

Robin of Sherwood

Michael Praed as Robin

APRIL sees the return of one of the very few recent British fantasy series, *Robin of Sherwood*. Over 11 weeks, with nine 50-minute episodes and two double-length episodes starting and ending the season, Jason Connery will take over the lead from Michael Praed.

There are few series which are able to change their star with any credibility, *Doctor Who* being the most notable, and it is because of this latter much-loved programme that the production team were anxious not to have a regeneration scene. As Richard Carpenter, writer and co-creator, said "When Michael Praed had to leave we could easily have fallen into the *Doctor Who* trap of having Michael walking into the water and Jason walking out."

Paul Knight, Executive Producer, continues, "We could have been compelled to close the production down until such time as Michael Praed may or may not have been available to us again. However, after some soul-searching discussions with Richard Carpenter and Esta Charkham (Producer) we decided to make the definite decision to kill Michael off in the last episode of series two. We then had the alternative to find and introduce a new Robin Hood."

Richard Carpenter added, "I thought it better to give Michael a good exit and kill him, because heroes aren't invincible and the greatest act of courage is sacrifice. In this case he sacrificed his life for that of Marion and Much.

"I freely admit that the inspiration for this came from 'For Whom The Bell Tolls', where Gary Cooper stays behind and forces Ingrid Bergman to be taken away to safety while he stays and inevitably loses his own life. I wanted a definite death, but nobody actually wants to see a dead hero, so when we tested Jason we shot a possible ending for series 2 rather like the people of the period would have wanted – we left hope.

"An element which helped towards a successful transition was the fact that there are two original legends of Robin Hood. One is the yeoman's son of a village Thane, as was Michael's Robin. The second is the aristocrat – the Earl of Huntingdon's son. This legend developed in the 16th century – almost the equivalent of one of Lord Mountbatten's children becoming a guerilla leader in El Salvador.

"Both legends are credible to a writer as both are only legends, so we warmly embraced the second legend and used a new face. We've called him Robert of Huntingdon, and he remains Robert until the third episode, when he says to Marion, "I didn't want to call myself by your dead husband's name", to which she replies, "But the people need you." He then naturally accepts his name and his role, a doomed man cut off without a shilling.

"So, out of a possible disaster last year, as a writer I was given a creative kick in the pants from which I still haven't recovered – I'm currently writing *Robin of Sherwood* Four with no lack of impulse."

So what of the new star of the series? How did he get the role? Paul Knight explains, "I interviewed many candidates for the role of Robin on Michael's leaving, and was immediately struck by Jason's enormous charm. I had an instinctive feeling that – given encouragement and experience – he could surpass Michael Praed in the role of Robin as well as giving the series a new lease of life. Thankfully my expectations have not only been proved, but exceeded. It is my prediction that Jason will become an even bigger international star than his legendary father.

"It has been my experience, with few exceptions, that young, attractive, physical leading-men are few and far between in the UK. America churns them out on a conveyor belt. Jason certainly has the dedication, talent, and most importantly, he's a joy to work with, which makes all the difference on a long-running shoot."

Now before we look in a bit more detail at the series to come let's have a look at the story so far:

SERIES ONE

ROBIN HOOD AND THE SORCERER

This first episode, shown on Saturday 28th April 1984 at 6pm, was a special double-length edition. It introduced the regular cast, and saw them pitted against the evil Sheriff of Nottingham and Sir Guy of Gisburne for the first time. Antony Valentine was the guest star, playing the Baron de Belleme, a disciple of Satan, who bewitched and planned to sacrifice Marion. In the end he seemed to be killed, and his servant Nasir, released from the Baron's power, joined the Outlaws as an ally.

