

Robin Hood (2010)

Rated PG-13. Our Ratings: V-6; L-1; S/N-2. Length: 2 hours 20 min.

*Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.
May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.
May the mountains yield prosperity for the
people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
May he defend the cause of the poor of
the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.
Psalm 72:1-4*

The new Robin Hood does not include the familiar scenes of Robin Hood using his bow more in battle than in individual conflicts. Robin and Little John dueling with staffs on a log. Nor of the Prince of Thieves riding atop Friar Tuck and being dumped into the stream. Megahit director Ridley Scott and scriptwriter Brian Helgeland want to go back to the beginning of the legend, rather than retelling again the familiar details of the later events of the story. Their film is about how Robin Longstride (Russell Crowe), serving with Little John (Kevin Durand), Allan A'Dayle (Alan Doyle), and Will Scarlet (Scott Grimes) as archers in the army of King

2010 Universal Pictures

Richard the Lion heart (Danny Huston), became the legendary figure of song and story. When we first meet the four they are anything but a band of Merry Men, so maybe Scott will come up with a sequel dealing with their transformation. After brawling and then foolishly telling King Richard truths about his conduct that he does not really want to hear, they wind up in the stocks.

The King of England is in France, on his way back to England after being engaged for ten years in a crusade to wrest the Holy Land from the Muslims. Because he is broke due to the ransom paid for his release from captivity Richard needs money, so he is besieging a castle for its booty. However, instead of booty, he receives an arrow in the head. Our not so merry four decide to leave the army and make their way back to England.

After the King is killed. his advisor Godfrey (Mark Strong), who has secretly sold out to the King of France, ambushes a party of English knights carrying the fallen king's crown. Among the fallen is Robert Loxley (Douglas Hodge) of Nottingham. All of his comrades are killed, with Sir Robert slowly dying from the spear lodged in his torso. Before Godfrey can find the crown Robin and his friends arrive, killing many of the attackers and driving off the survivors. One of Robin's arrows narrowly misses its mark, leaving a scar aside Godfrey's mouth. Robin reluctantly promises the dying Sir Robert that he will return the crown to London and his sword to his father Sir Walter Loxley (Max von Sydow) at Nottingham.

After stopping off in London to bring the news of Richard's

death and to deliver the crown, our hero's journey to Nottingham. One of the first persons Robin encounters is Marion (Cate Blanchett) busily cleaning an animal's hoof. She is not the "Maid Marion" we are familiar with, but Mistress Marion, wife of Sir Robert, and now a grieving widow. Sir Walter Loxley (Max von Sydow) receives stoically the news of his son's death. Now blind, the old man comes up with a proposition that angers Marion, and astonishes Robin. Stay with them and become his son and wife of his daughter-in-law.

Although unorthodox, the offer makes sense. Marion could not by law inherit the Loxley estate, so when the old man dies, she would be left penniless. She allows Robin into her bedchamber for appearances sake, but makes him sleep by the fireplace. This, of course, will change as the two of them become better acquainted. Also I should mention that Friar Tuck (Mark Addy) is introduced, his hobby of bee-keeping turning out to be important when marauders attack Nottingham.

Meanwhile King John (Oscar Isaac) is sparring with his mother Eleanor of Aquitaine (Eileen Atkins) over his infatuation with his French mistress, even though he is still married to another. In need of money he dismisses his chancellor William Marshall (William Hurt) because the officer disapproves of John's plans to tax the people heavily. The traitorous Godfrey (Mark Strong) is only too willing to execute the taxation plan. Heading up a band of two hundred French soldiers who cross the Channel and sneak ashore at night, Godfrey begins a reign of terror as the party sweeps through the countryside, forcing the people to pay. Those who are reluctant or who refuse are killed, their homes burned to the ground. This, of course, is when Robin rises to the defense of the people. There follows a series of encounters that culminate in a pitched battle to repel an invading force of the French, led by King Phillip himself.

Except at the end of the film there are little of the archery tricks so beloved by fans of the Robin Hood legend (though we

do marvel, given the long distance between archer and target, how accurate a marksman our hero is). Instead, the filmmakers have chosen to emphasize more the blood, sweat and dirt of medieval combat. Especially interesting is the depiction of the politics that eventually will result in the Magna Carta—Robin Longstride is declared an outlaw by King John because he champions a precursor of the Carta. Although I still love the 1938 Errol Flynn version with its more colorful costumes and merrier tone, this earthier and history-linked (and more violent) version will have to do—at least until I can pop the older version in my DVD.

For reflection/Discussion

1. What do you think of this version of Robin Hood compared to the others that you have seen?
2. As usual, there is little real history in the film: for instance, in the film the person shooting Richard is a cook, whereas sources state that it was a boy who fired the fatal arrow, and that the dying Richard forgave him. What do you think of Hollywood's handling of history in general, and this one in particular (another case in point, the supposed invasion attempt by the French)?
3. What do you make of the slogan on the sword hilt, "Rise and rise again/Until lions become lambs" ? See any echo of Isaiah 11:6? Compare it to the statement "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."
4. What do you think of the working in of the theme of liberty and rights that later (in 1215) culminated in the Magna Carta?
5. What image of the church did you receive from the priest's refusal of Marion's request to help the hungry people? What was the position of the church in medieval society? How did it help and hinder the people?
6. What do you think of the justification in the legend for Robin Hood becoming an outlaw? How are others who break the

law also “outlaws” –such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., the Berrigan brothers, or in slavery days, the Abolitionists? However, in what important way is Gandhi and those who adopted his tactics of non-violence different? (Hint: did Gandhi or King flee or hide or refuse to accept the consequences for their breaking the law?)