

ROBIN HOOD AND THE RATHER RUDE MARTIAN

By Joan Lennon

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Things were not going well for Robin Hood. He kept inventing these truly brilliant plans for nabbing the evil Sheriff of Nottingham's gold and giving it back to the poor. They were wonderful plans, each slightly different, but always they ended with Robin Hood and his Outlaws jumping out from behind trees and shouting things like,

“Ah-ha!”

or

“Boo!”

or

“Cozen thee, clodpoll!”

and then,

“HAND OVER THE GOLD!”

The Outlaws put a lot of practice in, back at camp, at the jumping out and the shouting bits. But somehow, when it came to the real thing, they never managed to surprise *anybody*. The Sheriff and his soldiers were *always* ready for them, and the Outlaws got soundly trounced, which is nobody's idea of a good time.

Then, one afternoon, Robin Hood was sitting up a tree, feeling depressed, when suddenly he heard a rustling down below.

And a muttering.

And, strangely enough, a beeping.

Robin Hood drew up his long legs, smiled, and launched himself out of the tree just as the rustling, muttering and beeping Thing appeared.

“Ah-sqwak!!” cried Robin, as he did a double-take in mid-air and landed on his backside.

“Saw you coming a mile off,” grunted the Thing, and beeped rudely.

Robin stared.

The Thing was like nothing he had ever seen before.

It had eyes on the ends of stalks, the way a snail does. It had ears that blinked on and off, and sometimes beeped. It had a mouth shaped like a letter box slot, except that letter boxes hadn't been invented yet. It had two arms and rather more legs than one might expect. And it was wearing a green dress that perfectly matched the colour of its skin.

“Um ... “ said Robin.

“Typical!” grunted the Thing. She was clearly in a bad temper. “I come gillions of spatimeters across space, powered by the most advanced Martian technology, chosen for this mission because of my Intelligence and Beauty, and where do I end up? On a second-rate planet with my saucer stuck up a tree and nobody to help but some kind of low life that can't even talk in sentences. Ty-pi-cal!!”

Robin had no idea what the Thing was on about, but he recognised the word “help” when he heard it. He drew himself up to his full height, disentangled his legs from his long bow, and said,

“I am Robin Hood, Leader of the Outlaws. Tell me your name, and how I and my followers may help you.”

The Thing beeped in surprise.

“It *does* talk in sentences! Right, well, my name is Gorgeous Fair Maiden, but you can call me Gorge, and you can help by getting my flying saucer out of a tree.”

Robin found he was not coping. He just stood there with his mouth open. The Thing beeped irritably at him and said, “Wake up! Come on! Hop to it!”

Robin Hood gulped. Then he did the only thing a well-brought-up Leader could do. He called his Outlaws to come to the aid of a Gorgeous Fair Maiden in distress.

The Outlaws, when they arrived, were a colourful sight in their purple trousers and their red and yellow shirts with their motto T.F.T.R.A.G.T.T.P. (which stands for “Take From The Rich And Give To The Poor”) embroidered in bright blue on the front. They didn't look very clever though, standing around with their mouths open and their eyes popping out.

“Pah! Low life!” beeped Gorge as she led the way.

A space craft stuck halfway up an oak tree was one strange sight too many for the Outlaws. Many of them sat down suddenly, and Little John came over funny and had to put his head between his knees.

The Gorgeous Fair Maiden raced about on more legs than the average, shouting “Get up! You there! Chop this tree down! Right away! I WANT MY SAUCER!!”

Robin suddenly had had enough.

“Madam!” he snapped. “Cease and desist!”

“What?” said Gorge, surprised.

“Stop bullying those Outlaws. That's my job.”

And Robin began to organise. First he sent two Outlaws up the tree to tie a strong rope round the saucer. Two others he sent up a neighbouring tree to loop the rope round the trunk and then down to the ground. The remaining Outlaws

took hold of the rope here. Then Robin shinned up the oak tree with his axe and very, very carefully, chopped through the branch wedging the space craft. The saucer swung free and, grunting and sweating on the other end of the rope, the Outlaws gently lowered it to the ground.

Gorge was absolutely silent. Robin jumped lightly down from the tree, right at some of her feet.

“Well, Madam?” He grinned.

Gorge spluttered in embarrassment. “I am very impressed. Very. I fear I have been rather rude, Bobbin — “

“That's Robin,” murmured Robin.