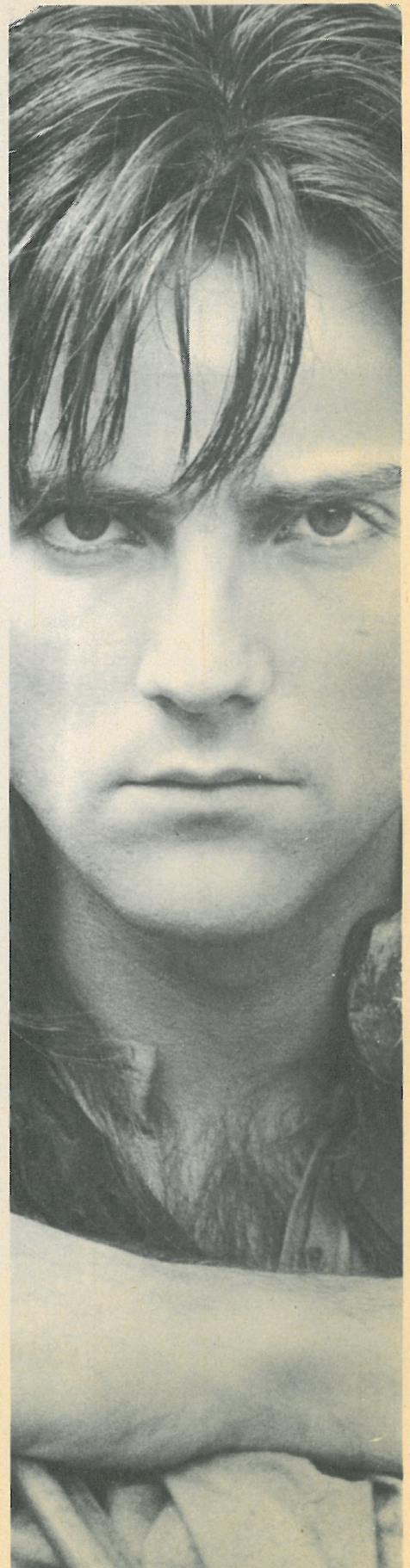
THE WITCH OF ELSDEN Angharad Rees starred as a frightened herbalist who was forced by the malicious Gisbourne to befriend, and then poison, the Outlaws.

SEVEN POOR KNIGHTS FROM ACRE

The Knights Templar, a group of warrior monks feared throughout Europe, believed the Outlaws had stolen their sacred emblem. Their leader was played by Yves Beneyton.

ALAN A DALE This figure from the *Sherwood* legends made his only appearance so far in this story. He rode into *Sherwood* seeking the love of his heart, a girl who had been betrothed to the Sheriff.

THE KING'S FOOL King Richard, played by John Rhys Davies, returned to Britain and pardoned the Outlaws, But it was all a political move and the Outlaws were soon betrayed. In escaping from captivity Marion was shot in the back by Gisburne. She seemed dead, but was brought back to life by the power of Herne in the stone circle.





Michael Praed as Robin with Marion and the Merry Men

Before the second series Richard Carpenter gave his view on the season to come, "We've extended and developed our characters – and developed our scripts from one story to the next, retaining a constant throughout the series but, at the same time, looking deeper into backgrounds of characters and encouraging each episode to stand on its own merit.

"For series two, we looked for new, startling locations and believe me, England is rich with them, especially in the West Country where the terrain changes dramatically within a few miles. This time we have turned from Sherwood to the sea in *The Swords of Wayland* and St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall lent itself as a 12th Century monastic backdrop.

"We walk a delicious tightrope with our introduction of mysticism. It was certainly a governing factor during the period but I have to be careful not to allow it to overtake the original legend."

SERIES TWO

THE PROPHECY Prince John returned to Nottingham with a mysterious prisoner whose identity was closely guarded. Herne prophesied the death of King Richard and the existence of the strange prisoner. "One close to you" he told Robin. When the Outlaws freed this mystery person they discovered he was Marion's father, Sir Richard of Leaford, played by George Baker. John (Bergerac) Nettles appeared as the King's seneschal.

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL The Sheriff owed a Jewish merchant, played by David de Keyser, a great deal of money, and so used the precedent of the Jewish massacre in York to stir up a riot under cover of which he intended to murder Joshua de Talmont, and so avoid his debt. Gisburne and the Sheriff pursued de Talmont and his family deep into Sherwood, where they were confronted by Robin Hood. But it was the powers of de Talmont's sacred book which totally defeated the Sheriff.

LORD OF THE TREES While the Sheriff was away Gisburne hired a band of ruthless Flemish mercenaries led by a former companion-in-arms Bertrand de Nivelles (Oliver Tobias). Their task was to finish Robin Hood. It was the time of "The Blessing", an ancient harvest rite ministered by Herne the Hunter. As no blood could be shed during the festival, Robin had to rely on cunning, and some magical help, to frustrate Gisburne.

THE ENCHANTMENT Lilith (Gemma Craven), an evil enchantress, bewitched Robin, and manipulated him into stealing the sacred "Silver Arrow", symbol of Freedom, from Herne's cave. With it she raised her master from the grave, the Baron de Belleme, once again played by Anthony Valentine. At the same time the Sheriff was seeking for the Baron's lost treasure. A battle between Good and Evil followed, once Robin was freed from Lilith's power. The Baron, defeated, but not destroyed, remained in his ruined castle to fight again another day.

THE SWORDS OF WAYLAND This double-length episode was the series' furth-

est venture into the Supernatural so far, with the Devil himself making an appearance.

