



# The Outlaws of Sherwood

*Robin McKinley*

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## **The Outlaws of Sherwood** Robin McKinley

The Robin Hood legend comes thrillingly alive in Robin McKinley's re-imagining of the classic adventure.

Young Robin Longbow, sub-apprentice forester in the King's Forest of Nottingham, must contend with the dislike of the Chief Forester, who bullies Robin in memory of his popular father. But Robin does not want to leave Nottingham or lose the title to his father's small tenancy, because he is in love with a young lady named Marian—and keeps remembering that his mother too was gentry and married a common forester.

Robin has been granted a rare holiday to go to the Nottingham Fair, where he will spend the day with his friends Much and Marian. But he is ambushed by a group of the Chief Forester's cronies, who challenge him to an archery contest...and he accidentally kills one of them in self-defense.

He knows his own life is forfeit. But Much and Marian convince him that perhaps his personal catastrophe is also an opportunity: an opportunity for a few stubborn Saxons to gather together in the secret heart of Sherwood Forest and strike back against the arrogance and injustice of the Norman overlords.

## **The Outlaws of Sherwood Details**

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# From Reader Review The Outlaws of Sherwood for online ebook

## Angie says

I have a thing for Robin Hood. Specifically Robin Hood retellings. I love Robin, Marian, Little John, Will Scarlet, Much the Miller, Alan-a-Dale, and the whole merry crew. I read Ivanhoe cover to cover just for Robin Hood's periodic appearances. And when I went on study abroad to England, I dragged my best friend all the way to Nottingham and Sherwood Forest as well so I could walk around in the woods and soak it all up. It's still one of the happiest, most golden days I can recall, that one. My first encounter with the tale itself was no doubt the Disney animated version (which I still love watching with my son), but I'm pretty sure the first actual novelization I read was Robin McKinley's THE OUTLAWS OF SHERWOOD. And it remains my very favorite to this day. Admittedly, I seem to possess the McKinley gene. I love her writing. I love the unexpected, twisty paths she takes, the obstinate characters, and the wry humor. True to form, her Robin is not the typical Robin of legend. If you cherish the strapping, dashing, swashbuckling hero a la Errol Flynn, then this version is probably not for you. But if you like an unusual, but beautifully wrought, take on a classic then you really ought to give this one a shot.

The story opens with the following lines:

A small vagrant breeze came from nowhere and barely flicked the feather tips as the arrow sped on its way. It shivered in its flight, and fell, a little off course--just enough that the arrow missed the slender tree it was aimed at, and struck tiredly and low into the bole of another tree, twenty paces beyond the mark. Robin sighed and dropped his bow.

Robin is on his way to Nottingham Fair to meet his childhood friends Marian and Much and have a bit of well-earned frivolity. As an apprentice forester in the King's Forest, Robin barely scrapes by and his days off are few and far between. Unfortunately, while on his way he is ambushed by a few of the Chief Forester's men who have had it in for Robin for years. No one is more surprised than Robin when he wins the resulting archery contest and the skirmish ends in an attempt on his life and Robin's arrow buried in his attacker's chest. From this point on Robin is a wanted man. His friends convince him to go into hiding while they work up a plan to keep their friend alive and prevent the Norman overlords from raining down punishments on all the Saxons' heads as a result of Robin's "crime." Against his better judgement, Robin goes along with Much and Marian's plan and, in the process, he becomes a hero--albeit a reluctant one.

There is so much good in this book and it all centers around the characters. Either you will fall in love with Robin or you will not. And if you love Robin, then you will love all of the characters for they gather around him despite his adamant refusal that he is no hero because they need him. Marian and Much, his old friends, see this. They understand it and they try to help Robin understand it. Their love for him, their need to believe in him, and their willingness to walk away from their homes and their lives to follow him into hiding in Sherwood Forest reflect the desperate nature of the times and the ways in which this good man is able to inspire and take care of other good men and women like him who have been caught in the ever-tightening vise of Norman justice. I love watching this transformation, this coming together of such a motley band of comrades. Every time I read it I savor each one. And, as with any McKinley book, if you're a fan of strong female characters who do not do what they are expected to do, then this book is for you. Marian is awesome. It's Marian who is the excellent shot. It's Marian who has the vision and who knows Robin's potential before

he does. It's Marian who risks more than anyone else to create the legend and keep it alive. There is one other standout female character, but I can't tell you any more than that as she is so excellent she must be discovered entirely on her own. Along with Deerskin, I think this is the most emotional of McKinley's works because it is as grounded in reality as any retelling I've read. *THE OUTLAWS OF SHERWOOD* is an emotional, subtly humorous, visceral take on the legend and I cannot recommend it highly enough.

