

an overdose of Robin Hood; and third, I don't think it is very good. I have chosen a similar, but I consider better, swashbuckler of the same time. We won't have Errol Flynn in tights, but we will have Tyrone Power. On Thursday, July 11, at 7 PM we will show

THE MT VOID

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The Swashbuckling Outlaw-Heroes
THE MARK OF ZORRO (1940) dir. by Rouben Mamoulian
ROBIN AND MARIAN (1976) dir. by Richard Lester

Well, what can you say about THE MARK OF ZORRO? This is one of the great fun adventure films, a sort of culmination of the adventure film conventions of the 1930s. Tyrone Power plays Don Diego, the great horseman and swordsman, who returns from school to his home in San Juan Capistrano to find his father replaced as Alcalde by a tyrant (played by J. Edward Bromberg) backed up by a vicious Basil Rathbone. By day Don Diego plays a fatuous fop; by night he dons a mask and cape and rights wrongs as the Fox: Zorro. The main musical theme by Alfred Newman is a classic. (If there is demand, incidentally, I would be more than happy sometime to show the original Douglas Fairbanks version made twenty years earlier--also great fun).

Now our second film is a rather interesting expansion of the last part of the legend of Robin Hood, the part that movies usually skip. James Goldman (T_h_e_L_i_o_n_i_n_W_i_n_t_e_r) wrote the story of the middle-aged Robin Hood and turned it into a statement about what heroes are really like, about aging, and about the true nature of adventure. The title characters are played by Sean Connery and Audrey Hepburn, with Robert Shaw as the Sheriff of Nottingham. Also present are Richard Harris, Nicol Williamson, Denholm Elliot, and Ian Holm. Nice sentimental score by John Barry.

2. Our long-time Holmdel librarian reports:

"On July 8 I'll be moving to a new and much more cramped office. It looks as if there's no way that the HO SF library cabinet is going to fit. I think the time has come to put out a plea for a new librarian. The library is one file cabinet, 18"W x 30"D x

60"H, plus 8 3-ring binders containing the past issues of the newsletter."

Is there anyone in Holmdel who would care to volunteer to take the library?

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There exists an obvious fact that seems utterly moral:
namely, that a man is always a prey to his truths.
Once he has admitted them, he cannot free himself from them.
-- Albert Camus

Keith Reynolds's ROBIN HOOD, PRINCE OF THIEVES
John Irvin's ROBIN HOOD
Two film reviews by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Two versions of the same legend became available within a month of each other. Neither does much justice to the original story but Irvin's television version turns out to be by far the better version with a little less flash and a little more intelligence and historical detail. Reynolds's film is not as bad as is claimed by the critics, but it still gets only a low 0 while I would give Irvin's film a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

I saw the coming attraction for R_o_b_i_n_H_o_o_d,_P_r_i_n_c_e_o_f_T_h_i_e_v_e_s several months ago and decided then that I wanted to see it. After all, it did not have police and was not set in L.A. How many films come out that even are set before the 20th Century? Filmmakers don't seem to

want to gamble on ever-diminishing public knowledge of history. I had hope this could be a good film. Then I read the article in the June 1991 C i n e f a n t a s t i q u e which said:

"The new film's approach to the legend can be [the producer/screenwriter's] description of the Merrie Men as medieval Hell's Angels. Add to that [director Keith] Reynolds's observation that '[Christian] Slater [as Will Scarlet] plays a 12th Century James Dean' (complete with Rocker quiff), the overall opinion that Maid Marian is a 12th Century feminist, and the fact that this film's humor is of a very contemporary nature.... [The Sheriff is] evil personified. With King Richard absent England has reverted to paganism and human sacrifice. The God/Christianity vs. Evil/Darkside is even more potent." [according to co-producer/co-screenwriter John Watson].

This was not at all encouraging. This is no place near what a telling of Robin Hood should be. I wrote an article at the time complaining about filmmakers who do not have respect for the material. It sounded as if the film was being made with no respect for the characters or the period. They had let Christianity versus paganism become the conflict rather than the Anglo-Saxon populace against the Normans who had conquered the country in the previous century and had set themselves up as the ruling nobility. That is why Robin, though technically from a noble family, had no real political power. He was of Anglo-Saxon nobility and was considered by the Anglo-Saxons to be rightfully of the ruling class. But it was the Normans who ruled.