The Outlaws left Sherwood, travelling to a distant village to help them against the Hounds of Lucifer, eerily clad horsemen who were terrorising the area. The horsemen were the servants of a powerful coven ruled by Morgwyn of Ravenscar (Rula Lenska). To the outside world Morgwyn was Mother Abbess of Ravenscar, but in reality her coven was scouring the countryside for the seven sacred swords. One of these swords was Albion, entrusted to Robin by Herne. Eventually Albion fell into Morgwyn's clutches and she bewitched the Outlaws to turn against Robin. Now possessing the seven swords the coven called the Devil. As he appeared Robin, alone, broke the spell, keeping the world safe.

THE GREATEST ENEMY King John threatened the Sheriff with loss of office, should he fail to finally dispose of Robin Hood. Eventually, in what seemed to be a relatively simple hunt, the Outlaws were flushed out of Sherwood to make an armed stand on a rocky outcrop. Their arrows wreaked havoc amidst the heavy forces besetting them, but it was obvious they were outnumbered. While his friends escaped, Robin made the greatest sacrifice, his life.

The Outlaws still held captive were then released by a hooded man. The Sheriff's men, believing a ghost was amongst them, held their fire.

In the forest the Outlaws paid their final respects to their dead leader, and were joined by the strange hooded man . . .

There we left the series. So what of the future? For the Hooded Man life is about to change drastically . . .

Herne: I am Herne the Hunter and you are a leaf driven by the wind.

Hooded Man: Herne is a spirit. And you . . .

Herne: I am a man.

Hooded Man: Yes, a man.

Herne: Answer me this then. What brought you here?

Hooded Man: I don't know. There was a voice . . .

Herne: And what did this voice say to you? Tell me.

Jason Connery as Robin surrounded by his outlaws



Hooded Man: It said. "Nothing's forgotten. Nothing is ever forgotten."

Herne: So he is free . . .

Hooded Man: Nobody's free. What does it mean?

Herne: The Hooded Man shall come to the forest, there to meet with Herne the Hunter, to be his son and do his bidding . . . String the bow.

Hooded Man: Why?

Herne: To give it purpose. And you must have purpose and prove yourself.

SERIES THREE

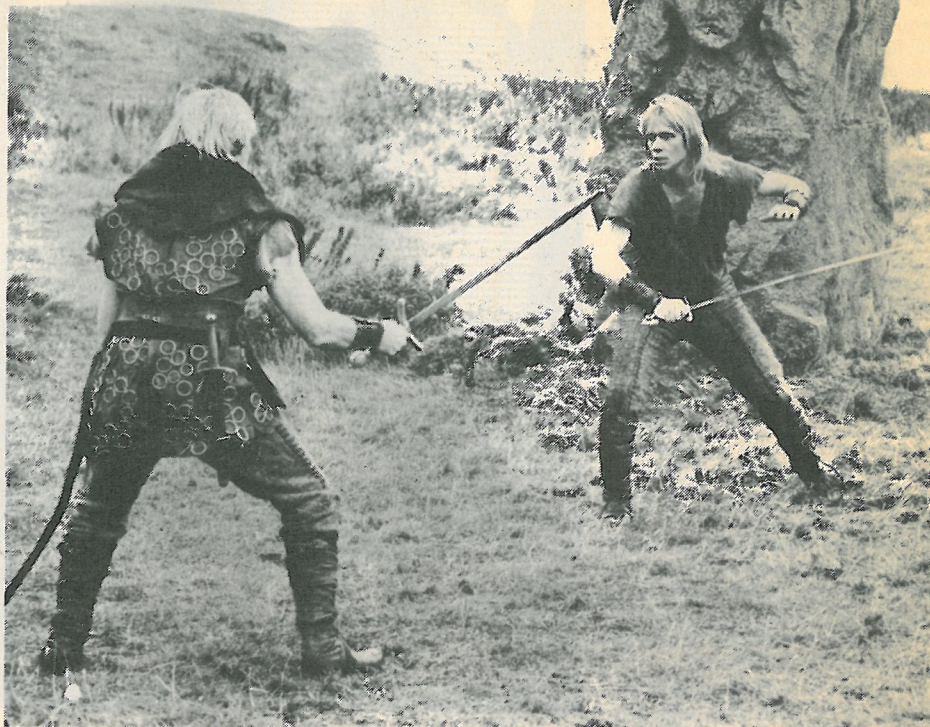
HERNE'S SON by Richard Carpenter (double length). Robin is dead. The Hooded Man who was chosen by Herne to rescue the Outlaws turns out to be Robert, the young son of the Earl of Huntingdon. After a struggle within himself, Robert finally comes to terms with his destiny, and accepts leadership of the Outlaws. Marion is kidnapped by Owen of Clun (Oliver Cotton) and the new Robin sets out to gather the scattered band of Merry Men in order to rescue her, and save her father (again played by George Baker) from ruin by the Sheriff. But already Guy of Gisburne is becoming suspicious of the leader of the Outlaws' identity.