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### Natalie says

The writing is *superb*. I love this telling of the story, and how the characters are portrayed. They have a slight modern feel without being obnoxious or out of place (I could easily picture the cast from BBC's Robin Hood. In fact, I suspect the creators of the show read this book for inspiration, for there are some suspicious parallels. :)) All the Robin and Marian scenes were adorable and made my heart happy. <3 I liked how Robin was almost a different character in this. He *wasn't* the best archer. He wasn't a lover of high adventure and glory. He just wanted to protect his friends.

The ending pleased me. It left me with hope and semi happiness. (Not depression, like the BBC show, haha. )

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### Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

**\$1.51 Kindle sale, Nov. 30, 2017.** 3.5 stars. *The Outlaws of Sherwood*, a retelling of the Robin Hood folktale, has been on my bookshelf for ages, dating back to the days when I was auto-buying everything Robin McKinley wrote. It's a very different type of book for her: no fantasy elements at all, just a straightforward historical novel about how Robin came to be the leader of a band of outlaws in Sherwood Forest, and how several of the key members of his group came to join him.

Interestingly, Robin himself is kind of a beta hero in this story, and initially he's more driven by events that happen to him than affirmatively taking action himself. He's also not much of an archer - Marian is the one with the real archery skills. This makes for an interesting twist on the famous archery contest story.

It's mostly pleasant and enjoyable, but there's an extremely violent and bloody battle toward the end that I found rather harrowing reading. If you're interested in the Robin Hood legend it's worth checking out, especially on sale. Otherwise I didn't find it all that memorable, despite reading it two or three times over the years, and I'm normally a big fan of McKinley's earlier fiction.

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### Duckie says

It's impressive the power a symbol can carry. Case in point: for a brief spate about three or four years ago, I was working in Beijing, which is noted for (among other things) its affection for foreign brands and its creative interpretation of copyright law. Near my apartment lay a popular clothing store called "Robin Hood, Ltd.," which offered a shirt emblazoned with their own logo design and the motto, "Be yourself." This shirt was so ubiquitous that I would sometimes step out of the apartment into a crowded street and find myself enveloped in a double layer of irony: first, because if everyone's wearing it, then how original is it? And second, since the shirts were all knockoffs, they're not even themselves original. China, y'all!

It's not unusual for a store in China to attract an adoring fan base with the perceived exoticness of some foreign imagery (regardless of its veracity); indeed, this is hardly unique to the Chinese. It says something about the power of symbols, however, that the Robin Hood name could carry a connotation powerful enough to inspire attraction in a culture that already has its own Robin Hood-like mythos.

In *The Outlaws of Sherwood*, Robin McKinley takes her signature approach to unravel the story and characters behind the Robin Hood legend. She stresses the importance of stories and how they can evolve depending on the needs of certain times and situations. She particularly emphasizes what those stories can mean for those with limited choices, and how they can offer a sense of escape or freedom. Robin and Little John form the crux of the growing legend, yet their lack of alternatives, since they have each killed a man and can no longer return to society, are posed in contrast to those who are turned away from the band because they have other options:

He still could not quite believe that anyone would willingly throw over a living, however meager, to live as an outlaw. "Ah, but Robin, that's just it: we /are/ choosing," said Much when Robin admitted a little of this to him..."None of us wakes in the night speaking the name of the man he killed by accident. " (34)

Ms. McKinley also carefully traces the arc of the legend as it grows, and carves out the spaces where it begins to move beyond its human sources:

If Robin Hood had not gathered a band of outlaws around him, the tale-tellers would have had to invent one for him. But the band did exist, and none of its members was taken either... and this, too, improved in the retelling. (36)

"Have you asked Robin Hood who he is?"