Then Fox Television did their own version of Robin Hood, one not great but creditable. I wondered if it might not be better than the film it was trying to imitate. And I got into at least one argument

Robin Hood

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with someone who thought I was not being fair to R_o_b_i_n_H_o_o_d, P_r_i_n_c_e_o_f_T_h_i_e_v_e_s. Then I went on vacation. I came back to find R_o_b_i_n_H_o_o_d, P_r_i_n_c_e_o_f_T_h_i_e_v_e_s opened to calamitous reviews. Now I have seen it and I would say that while everything bad I predicted about the film turned out to be quite true, I think that the film was not as bad as most of the critics seem to think. So part of my job now is to defend the film that I formerly criticized.

There is little wrong with R_o_b_i_n_H_o_o_d, P_r_i_n_c_e_o_f_T_h_i_e_v_e_s that could

not have been fixed by just not making this film about Robin Hood. The Robin Hood of legend was outlawed as a young teenager. It was his youth that made him an outlaw since after being taunted about his youth he shot a king's deer to prove he had the prowess of a man. The film's concept that Robin had been to the Crusades and had picked up a Moorish sidekick was inventive but also purely invention. That the Moor would bring with him the knowledge of gunpowder is unlikely and the telescope--not invented until the Renaissance--is absurd. In a lighter film, such as T_h_e_C_r_i_m_s_o_n_P_i_r_a_t_e, such anachronisms might be a little more acceptable, but with the exception of the performance of the Sheriff of Nottingham (played by Alan Rickman, who has more fun with his role than the audience does), this film is just not that light. Speaking of Rickman's Sheriff, while I would probably have liked to see the film less tongue-in-cheek, Rickman's screwball wedding scene has to rank as a guilty pleasure. (The real Sheriff was married and had a daughter who eventually succeeded at the feat her father botched: killing Robin Hood, albeit and old and ill Robin Hood.)

One of the major problems was that the script was just not very professionally written. Pieces that have already been used in far too many films show up here. [Minor spoiler alert: The reader who has not seen the film may want to skip to the next paragraph.] In searching for Marian, Robin must fight a hooded guardian who nearly bests him. Can you guess who this warrior is? Yup! In two or three scenes characters bragging about their expertise are cut short because they were not watching what they were doing and did something like riding right into a tree branch. They even manage a horror film jump scene. This is very inadequate script-writing. And when the Sheriff tells Robin his father died "squealing like a pig," this was an allusion to a similar line also spoken to Costner in T_h_e_U_n_t_o_u_c_h_a_b_l_e_s.

Dialogue is particularly anachronistic, with characters using lines like "full of piss and wind" and saying Robin has "balls of stone." The Sheriff tells someone, "Shut up, you twit." This is the kind of script-writing where whenever someone falls there is always a fortuitous haystack to break the fall. When swords strike each other or a wall there are always sparks.

But having promised to defend the film, I will. The main criticism that has been leveled at the film is that Costner is much too laid back to play Robin. This strikes me as nonsense. He does not have the u_m_p_h of an Errol Flynn swinging through the trees and calling, "Welcome to

Sherwood, milady!" Costner's performance is at worst non-traditional, but with the exception of some accent problems it is still a valid interpretation of the character. The film has been criticized for having too many scenes that are too dark. It seems to me that the lighting is perfectly reasonable to create a period feel. The night was a lot darker in the late 12th Century. As for the darkness of tone in what some will interpret as children's film, good! We are talking about some nasty people. Let's not sugar-coat them.

As the film ended I decided it deserved some breed of a zero rating. The gratuitous rock music song over the end credits convinced me it was a low 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

What shows up the pandering and silliness of Kevin Reynolds's R_o_b_i_n_H_o_o_d, P_r_i_n_c_e_o_f_T_h_i_e_v_e_s even more is the other version of Robin Hood made for Fox Television and directed by John Irvin. This is not a flashy R_o_b_i_n_H_o_o_d and it certainly is not the original story, but it is certainly the more intelligent retelling of the story. I think that was pretty much to be expected. Director John Irvin is probably most respected for his BBC television adaptation of John LeCarre's T_i_n_k_e_r, T_a_i_l_o_r, S_o_l_d_i_e_r, S_p_y. He has gotten into wider-appeal films since, things, like G_h_o_s_t_S_t_o_r_y and H_a_m_b_u_r_g_e_r_H_i_l_l and even R_a_w_D_e_a_l, but clearly this is a man who can do intelligence on the screen. Rather than side-stepping the politics of the time as Reynolds did, Irvin's version, written by Sam Resnick and John McGrath, is steeped in the politics of the time. Robert Hode (played by Patrick Bergin) is a Saxon noble who has been a lifelong friend of the Norman Baron Daguerre (played by Jeroem Krabbe). Robert wants what is best for the Saxons; Daguerre wants England to become strong under Norman rule. Both are "good guys." The "bad guy" is another Norman noble, Miles Falconier (played by Jurgen Prochnow), whose selfishness turns Norman against Saxon and shows the two friends where their differences lie.