THE POWER OF ALBION by Richard Carpenter. Marion is sent for when Robert is badly wounded, but the Sheriff, anxious to discover the identity of the new Robin, arrests her on her return. It is now up to Robert to enter Nottingham in an attempt to dupe the Sheriff, save Marion and retrieve Albion.

THE INHERITANCE by Anthony Horowitz. In an old castle lives a young girl, Isadora, and her father Agrivaine, who is guardian of a priceless treasure. Agrivaine foresees his own death in the Tarot cards, but a more immediate danger worries him. Raven, a one-eyed ruffian, leads a ragged group of bandits who specialise in pillaging anything of value. Isadora seeks the help of Agrivaine's godson, Robin Hood. As Raven and Robin fight to the death, Raven catches a glimpse of the priceless treasure he came for. It is . . .

THE GIRL OF SAINT CIRICUS by Richard Carpenter. After a lucrative robbery Robin and the Outlaws make their way to Croxden Abbey to give away their loot. En route they come across the victim of a robber, Lady Gisburne, mother of Sir Guy. Thinking she is going to die, she makes a confession to Friar Tuck, and reveals an unexpected relationship. At the Abbey, the theft of the Sacred Girdle of Saint Ciricus provokes a confrontation between Sir Guy and Robin, but that's not the only problem.

CROMM CRUAC by Anthony Horowitz. A wounded Much is taken to a strange village, where the people have no children and the fruit grows out of season. Strange things start happening to the Outlaws, and they eventually discover that the village is in the hands of the evil Gulnar, formerly a druid with Owen of Clun. The sorcerer's black magic is too strong for Robin alone to defeat, and so a formula must be found to break the spell and enable the Outlaws to fight Gulnar and his cronies.



Jason Connery in action!

THE BETRAYAL by John Flanagan and Andrew McCulloch (also writers of the *Doctor Who* story "Meglos"). Since the Sheriff is doing so badly the King himself comes to Nottingham to collect his taxes. He brings with him Roger de Carnac, a ruthless man who devises a clever plan to destroy Robin's reputation and deal with the Outlaws once and for all. Dressed as Outlaws de Carnac's men commit atrocities in the local villages. But this gives Robin an idea along the same lines.

ADAM BELL by Anthony Horowitz. Much is held hostage by the Sheriff in return for his nephew held in Sherwood by Adam Bell, an ageing Outlaw. Only a change of heart in an old villain can prevent Robin's attempt to mediate from ending in tragedy.

THE PRETENDERS by Anthony Horowitz. King John has taken a new wife, Isabella, a twelve-year-old girl. The forsaken Hadwisa is outraged. The Sheriff of Nottingham is bed-ridden, bitten by his dog, leaving the hapless Gisburne free to meddle.

Arthur, a noble young man, saved by Robin from the Duke of Gloucester's soldiers, wants to join his band. The powerful Duke and his daughter Hadwisa are plotting against the King. There is no natural heir to the throne, only a mysterious Pretender, a noble-looking young man . . .

The Gloucesters plan to murder the young Queen Isabella while she is making a pilgrimage near Nottingham, using the Outlaws as unwitting accomplices. Gisburne is taken into their confidence, delighted at the idea of killing two birds with one stone. Only the Sheriff, an abler politician than Gisburne, is

furious, for he knows that if the Queen dies they will all surely hang.

RUTTERKIN by Richard Carpenter. Lord Edgar is plotting against his brother, Robin's father, and connives for the Earl to be accused of treason. Robin has to find a way to reveal his uncle's deception to the King and save the Outlaws from the executioner's axe.

THE SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM by Anthony Horowitz. King John decides to replace the Sheriff, but the new Sheriff is Philip Mark, known as "The Butcher of Lincoln". His Saracen sidekick, Sarak, is not much better. Mark takes hostages from the local villages, planning to kill them one by one unless Robin surrenders. But Robin doesn't, but . . .

THE TIME OF THE WOLF by Richard Carpenter. Gulnar returns, leading an evil band of wolf worshippers, the Sons of Fenris. King John is raising an army against the Welsh and takes all the villagers' food. Unwilling to let them starve Robin leads a raid on the Sheriff's store of requisitioned grain, but while this is going on the women and children are taken to the wolf-men's lair at Grimston Abbey.

Robin tries to rescue them, and once again has to battle Gulnar's powers of sorcery.

Guest stars for the new series include Dorothy Tutin, Cyril Cusack, Mat Frewar, Lewis Collins, Bryan Marshall, Daniel Peacock, Patricia Hodge, David Rappaport and Richard O'Brian. At the moment the first episode is due for transmission on Saturday 5th April at 5.35pm. ■