

Michael Praed admits that in his ideal universe, he would both live and work entirely within a 20-mile radius and with the same people. For two years, his wish came true.

Cast as Robin in the TV series *Robin of Sherwood*, he found himself part of a cast and crew who became very close as they worked on location throughout England. Fellow *Robin of Sherwood* actor Mark Ryan observes: "It's like a family. You all have your niggles with people. You get up in the morning, see the same faces, see them all day until 6:00 p.m. Go into the bar and see the same faces. Then, you fall over in the bar and see the same faces looking down at you and laughing."

Michael Praed agrees. "We *did* get along tremendously well. It's funny. It doesn't always happen. I think people assume that if you're acting in the theater or in television or in a film, that everyone loves each other. And," he says emphatically, "it is *very rare* that you do get chemistry. It does sound trite and facile to say there was a big bond or something [between us all], but there really was. All these things happen by accident. In some respects, that's why the show worked so well. I should think a *large* part of it—aside from the stories' brilliance—has to do with the way we all feel about each other."

The *Robin of Sherwood* series took a different approach to the Robin Hood legend. Set in an England where magic still works, Robin is the adopted son of Herne the Hunter, the antlered God of the Forest, leader of the Wild Hunt. Herne has chosen Robin to fulfill the legend of the "Hooded Man" who will defend the Saxons against the Norman oppressors and, possibly, defend the old religion against the new, Christianity.

Herne tells Robin, "The powers of Light and Darkness have always been with you." "What do they want of me?" Robin inquires. "Your life. Your strength." "What must I do?" "Act without thinking," he is told. With this kind of foretaste, it isn't unusual that Robin demonstrates an almost magical power to find his way through the brooding greenness of Sherwood Forest. He can, at times, read a man's soul and ferret out the truth or untruth of what he is being told. He seems to have an uncanny instinct of "knowing" when to do something or which road to travel. Even more unnerving, he can sometimes "see" into the future.

Praed's Robin is certainly "fey"—in the original sense of the word—enchanted, fated, doomed to death. Robin is almost too good to last and Praed plays him to the hilt.

Praed (as Captain Royd Erris) inspects the damage to the *Nightflyer*, hoping that he'll be able to report his findings to someone other than the continuity girl.



Nightflyers Photos: Rory Flynn/Copyright 1987 The Vista Organization Partnership, L.P.

By JEAN AIREY & LAURIE HALDEMAN

Michael Praed Legends of the Hooded Man

Whether Robin Hood or Nightflyer, he's swashbuckling into adventure from the green shadows of Sherwood Forest to the ebony depths of outer space.



Michael Praed (as Robin, center) and his fellow denziens of Sherwood Forest were merry men both on camera and off.

He brings an innocence to Robin, a believable vulnerability. For the most part, people can read Robin like a book until Herne touches him. Then, suddenly, he is older than the oldest living being, wiser than Merlin, and Praed does it all by slightly altering his facial expression. It seems that this person truly *is* touched by the gods of a religion older (and crueller) than Christianity. Just as suddenly, he'll slip back into Robin, a man surrounded by his friends, his love (Marion), and his forest, secure in the place fate has chosen for him.

Although *Robin of Sherwood* has mystical elements, there were many fights—all carefully planned—but Praed quickly found that not all plans work out. "In the first episode, I was fighting a stuntman, and I'm a *notoriously* bad puncher. I

was trained in the theater-mode of punching. It's completely different than films. We're filming the first fight sequence and the stunt director, Terry Walsh, wanted me to punch the stuntman. Not wanting to say 'I'm not very good at this,' I said, 'OK, pal.' I was *so* nervous and eager to get this thing right, that I smacked the stuntman in the mouth! I didn't hit him very hard, but I knocked one of his teeth out. He had to go to the hospital. I felt *so* wretched. But stuntmen are brilliant, they never forget." His voice lowers dramatically, "They're like elephants.

"We had a fight sequence about a week later and the stuntman was D.D. Powell, who was fourth-ranked heavyweight champion of Great Britain in 1950. The man *eats* children for breakfast. He's *strong*. Have you ever met people who are unbelievably strong? Terrifying. The scene's action was that I was on the floor and I had to be pick-

ed up and put against the wall. And then punched. Denny said, 'All right, Mike, I'll pick you up.' I said, 'No, no, Denny, go on, *throw* me!' He said, 'Are you sure?' And I said—this was mistake number *one*—'Yeah, I'm all right, that's what I've got the pads on for.' I had elbow pads on and a back brace. He said, 'Are you *sure*, Mike?' I said, 'Yeah, I'm all right.'" The director said, 'Do you want to rehearse it?' I said, 'No, let's go for it!'"

Praed shakes his head in disbelief that he could have set himself up so thoroughly. "*Mistake number two!* It was 'Action!' and all I can remember is, I saw these *hands*—" He holds up both hands menacingly in front of his face—"grabbing me. Denny picked me up as if I were this *glass*," pointing to a glass of water on the table, "and I took off! Watch very carefully in the first episode what happens when I get thrown. I literally take off and hit the back of this stage—and



Sherwood Photo: Showtime/Courtesy Showtime

writer] researched the invocations and incantations so they were quite accurate. As we were filming, weird things happened to the women in the cast. Three of the ladies crashed their cars. The others fell over, hurt themselves. There were about six or seven ladies involved and it was all too coincidental for me. We were filming in the crypt and I got *really* sick down there. I felt very strange. I happen to believe that anything is possible and I'm sure there is black magic. If you dabble in that—even harmlessly—I'm quite prepared to believe that something *could* happen as a result. It could be coincidence," he adds, "but it's interesting that throughout the entire series, injuries on such a scale never happened except on this one episode."

