

# Why Robin Hood Prince of Thieves is the Greatest Movie Ever Made (To me)

Meta Title: This November sees the latest incarnation of the Sherwood Bandit in cinemas, but it'll take a lot to best Robin Hood's 1991 outing as the Prince of Thieves

So, the Robin Hood reboot trailer has arrived and it leaves a lot to be desired. Wait; is that Nottingham in the middle ages? I don't remember it looking like Kings Landing or Canto Bight! Not that I was around in the middle ages of course, but having visited the city on several occasions, as well as Sherwood Forest itself many times, I can safely say that it doesn't look a bit like Dubrovnik – Hollywood's current film location of choice. And nothing says Robin Hood more than machine-stitched hoods, tanks, explosions, tweed jackets, modern haircuts, AR15 style crossbows, Molotov cocktails, bullet time, and Jamie Foxx in a white T-shirt.

Yet another dreary, superhero-infected rehash of a fascinating legend, dumbed down to give modern audiences with short attention spans the smash-and-grab noise-fest they've been conditioned to crave. The words "teaser trailer" burst onto the screen, and two minutes and 21 seconds later, you've seen the entire film. Come in Hollywood, your time is up.

With the knives already out for Otto Bathurst's Guy Ritchie-influenced retelling of the Sherwood bandit, you have to ask yourself – is nothing sacred anymore? Can they only hope to put bums on seats in cinemas if we're watching 120 minutes of explosions? For me, there will only ever be one Robin Hood anyway – but that, and the movies of that era, seems like a lifetime ago.

The summer of 1991 was unforgettable for one main reason. I would have been turning 12, on the cusp of my teenage years and finally allowed out beyond the end of the street on which I grew up. I'd come home with muddy hands, bloody knees, and grass stains that were never going to wash out, and I knew I had one movie to thank for my new-found sense of adventure.

Robin Hood Prince of Thieves.

Now, Star Wars was always a staple in our household every Christmas, and it wasn't Christmas without that blistering fanfare and bold, yellow lettering whose true power I and a great many others hadn't yet quite grasped. But it was precisely for that reason that RHPOT grabbed me in those heady days of the early 90's: because I was old enough to really remember it. I grant you that the epic space opera will always have a place in my heart as an impressionable young boy (and as an impressionable adult), but RHPOT holds a certain power over me that I'm going to do my best to explain here. And I can assure you, I'm not the only one.

I was always a Robin Hood fan. I grew up reading the books, fascinated by the legend. As fictional as he might have been, there was a believable, palpable sense of reality there. I was infatuated with the dark ages while harboring an unhealthy obsession with swords (I spent \$200 of my pocket money on an Excalibur replica) and of course, bows and arrows. Growing up, I often thought I was born in the wrong time, and I yearned to ride a horse with a blade strapped to my waist, a tunic covering plate mail and a quiver of arrows on my back. Fashioning bows with a borrowed pocket knife became part and parcel of that summer. I wasn't allowed my own knife; mom thought I would stab my sister.

I distinctly remember one holiday at a caravan park somewhere near St Andrews, on the northeast coast of Scotland. At the time I didn't have many friends and I struggled to make them, but, for some reason, I was invited to play "Robin Hood" with the older lads. We split into teams and threw ourselves through bushes with careless abandon, crude wooden swords, bows, and quarterstaves clashing. I wasn't a very brave kid, but I found something of myself there, and couldn't quite believe it when our leader called me the most loyal man present. I swelled with pride. I'd bashed a bigger and older kid's thumb in during a rescue attempt of Maid Marion. It might have helped that girls were involved.

And every time I walked past the local cinema, I would look up and admire the RHPOT cardboard front-of-house set that dominated the top window. I was mesmerized by it, and I knew I was destined for a life of loving movies.

But what of the actual film? Upon its release, it received lukewarm praise from critics, but it captured the imagination of the public. Either I was highly aware of its promotion, or suddenly it was everywhere. There were phone-in competitions on national TV for you to win Robin Hood goodies. A toy line came out from Kenner (their Sherwood Forest playset was actually just their 1983 Ewok Village with a new paint job and plastic leaves) and then, of course, there was THAT single. Bryan Adams' Grammy-winning "(Everything I Do) I Do It for You" was an astonishing 16 weeks at number one, long before all the current downloading nonsense, setting a record that has yet to be broken. I adored that song at the time because of its association with the movie, and whenever I hear that opening piano I think of the sunlight glinting through the trees of Sherwood Forest. Right before I puke.

To say I loved it was an understatement, warts and all. Alright, so it's a million miles from being historically accurate, it's a damn sight closer than this guff we're about to be spoon fed in November. Maybe the hero had a dodgy accent, but I can forgive him for that. To me, Kevin Costner IS Robin Hood and always will be. Even when the line "this is English courage" was met with roaring guffaws in cinemas and continues to do so today. So their geography of the British Isles is *slightly* off, having landed at the Seven Sisters cliffs in Suffolk only to walk all the way to Hadrian's wall on the Scottish border before turning around and ending up back somewhere near a fictional Nottingham in the Midlands. So what if Morgan Freeman's character was invented to get a black actor into the film – to this day and without exception, every single time I see Freeman perform I acknowledge him as the guy that played Azeem. I didn't care as a kid and I don't care now. What the film lacked in accuracy, it more than made up for in magic.