Cecily said, puzzled, watching Tuck's deft hands, "No. I would not."

"Have you asked yourself who he is?"

Cecily said slowly, "He -- he is our leader."

"The leader of a band of outlaws," said Friar Tuck, "who live leanly in Sherwood. And did you hear the folk today talk of this Robin Hood whom they saw shooting his arrows into the target better than anyone else?"

"They spoke of him -- as if he were not human," Cecily said..." (206)

Ms. McKinley also brings out the human weaknesses behind the characters in these stories. Robin's fits of temper, for example, or Tuck's failure of will in the face of a threat to his beloved dogs, offer a depth not often explored in other Robin Hood pastiches.

Despite these elements, there are other areas where the novel stumbles. Ms. McKinley's choice of highly stylized language to tell the story is a sizeable risk; it's clear why this was done, but it's a bit like watching the action through a stained-glass window. As far as the novel goes, this will make it or break it for most readers -- either the language works for them or it doesn't. The love stories, moreover, feel forced, as if Ms. McKinley were setting them up to make a point without considering if they worked for the characters. At least they're part of the B-plot and can be easily skimmed.

I suppose it means something, as well, that I never figured out if there really was a Robin Hood, Ltd. brand based in England. It's entirely possible that the store, and their much-admired logo, were both offshoots of a Chinese company that only sought to *appear* foreign. The logo design itself could have been pilfered from a

foreign apparel company; the store was, after all, across the street from a fake Chipotle's. Such is the power of symbols.

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## **Miriam says**

McKinley explores the circumstances that might have led to the formation of an outlaw community in Sherwood and the growth of the Robin Hood legend. She contrasts Robin's practical concerns (not being arrested and executed, taking care of his followers when they decide to live in the woods) with the more abstract political ideals of those who want to make him a symbol of Saxon resistance. McKinley's Robin is not a great archer or a brilliant strategist, but he is an inspiring leader.

This was a great idea, but there were some serious weaknesses in the execution.

First, the political discussions. I'm sorry, I just don't believe medieval peasants talked like this, especially when they had accidentally killed someone hours before and were urgently trying to escape. Much, especially, sounds more like someone giving responses on a political talk show than someone talking about real life with friends.

The second problem -- and this won't surprise prior readers of McKinley ([cough:]Spindle's End[cough:]) -- was point of view. For the first two thirds of the book, the pov is Robin's. Then suddenly we have a brief shift to Marian at her father's castle. Then in the last few chapters we are seeing from the point of view of Cecily, Will Scarlet's little sister.

And that's third -- Cecily. She was fine as a character, but I didn't see any reason to make up an additional character when there were so many already to choose from that I could hardly keep them straight. If McKinley had wanted to add a character to serve as narrator throughout the story, that would have made sense, but why invent one who isn't really important until fairly late in the book? If the author wanted more female perspective she could have used Marian, who really doesn't get as much page time as the character seems to deserve. And Cecily's romance was weak; you know, authors, it is okay to have a female character who doesn't fall in love with anyone. Really it is.

Lastly, I did not find the ending very satisfactory. I don't think there is a good way to "end" Robin Hood. That's why the tales are so episodic and their timeline so unclear. Robin Hood's story has a vague beginning and an even fuzzier termination; the important part is the adventures in the wood (which is as much the Forest Eternal as Sherwood), the series of jokes, tricks, and thefts against oppressive enemies, rescuing comrades from danger... Is there really a believable happy ending for a bunch of outlaws living in the wild? Not really. McKinley wants the story to be short and delineated -- a couple years in Sherwood, a couple minor victories against the Sheriff, a major battle, The End. And that's not the right feel for a story with an epic cycle. I realize that is McKinley's point. Yeah, the outlaws probably would have been lucky to make it two years before getting caught. It just was kind of a let down.

If you're a McKinley completist or fan of Robin Hood adaptations by all means pick this up. It was not unenjoyable, the flaws were just a bit too glaring for me to love it.

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## Meg says

The first half of this book is a weak 2 stars - but it picks up to 4+ after that point, so rating it is really confusing. One thing's for sure, though - Robin Hood is the LEAST interesting character. Not to mention the worst archer in the group. Which is easily one of my favorite parts about it.

