drag. It's hard to make friends, too, because you're always moving from

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

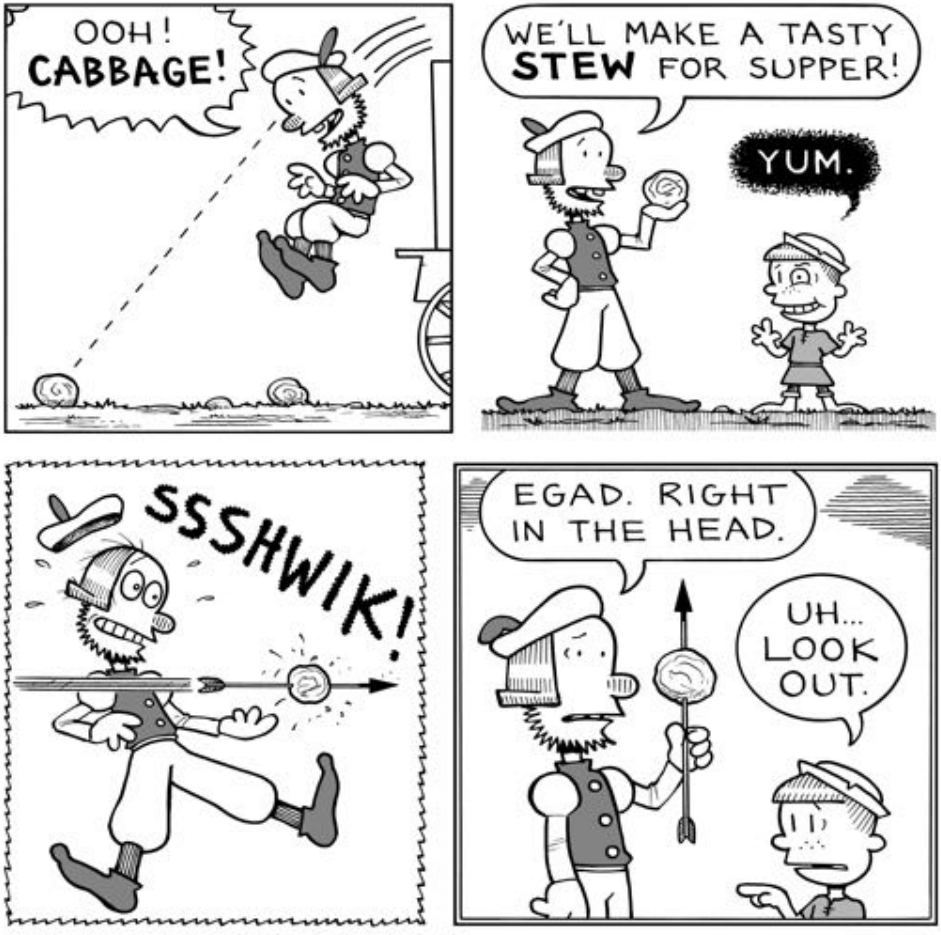
It's the MIDDLE AGES!

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.



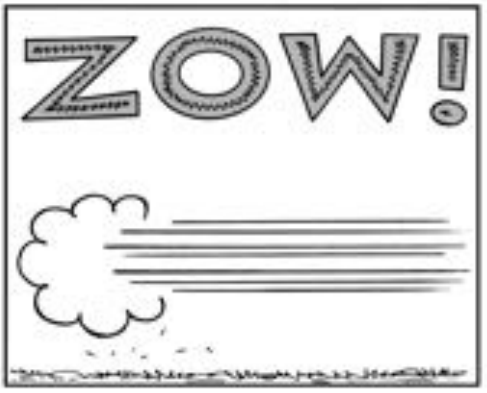
See, here's how this troubadour thing is SUPPOSED to work: You roll into some random town. A crowd gathers. You put on a show. The crowd applauds and throws money in a basket. You take the money and use it to buy food and avoid starving to death.