And what magic it was. Backed by the stirring, goose-pimple-inducing soundtrack composed by the late Michael Kamen, the story is filled with wonderful characters, all with terrific arcs – quite an accomplishment considering how many of them share the screen. Even on my 1,000<sup>th</sup> watch, the opening credits depicting the 11<sup>th</sup> century Bayeux Tapestry with that fanfare never fails to set the hairs standing on the back of my neck.

There are other reasons too for such near-mythical adulation. With hormones about to run riot, tweenage boys like myself were soon to discover the highs and (mostly) lows of chasing girls by forcing your best mate to deliver a single red rose to the unobtainable class goddess while you ran away. Enter Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Maid Marion herself, and I was smitten. So much so, that her aura in that film became my “type” when it came to falling for the fairer sex, much to the amusement of my peers. You will often hear a scoff of laughter when I tell people I like women who look like elves; the ethereal, angelic, quirky beauty of Eva Green rather than the stereotypical basic bitch hotness of Megan Fox. You can imagine how crazy I went for Lord of the Rings, while casting Cate Blanchet as Maid Marion in the 2012 Ridley Scott reboot was a stroke of genius. But all my lusts and desires stemmed from when I first clapped eyes on Mary Elizabeth. I would have flung myself over a castle battlement with a catapult too.

Man, I watched that flick so much I might as well have inhaled it. I know huge portions of the dialogue of the original Star Wars trilogy. At a push, I could get through it with maybe a few stumbles. The same can be said for *Withnail and I* (my *actual* favorite movie of all time). But without a doubt, from start to finish, I can quote Robin Hood Prince of Thieves. I was even known to do a rather impeccable Guy of Gisborne impression. Michael Wincott was perfectly cast as the courageous but ultimately hapless sheriff’s cousin, and he’s got some stonkingly memorable lines throughout. Well, at least my sister always laughs when I gruffly belt “A CROWN TO THE MAN WHO BRINGS ME LOCKSLEY’S HEAD!”

I could ramble on about this all day dear readers, but there is one thing I have yet to mention which will be perfectly obvious to the vast majority of you. I am, of course, talking about the performance of the late, great Alan Rickman.

The definitive Sheriff of Nottingham.

Now my intrigue for this new retelling peaked when I heard Ben Mendelsohn was taking the coveted role. He’s an actor I admire greatly and is going from strength to strength, particularly when playing the villain. You heard it here first: he will be the best thing about this wank-a-thon come its release. No one – but no one – will ever top Mr. Rickman’s tour de force; the benchmark against which we judge all future Sheriffs.

Deliciously evil, camp, often hilarious, he was rightly awarded the BAFTA for best supporting actor. And much like Morgan Freeman, it marked him on the acting map for me. It is well known he refused the role twice before being given carte blanche in the part, and what you see is largely down to Alan himself. There’s a rumor that Kevin Costner had Rickman’s part curtailed because of fear of being overshadowed, a move which appears to have made not a blind bit of difference if true. Although a new generation of fans will know him better as Professor Snape, you only had to look at the RHPOT video tributes that poured in over social media when he passed to know that this was his true defining role. “Cancel the kitchen scraps for lepers and orphans... no more merciful beheadings. And call off Christmas!” Add-libbed genius and he is sorely missed.

BRUUUUUUUUUUUH! BRUUUUUUUUUH! The standard, one note, booming opener of superhero/action movie trailers these days (Christopher Nolan has a lot to answer for) assaults our ears within seconds of watching the new Robin Hood teaser – and just like that, we know it’s going to be crap. But then, maybe I’m being too harsh. RHPOT was panned by critics when it came out back in 1991, some even calling it “joyless” and “a mess.” One reviewer even went so far to say the most depressing thing about it was that kids were going to see it “expecting to have a good time.”

It's interesting to note, then, that RHPOT is still loved and held so dearly by many from that generation. The kids did go and see it buddy, and they *did* have a good time. I still think it's one of the best, most stirring, uplifting and adventurous films I've ever seen. Alright, so it might not actually be the greatest movie of all time, but buckles were well and truly swashed. I very much doubt the same will be said of this new effort 27 years after its release, and I'll have words with any man who says otherwise.

And cut their heart out with a spoon.

#### Mini-Bio

Stuart is a freelance writer, world traveler and movie buff from the UK but currently to be found bothering the residents of Zagreb, Croatia. He will be moving to the states in the near future because he's desperate to once again live in a native English-speaking country after seven years on the road. Formerly an actor, he gave up because he wasn't any good and turned his attentions to critiquing other thespians in all the movie roles he would never be cast in. He believes Robin Hood Prince of Thieves to be the best movie ever made, and that everyone should watch Bojack Horseman.