To me, the book demonstrates the reality of a legend like Robin. Most iconic characters in both history and fiction owe their legendary status to timing, luck, and a bunch of awesome friends.

This novel is obviously written by a woman, because even the truly awesome male characters are saved by women at one point or another. Maid Marian is certainly three-quarters of the way up the cool-o-meter - but Cecily is tops for me!

Basically, pick this book up about halfway through (right around the archery contest) and you'll thank me. Up until that point it's mostly the day-to-day drudgery of trying to live in a forest... with Robin generally being a fuddy-duddy and worrying over his people like an old woman.

And PLEASE - if you want to read a Robin McKinley - pick up *The Blue Sword*! It's GOLDEN.

P.S. When did Friar Tuck get so cool???

### FAVORITE QUOTES:

Let us not gallop to meet future difficulties. A walking pace is enough. (Robin)

I have often been wrong, and whilst the training of the church has taught me to admit it, somehow I have never learnt not to be wrong in the first place. (Tuck)

I knew your father. A good man, as many say – not all, for if all called him good it would not be the truth. (Tuck to Robin)

It was common knowledge when I was a forester that I could hit the broad side of a barn only if it wasn't walking away too quickly. (Robin)

It is her misfortune not to be stupid, and so her hatred is difficult for her. It twists in her hands and bites her. (Rita on Beatrix)

Tales are as much the necessary fabric of our lives as our bodies are. (Tuck)

Any lone man who can, with little more than stubbornness and a few ragged friends, set so much of my aristocracy in a rage, is a man I wish to put to my purposes. (King Richard)

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## Deborah Pickstone says

One of the better versions of the legend of Robin Hood. I have no idea why this is designated as YA, that seems fairly pointless; perhaps because the author writes fantasy - to my disappointment there is no more from her in this vein.

Set in the reign of Richard 'Lionheart', as the legend often is - yet this is a most unlikely time for the birth of this legend if only because Richard spent as little as 8 weeks in total in England in the course of a 10 year reign. I also think his attempt to elevate Marian to (view spoiler) a definite fantasy element! The 'punishment' he handed out to the outlaws was believable - and a harsh one too, likely to have ended in all of their deaths. Despite historical howlers this was a very good read and bettered in the Robin Hood subject only by The Arrow of Sherwood in my reading.

Personally, I believe Robin Hood originates from the catastrophic defeat of Simon de Montfort at Evesham when fugitives were known to have fled into the Fens and into Sherwood. Anyone subscribing to de Montfort's moral chivalric code might well have proceeded to 'rob the rich and give to the poor'. And there would have been no way back with Edward I on the throne.

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## Minh says

I am a sucker for Robin Hood. Off the top of my head I can remember at least 3 versions of Robin Hood that I've read (not all loved). Robin Hood is the book that I remember the most when I think back to my primary school reading days, and I was super excited (and eventually super disappointed) for the new BBC incarnation of my favourite protagonist. I picked up Outlaws because of a yuletide story that I put to the sidelines, not wanting to spoil myself for yet another version of the Hooded Man.

Without a doubt my sentimental favourite for Robin Hood is the novelisation of the old TV series, Robin of Sherwood. I searched for that omnibus for YEARS. I had a search saved on ebay for it, scoured the 2nd hand search engines, looked in every library! Finally, finally I found it, of all places... In a 2nd hand bookstore at Milson's Point for \$5. :D And if I hadn't turned around at the right time I would have missed it. Yes. I do believe it was Fate.

Outlaws of Sherwood! For some reason I have this categorised as a Children's Novel. I'm not particularly sure it is a children's novel but I enjoyed the spin that Robin McKinley put on this incarnation of Robin Hood. For one, he's a crap shot and readily acknowledges that a test to become one of his men, is to be better than the leader with the bow and arrow. The Marion of Outlaws is very similar to the BBC Marion, stubborn, outspoken, yet still living at home, rebelling quietly under the farce of unassuming daughter. Will Scarlet is actually a nobleman, who takes his name from the scarlet cloths he loves to wear. Much is one of Marion and Robin's childhood friends and Little John is as always, not so little.