There were some strange experiences off the set as well, Praed relates. "Mark [Ryan], Clive Mantle [Little John] and I went out for a drink in a disco. The first *Robin of Sherwood* series had just aired and we were all flush with excitement and dying to show our faces and—hopefully—somebody would recognize us. So, we went to the bar and we were preening," he grins impishly, tossing his head back, running his hand through his hair to artistically dishevel it, striking a pose—not at all reluctant to mock his own public image. "And there was a woman—actually a midget, a tiny little thing—and she came up and said, 'You're Michael Praed, aren't you?' And I said, 'Yes!' 'I've seen you on television?' 'Yes, yes, I'm on the television!' And she said, 'Can I have a kiss?' And I said, 'Well, I'm no—' The next second, these tiny little arms came around my neck! And all I can remember is this—*mouth!*"

"It was terrifying because I got to this situation where I had to come up for air and still be polite. 'May I have my tongue back please?' This woman was literally, *literally* hanging around my neck. And Mark and Clive were *laughing!*"

Forest Flights

Then, circumstances changed. "I was placed in an intolerable situation," Praed says, "and it's not something that's easy to handle. If you're an English person and are offered the starring role in a major American stage musical, it's a very hard decision. I knew if I turned something like that down, the opportunity may or may not happen again. It was really hard because [the *Robin* group] really were—and are—good friends. But I knew I had to go and do the play, cataclysmic disaster that it turned out to be." The play was a musical version of *The Three Musketeers*, and Praed played D'Artagnan. "They did unbelievably crazy things. My first entrance was on a horse—a real one—from the back of the theater." The musical did not survive its Broadway opening.

But Hollywood had spotted him and it was on to Tinseltown to portray the Prince of Moldavia on *Dynasty*. Filming for American television was quite a change. "The central difference between American TV and British TV is *money*," Praed

observes. "The show I worked on cost in excess of \$1 million an episode. They have to shoot in a week. It's a tremendous pressure to shoot in a week. It's not a very good system because everything is really stacked up against the actor. You arrive on the set and you know your lines and they'll set the lights up. They'll say, 'Action!' and—I'm serious—as long as you didn't bump into the furniture, as long as you said *vaguely* the right lines, they'll print and move on to something else.

"Whereas in *Robin*, we had the luxury at least, if we want to, to say, 'Could we try to do that?' American television is formula television. They shoot what is called a master shot, there'll be a mid shot, and straight away, they get into close-ups. There's nothing *wrong* with that, it has its place. Something like *Dynasty* is running for seven years, *somebody* likes it."

After *Dynasty*, he stayed on in Hollywood "because that's where 98% of the work is," and was cast as Captain Royd Erris in the recently released *Nightflyers* (STARLOG #124). Attempting to explain the film—and his role—isn't always easy. "It's based on a story by George R.R. Martin and if you read the book and see the film, you'll know that *neither* have anything to do with the other," Praed says wryly. "That's what happens. The production company buys a book and intends to do it and winds up doing something else."

Explaining his part is even more difficult. "I'm the pilot of this ship, and it's bigger than this building. Except that I'm also a hologram, so I'm *not* really there. Actually, it's a misnomer because a hologram is simply a two-dimensional image that is three-dimensional. So, the way they shot it—quite technical it is—was to film my scenes against a blue screen. Which meant that I had to do all my acting to crosses on walls and things. They have to take my image and put it on to the master image, so the idea is I'm very ghost-like. You can see through my image.

"One problem was the actress I was working with [Catherine Mary Stewart, STARLOG #117] had gotten another job at the time it came for me to do my bits, so that I was acting—literally—to a cross on the wall and some *appalling* continuity girl reading Stewart's lines!"

He is reluctant to speculate about his plans for the future. His current interests include writing, singing, playing and recording his own music in a home studio. Praed doesn't rule out a return to *Robin of Sherwood*—although "his" Robin apparently died and Jason Connery took on the part—"I wasn't seen with arrows sticking out of me," Praed notes with a smile. But generally, he comments, "As an actor, until you have enough clout to say, 'I want this,' it's rather foolish to say well, I would like to play this role. I could lie and say I would like to do all kinds of things, but I don't really have any sights set on that." So, you might see Michael Praed in a music video, on TV, in the movies—but watch for him—whatever he does, he'll bring magic to the part.



Harassed and harried hologram Captain Erris searches for the source of the *Nightflyers'* troubles. And just why do they call this film "Psycho in outer space"?

it takes me so much by surprise. Then, Denny punched me and *hit me!* Just hard enough—and I thought I was going to *die*. I was determined *not* to show any pain. He had this glint in his eye, 'That'll teach you!' The actor pauses for a moment. "I never hit another stuntman in my life."

Once it was the magical elements that caused Praed—and the rest of the cast—some discomfort. "There was one episode, 'Swords of Wayland,' about a lady who invokes the devil incarnate. Kip [Richard Carpenter, the series' creator and