Falconier, incidentally, is cruel to Norman and Saxon alike. The reason for his presence in the land is to force himself on the Norman Lady Marian (pronounced Mar-ee-AHN) in an arranged marriage. Marian (played by Uma Thurman), of course, has taken a liking to the Saxon who has been outlawed and who has changed the spelling of his last name to "Hood." It is with pride that she tells Falconier that she has already given herself to another "with the greatest of pleasure." Incidentally, I caught only one reference to the Sheriff of Nottingham and it was unclear if it referred to any character we had seen. It might have been a title for Daguerre.

While Reynolds's version insists on making the good guys Christian and the bad guys into believers in witchcraft, the Irvin version, probably with more historical accuracy, makes the Normans the Christians and the Saxons still drenched in the so-called "pagan" religion of their ancestors. While the Reynolds version gives the edge to the Saxons because a Moor brings them scientific knowledge anachronistic to the period, the Irvin version gives the edge to the Saxons because the

Normans still accept some of the pagan customs. (Which of course they still do, as witnessed by the presence of the spring fertility symbols of the rabbit and the egg at Easter and the winter solstice holiday's association with mistletoe, holly Yule logs, and the bringing of trees indoors, all inherited by Christmas. It is as much of the compromise worked between Norman and Saxon as anything else is.)

So Irvin's is the second version of R o b i n H o o d which also plays very fast and loose with the original story, but at least it replaces fidelity to the story with some intelligence and some historical accuracy, and in that it is the better film. My rating for Irvin's R o b i n H o o d would be a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

THELMA AND LOUISE
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: This is a cross-country chase film with a strong feminist subtext. Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis find themselves in a life of crime in a world with little support from the opposite sex. Rating: high +1 [-4 to +4].

Thelma and Louise have had it. Thelma (played by Geena Davis) is something somewhere between a housewife and a household appliance. Her husband bullies her, cheats on her, and treats her like dirt. Louise has it a little better as an unmarried waitress with a foul-tempered boyfriend. The two of them want just to get away for a weekend and do a little fishing. Then, after an evening in a bar, Thelma is almost raped and Louise has shot the rapist. Suddenly the two are on the run from the law, a situation they find both exhilarating and terrifying. Thelma has never been allowed to think for herself. Now that she is free and thinking, it is not surprising that her decisions are not very well thought-out and generally get the two deeper into trouble. In a sense this is a coming-of-age film about Thelma.

At least superficially, this is a story that has been done many times before. The sympathetic characters start with a little fun,

enrage the law, and eventually are being chased by regiments of law enforcement officers. Yes, the film does have car chases and hair-breadth escapes and the usual scenes of police cars cork-screwing through the air and crashing. Take away the subtext and you have a very cliched film. The subtext, however, makes this a very strong little propaganda film. There are a lot of men in this film and only one man is decent and another is decent when he is not having a temper tantrum. Jimmy, Louise's boyfriend, does prove to have redeeming features. And Hal, the policeman tracking Thelma and Louise, manages to understand every wall of the box the two of them are in. Hal is more interested in saving the two from harm than he is in catching them. If this film has a hero, it is Hal. But every hunk Thelma tries to pick up only makes things worse. Truck drivers on the road are sexist pigs. And Thelma's husband Daryl is a real piece of work.

Ridley Scott's direction is good in the human interaction scenes if rather cliched in the action scenes. The photography of the great Southwest is certainly visually stunning. Still, the film's message about feminism and, in general, freedom comes on a little strong. While the rapist certainly has none of the audience's sympathy, killing him seems unnecessary. We want to see his attitudes and behavior punished, but like Louise, we have strong second thoughts as to whether his crimes deserve the death penalty.

In any case, this may be one of the most intelligent cross-country chase films. I give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

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