All the old favourites come out to play, Guy of Gisborne becomes an assassin! And yes, King Richard the Lion Heart appears. I enjoyed the novel as it portrayed Robin as a normal man, stripping away some of the myth factor that you see in so many other Robin novels. Robin is just a boy really, who somehow ends up being the figurehead of the rebellion, not all powerful by any means, not even a good shot. But a great story.

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## Nicole says

I finished this book with a wistful feeling, thinking it was beautiful despite the violence, suffering and loss. McKinley captures the essence of the Robin Hood legend with lyrical descriptions and good characterisation. The style of the telling is reminiscent of a tale of long ago--with a few anachronistic turns of phrase. The author even gets away with some drifting points of view because of that old-tale quality.

The story of Robin Hood captured my heart when I was very young, and Robin has long been one of my favourite characters. McKinley talks in her afterword about how the story has changed over time to suit the desires and needs of the audience, and I've heard this concept applied to other stories. While I have seen some versions of the Robin Hood story I like more than others, none fully capture *my* idea of how it should be. But this one is definitely one of the better ones. To me, there should be a magical quality to the story without there being any actual magic--I guess that's the legendary element, the idea of humans doing extraordinary things. McKinley does a good job contrasting the reality of the outlaws' lives and deeds with the tales that are being told by the villagers about them.

I'm a conflicted idealist--I love seeing characters do heroic things, but I also like seeing characters with realistic flaws or weaknesses. In this case, Robin is not the best archer of the group. The incident that starts him down the outlaw road involves a stroke of luck (both bad and good), and his friends nudge him into his role in Sherwood. Robin is not devil-may-care but instead takes his responsibilities as a leader very seriously.

His friends Much and Will are more impulsive and sarcastic. Little John is complex. Friar Tuck has a bit of an edge. I liked them all very much.

This version of the story makes female characters more central to the action, and I enjoyed seeing that. Marian plays a dangerous game living a double life. I also liked how she, Robin, Much and Will had grown up together. The romantic element between Robin and Marian is subtle and sweet, the tricky business of a friendship turning into romantic love, made more complicated by Robin's conflicted sense of honour--he wants to send her away for her own safety but doesn't want to be without her.

The outlaws don't come through their adventures unscathed, which is sad but realistic. The ending felt a little abrupt, but I suppose it makes sense. While I would've wished (in my silly, girlish way) for a somewhat more fairy tale ending, King Richard's punishment/reward for Robin and company is logical and more realistic than many outcomes. At least it allows me to imagine that they did eventually all make it back home again intact.

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## Anne says

*Full disclosure: I like this book a lot, and I think its best points more than outweigh its flaws.*

To those disappointed by Robin Hood's sidelining, I want to point out that McKinley's title--The Outlaws of Sherwood--should warn you what she's up to. Robin Hood himself is not her main focus, though he is the key and the center of the plot, and the nucleus of all the relationships of the outlaw band. Traditional interpretations of heroism and heroes don't interest her, and mythic grandeur only when contrasted with reality: otherwise, why bother to reimagine folk or fairy tales at all; they're grand enough in original form? Myth-making, in McKinley's view, is a vital part of human nature. Fleshing out myth with realistic characterization is what makes her stories vibrant and relatable, and all it takes is about the second page or so ("[Robin:] did not hate the fact that he was a second-rate archer...") for Robin Hood to snap from godlike Mary Sue to complex, layered, interesting person.

She's explored this tension before and will again--the idealization of storybook heroes contrasted with what would be the gritty reality of practical deed-doing. The Hero and the Crown showed us dragon-killing as grim, thankless vermin disposal, a clear inversion of the most typically heroic deed in Western myth; in *The Blue Sword*, Harry is consciously molded into a hero as a symbol she feels she can't live up to. All of McKinley's heroes are reluctant, uncertain, forced to step up to the plate by circumstance and character rather than high-minded inclination--they perform heroic deeds because there is no other option, not because they're bold, noble, pure, or powerful. Like Ursula LeGuin's Sparrowhawk, they spend their lives learning to decide to do what they must do.