“—and to make up for it and to thank you all for helping me *I will now help you.*”

And the Gorgeous Fair Maiden pulled open a panel in the side of her saucer and began to rummage about.

“Really, it isn't necessary — “ began Robin, but Gorge wasn't listening.

“Here we go, Dobbins! Just the thing.” And she held up a small gray tube.

“That's Robin,” said Robin.

“This? No, it's a Long-Distance-Bird-and-Beast-Blaster. Now send one of your brightly-coloured Outlaws up to the top of yon distant tree with one of these incredibly life-like stuffed squirrels to serve as a target.”

“*That's* supposed to be a squirrel?!” muttered the Outlaws, but they were too polite to say so out loud.

Dave, the Outlaw known as Tree Frog, climbed up the tree and stuck the squirrel-thing on the highest branch, and slid down, grinning. Gorge aimed the tube, there was a loud “*Zi-zzzzz*” and the squirrel-thing exploded.

Dave the Tree Frog stopped grinning.

The Martian looked horribly pleased with herself. Unfortunately, as Robin pointed out, if it had been a *real* squirrel, there would have been nothing left of it to *eat*.

Gorge was cross, but couldn't really disagree.

“Dave?” said Robin gently. He handed him another squirrel-thing.

“The blindfold, please,” said Robin and a beautiful purple scarf was tied over his eyes.

“Quiet.”

Instantly it was still. There was the slight rustling of Dave climbing the tree again, and nothing more.

“Cough when ready,” called Robin.

Dave stuck the squirrel-thing on what was left of the highest branch, and coughed.

In a blur of speed, Robin raised his long bow, notched an arrow, aimed, and let fly.

Gorge gulped in astonishment as the squirrel-thing dropped neatly out of the tree with Robin's arrow stuck through it. The Outlaws couldn't resist a cheer, as Dave retrieved their "supper" and Robin shyly unwound the blindfold.

"Wow," said Gorge.

The rest of the afternoon was spent by the Martian unsuccessfully trying to help the Outlaws. She showed them a new sort of messenger pigeon, called "The Telephone." Unfortunately, it needed wires strung all over the forest, which Robin felt might be a bit ... obvious.

She showed them a new sort of cooking fire, called "The Microwave Oven." However, it needed a huge hydro-electric power station to run it, which Robin felt the Sheriff of Nottingham just might notice.

But Gorge wouldn't give up. The Outlaws could hear her inside the saucer, muttering crossly and throwing things about.

"Electric Surfboard – no waves. Satellite Tracking Gear – don't be stupid. Laser Tattoo Kit – oh, yes, *just* what they need ..."

And so it went.

It began to look as if the Gorgeous Fair Maiden had *nothing* to give them, which did not improve her temper one bit.

She stumped out of her saucer and stood there, on all those legs, looking crossly at Robin Hood and his Outlaws, who were shining like jewels among the trees in the late afternoon sun.

And that was when it hit her. How she could help.

"Watch this, Globbin." She turned and walked into the bushes.

"I'm *Robin*," began Robin, and then stopped. And stared.

It was *amazing*. She was ... invisible. She came out of the bushes, and pointed to an Outlaw.

"Now you," she said. The Outlaw also walked into the bushes. His lovely red and yellow shirt showed to perfection against the green.

Slowly, Robin's brain began to stir.

The Gorgeous Fair Maiden pulled a roll of cloth out of the saucer. It just matched her skin. She handed the cloth to Robin, who wrapped it round himself and slowly walked into the bushes.

The Outlaws were astounded. Their leader had *disappeared*.

Even Little John was speechless.

Robin came out of the bushes and looked at Gorge.

"I've got plenty—more than I need!" she said, and began to unload *rolls* of green cloth from the saucer.

“What ... ?” began the Outlaws but Robin interrupted.

“Thank you,” he said. “That would be very ... helpful.”

“My pleasure,” said the Martian, her ears beeping in delight.

And, as the sun set behind the trees, the Gorgeous Fair Maiden said good-bye to Robin Hood and the Outlaws, climbed aboard her saucer, and flew away.

So Robin Hood and his Outlaws stopped wearing red and blue and purple and yellow, and began to wear green—and things immediately started to get better! *The Sherrif of Nottingham's men didn't notice them at all now!*—not until they got to the jumping out and shouting bits. No more spoiled ambushes; no more being soundly trounced.

But one thing stayed the same. Embroidered on the front of their forest green shirts, in forest green silk, were the letters T.F.T.R.A.G.T.T.P.

Which is just the way it should be.