

Russell Crowe, Cate Blanchett Forge an Epic Adventure in 'Robin Hood'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 13, 2010 - 8:56pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “T’wang!” is the the sound of an archer’s arrow going right into the center of the summer movie kick-off season. Director Ridley Scott, Cate Blanchett, Max Von Sydow, William Hurt, Mark Strong, Oscar Isaac and Russell Crowe – in the title role of “Robin Hood” – offer a compelling story, plenty of action and an epic quality to the oft-told legend.

This is the Robin Hood of the Crusades, as the film opens at the end of the 12th century, and King Richard the Lionheart (Danny Huston) is leading his troops through the last invasion in France before everyone gets to go home. Robin is shown to be exceptionally brave through battle, and establishes further credibility when he meets his compatriot Little John (Kevin Durand) during a game of chance. When an encounter with the King lands both of them in the stocks, they miss the final battle, where King Richard is killed by an errant arrow.

Escaping the stocks and seeking passage back to their homeland, Robin and his companions – including Will Scarlet (Scott Grimes) and Allan A'Dayle (Alan Doyle) – encounter Godfrey (Mark Stong), a double agent for the French king, who has raided the company responsible for carrying King Richard’s crown back to England. Robin’s men dispatch the marauders, but Godfrey escapes. At the scene of the raid, Robin receives a special sword, and promises the dying knight who owns it that he will personally deliver it back to the warrior’s father in Nottingham.



Russell Crowe as Robin Hood and Cate Blanchett as Lady Marian in 'Robin Hood'
Photo Credit: © Universal Pictures

Assuming the identities of the knights who are delivering the crown, Robin and his men get their passage back to England and completes the delivery of the headgear to the new King John (Oscar Isaac), an immature egotist who immediately starts rescinding all of his brother Richard's good intentions. Enter the evil Godfrey again, who now also sits on the court of the king while planning with the French to plunder England. The legend of Robin Hood begins with his returning of the sword to Sir Walter Loxley (Max Von Sydow), pretending to be that dead knight and husband to Lady Marian (Cate Blanchett), plus assuming the duties of protector in Nottingham, despite the ineffectual Sheriff (Matthew Macfadyen), a beekeeping Friar Tuck (Mark Addy) and Godfrey's pursuit of his head.

Setting the myth in historical context was a master stroke, because this phase of Robin's "career" is steeped with morally vague concept of the Crusades and the selfishness of a new king. He has seen war and it has changed him, in fact he is put in the stocks because he gave Christian King Richard a true account of the slaughter of the Muslims. Crowe is perfect to play this side of Robin, a brooding man of integrity. This is an origin story, much like a baby escaping an exploding planet in a rocket.

The England of the 13th century is not a clean place, and director Ridley Scott's production is designed to show the rutted dirt roads, bad teeth and desperation of a people sick of their young men being stripped away to war. Cate Blanchett's Marian is symbolic of that frustration, angered by a roving band of children stealing seed corn before the plantings. Human life was much cheaper then, and the film does a great job of setting up that atmosphere.

Two veteran actors add a spice to the epic. The ageless Max Von Sydow brings a larger-than-life presence to Sir Walter Loxley, and even gets to engage in some vulnerable swordplay, which was reminiscent of his medieval knight role in Ingmar Bergman's "The Seventh Seal." William Hurt has an amazing presence as William Marshal, advisor to King Richard, who is summarily dismissed by the newly crowned King John. His gravitas is perfect for the steadfastness of the role, and he brings a unwavering sense of calm among many storms.

There is a bit of a redundancy in the battle sequences – the Akira Kurosawa family should receive a royalty check every time a rain of arrows come from the sky (see "Throne of Blood") and even though the climatic battle was evocative of the D-Day raid in World War 2, it seemed anticlimatic. But this is a small complaint in an otherwise rousing fable – dirt, warts, history, morality and all.



Making Merry: Russell Crowe, Alan Doyle, Scott Grimes and Kevin Durand in 'Robin Hood'
Photo Credit: © Universal Pictures

The iconic film reviewer Roger Ebert has a "Little Movie Glossary" as part of his excellent Answer Man series and website. I was once published in that glossary with the "[Monty Python Holy Grail Moment](#)" [17] which states in part, that in every epic there is inevitably a moment that outsmarts itself by reminding us of "Monty Python and the Holy Grail." Robin Hood abounds with these moments, especially as Robin first rides into Nottingham pretending to be Marian's dead husband. I expected Eric Idle's "Bring out yer dead!" proclamation to reign upon the parade.

"I'm not dead yet!" would be the reply from Robin Hood, and this film resurrects the archer's rightful place within the canon of righteous storytelling, as poignant as an arrow right through the heart.

"Robin Hood" opens everywhere May 14th. Featuring Russell Crowe, Cate Blanchett, Max Von Sydow, William Hurt, Mark Strong, Oscar Isaac, Danny Huston and Mark Addy, written by Brian Helgeland and directed by Ridley Scott.



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