She's never before been so explicit about what she's doing, either. There's practically not a character in the book who doesn't overtly refer to the act of myth creation and its contrast with the facts of their narrative. Friar Tuck tells us "tales are as much the necessary fabric of our lives as our bodies are." Marian consciously constructs a legend of superhuman archer Robin Hood; the common folk of Nottingham have their own tales and stories of a fairy 'Old One' Robin Hood, savior of the Saxons; the outlaws themselves add some gloss to their versions when drinking with town girlfriends; and robbed nobles exaggerate the shocking deeds of the outlaws, or are implied to be doing so. Finally, in the afterword, if you somehow missed it, she lays it out in her own voice and tells us how and why she manipulated the Robin Hood legend the way she did. This is a story about stories, a story about the impact of stories. The next time you read it, dig for quotes about stories, tales, myths, and you'll find them everywhere.

McKinley's skill lies in burying this theme in a great story that stays interesting, in part because the third-person narrative POV jumps around and you don't spend too much time in any one character's head. Plot and character-wise, she fleshes out most generally agreed-upon elements of the Robin Hood myth--longbow archery, Sherwood Forest, robbing the rich to give to the poor, the quarterstaff meeting with Little John, the ragtag fugitives' motley characters (seriously, didn't we all wonder what a minstrel was doing in a forest?)--all are given plausibility, grounding, wit, motivation, and real character. I suspect that a lot of us double-X-chromosome folks are drawn to this book because she added some women to the traditional Robin Hood sausagefest, and realistic women at that. It's difficult to tell how anachronistic they might be, since there aren't a lot of records of women's inner monologues in the 12th century, but at least they aren't glaringly modern (Anne Perry, your Charlotte Pitt is a huge offender.)

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### **Suzanne says**

A nice telling of Robin Hood that sticks pretty close to the classic version. However, Marian gets more of a role, and she is a great character!

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### **Avrelia says**

I was reading Robin McKinley's *Sherwood Outlaws* and started thinking what the legend means to me.

I couldn't get into the book – even though I like the characters (this incarnations of them) and the writing, they seem to be behind a glass wall that I couldn't break, and didn't want to. I cannot start to care – and this feels to be of crucial importance in fiction for me lately. I don't have to like everybody and everything in a book, but at least something must pull me into – even if it is a description of a sea, or beautiful style, or fancy ideas. Here it was nothing of the sort, and the only thing that elicit emotions was the marginalia on a page splattered with something brownish: "It is blood. Don't lick it".

I thought that may be the case is in the legend itself? That I grew disenchanted with Robin Hood and his merry band? I used to love the story and its heroes and heroines. Somewhere in the back of my mind I was always sure about the continuous existence of Robin Hood, Marion, Little John, Will Scarlet, Friar Tuck, Sheriff of Nottingham, Guy of Gisborne and others in the Sherwood forest and around. They add something to the world, some important tiny bit.

Why not to read a novel about them? I cannot say that the interpretation is too contrary to what I imagine – or any other interpretation, because I just don't really imagine them at all. I have a vague picture that changes when I change or when my mood change. Robin can be young or grown man, blond or black-haired, bearded or not, asshole or sweetie or both, of gentle birth or of common, just a robber or an idealist – none of it ever sits in stone. Same with Marion (though I like her more when she is not a damsel in distress) and everyone else. I probably have a more definite image of Friar Tuck – he is short and round, good with his staff, optimistic, and the only monastic vow he takes seriously is the one of poverty.

But maybe that was the reason – I prefer my vague image to the detailed and rooted in the time and place version. Plus I always get annoyed when Richard the Lionheart came and resolved the matter. Because he would never do that. But I got even more annoyed when he took all the band with him to Holy Land – even though that's what he would definitely do. But Robin Hood cannot be outside of England! There mere idea of it destroys the Universe as we know it.

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## **JonathanT says**

For the most part, this was excellently written! Fresh and clever dialogue gave the characters life, omniscient POV held my attention well, and the prose practically sparkled with strength of expression. One small problem: I NEED A PLOT. It's not that nothing happens—it's just that what does happen is mostly a bunch of loosely related events that have little to no effect upon each other. Hence, the story has a disjointed, rambling feel to it, and it lacks any significant build-up. So although *The Outlaws of Sherwood* has fantastic prose and characters, it lacks a compelling plot. Still, I enjoyed it! Kudos to the author for maintaining a VERY classic feel while still developing the Robin Hood story in a unique way.