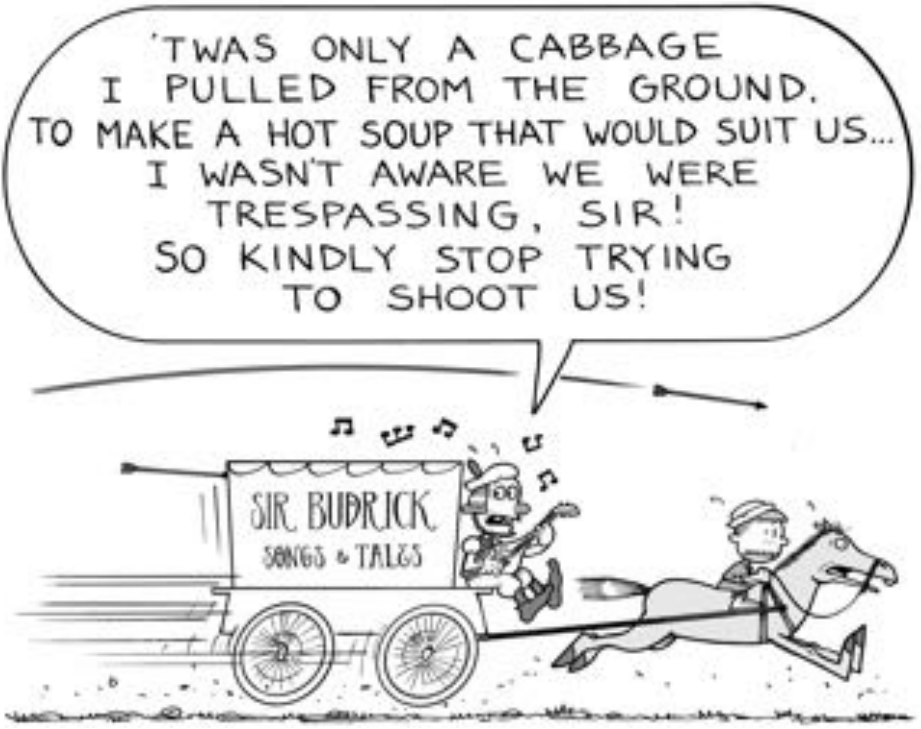
Sounds simple enough, right? It's a basic business transaction. Except Uncle Budrick is a lousy businessman. He doesn't focus on the money. He gets distracted by other things, like . . .




GET THEE OFF MY LAND, FREELOADERS!


SHALL WE RUN?
YES, LET'S.


ZOW!

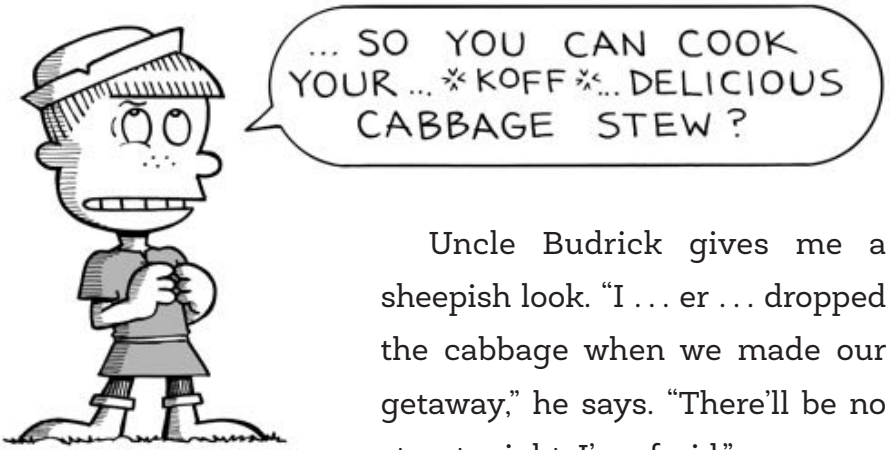

'TWAS ONLY A CABBAGE I PULLED FROM THE GROUND, TO MAKE A HOT SOUP THAT WOULD SUIT US... I WASN'T AWARE WE WERE TRESPASSING, SIR! SO KINDLY STOP TRYING TO SHOOT US!
SIR BUDRICK
SONGS & TALES

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 . . ."



Oops. That sounded kind of rude. But he's got to be pulling my leg, right? I mean, knights are supposed to be brave and strong and all that jazz. Uncle Budrick is—



As I was saying: Uncle Budrick is a total wuss bag.

"Well!" he says. "Shall we eat?"

"Not so fast," I tell him.


I WANT TO HEAR MORE!
HOW DID YOU ALMOST BECOME A KNIGHT?
LONG STORY.
PERHAPS THE BEST WAY TO EXPLAIN IT...
...IS WITH A SONG!
SUPER.
ZWIP!
♫ OHHHHHHH... ♫ LEND ME YOUR EARS AND I'LL—
PLOING!
NUTS.
BROKE A STRING.



"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?"