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## **Hope says**

I've been on a bit of a Robin Hood craze for the past month. Having always had a place in my heart for the noble outlaw, my interest in him was rekindled when I stumbled upon the BBC show and fell in love with the story and the characters all over again. Thus, when I started nearing the last episodes of the series, I

wasn't ready to give it up just yet. I got this sort of clingy feeling, like when you were little and you came to the end of a wonderful bedtime story and you just don't want to go to sleep.

And so, I found *The Outlaws of Sherwood*. And it did what I wanted, in prolonging the Robin Hood obsession a bit longer.

My main complaint about this story was that there was too much Cecily. Who is this character and why is she so important and what's so special about her? And most of all, why is she even in this story? I just found her to be really quite flat, over all, and I'd rather have had her "screen time" replaced with Will, Marian, or Much. Because none of those characters got what was due to them. Marian got like, one chapter devoted specifically to her? Was it even that? And I LOVED that chapter. Marian's perspective was fantastic. I would've put more of her in there, if I'd written this. But, alas, I did not.

I kind of liked how Robin wasn't the best archer in the gang. But actually one of the worst. Probably the worst. Not that he's bad, by typical standards, but he's not great. And Robin is always great. I liked the unremarkable-ness of this Robin...but I also missed it a little. I can't really explain why, but there's something about the Robin Hood who never misses a target and is the best at all the cool stuff that I'm just a bit attached to. Still, I can't complain. He was realistic, and he was still awesome. He still had that incredible leadership thing going on, which is the essence of Robin Hood anyways. One description in the book which I found most fitting went thus: "*But there was something—the way the man caught the eye for no reason; the something Robin had.*"

There wasn't a lot of dwelling on the romance between Robin and Marian, but the little glimpses of it were absolutely adorable and maybe more so because of how little there was shown between them. They remain at the top or very near the top of my list of favorite fictional couples.

There's not really a whole lot to say about the book *in particular*, but more about the Robin Hood legend in general. Because I've felt like researching, and I've felt like pondering, and I've been wondering incessantly what it is that people of all ages find so memorable and so endearing about the tale. What it is that I myself find so endearing about the tale.

My thoughts are scattered, but the conclusion I've come to is that people need a hero. We need to believe that a human being is capable of selflessly giving up his livelihood, whether of his free will or not, to serve and help the less-fortunate.

Robin Hood's actual existence is rather vague. I'd like to believe that he lived, that he was real, because there's something romantic about it all for me. But then, he might have just been an idea. A hopeful, idealistic idea that is still alive and well today even though it doesn't take the form of ballads and epic poems.

"Robinhood" became a general name for bandits in the 1300s, apparently. But it had to start *somewhere*. I don't think we'll ever know for sure whether he was real or not, and I think I like it best that way. Because there's this mysterious, magical feel that surrounds the legend. Hood has been exaggerated, he might have been a horrible person in reality with nothing noble about him. And that's exactly, I think, why I'd prefer not to know entirely who he was or was not.

The ending of this novel, in my opinion, was *not* satisfactory. But it's enjoyable over all, with its fun as well as its serious moments. And it's definitely worth a read. :)

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## Emily says

This retelling of Robin Hood tries to ground itself in the realities of life in early medieval England, which makes this interesting but only semi-enjoyable. Robin is pessimistic about the bandits' chances from the start, and there's the understanding that they can't last forever. This gives the book an odd tone. It's sometimes lighthearted and humorous, poking fun at the more ridiculous elements of the legend, but then will take a sharp turn into darker sections where everyone is cold and hungry in the woods, unsure of their fate. And it has the most ridiculous ending I've ever read. (view spoiler)

What I was most struck by on this reread is how uneven Robin is as a character. I really liked how McKinley turned some of the most routine pieces of the tale on their head (view spoiler), but she also keeps some of the elements that don't line up with her interpretation: I never bought Robin as an inspiring leader. The best characters in the book are in the supporting cast, especially Little John and Cecily.

This is interesting as an addition to the Robin Hood canon, but isn't my favorite rendition.

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