



The valiant Robin Hood (Kevin Costner) rights a few 12th-century wrongs while swashbuckling his way into the heart of Maid Marian (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio).

Over the past few years his soaring career has taken him from the cornfields of Iowa to the plains of South Dakota.

Now, for his latest cinematic excursion, Kevin Costner has gotten more ambitious, heading back all the way to the forests of 12th-century England.

The occasion is **Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves**, a new telling of the sturdy tale about that arrow-slinging champion of the poor who takes on the evil Sheriff of Nottingham. The epic adventure, also featuring Morgan Freeman as Robin's blood brother, the wise nobleman Azeem, Alan Rickman as the Sheriff of Nottingham, Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio as Maid Marian and Christian Slater as Will Scarlet, was a project that reunited Costner with director Kevin Reynolds. Costner starred in Reynolds's 1985 movie *Fandango*, a comedy with Judd Nelson that brought the then-fledgling actor some of his first major notices.

"We had to find an actor who could put on the mantle of Robin Hood for this generation without being haunted by the films that had gone before," explain coproducers John Watson and Pen Densham. "Kevin has a unique ability to breathe humanity and depth into the characters he plays."

The love affair between motion pictures and the prince of thieves has certainly been one of the most enduring in film history, dating back as far as 1909. Douglas Fairbanks put Robin Hood on the movie map

ROBIN HOOD: PRINCE OF THIEVES

KEVIN COSTNER IS THE NEWEST LEADER OF THE BAND

in a 1922 silent version, while Errol Flynn did the honors in the star-studded 1938 version, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, long considered by many to be the definitive telling. Along the way Richard Todd and Richard Greene tried the role on for size, while Sean Connery played a middle-aged Robin Hood in the 1976 film *Robin and Marian*. Then there was the 1973 animated Disney picture with Robin and his merrie men played by animals, and the short-lived 1975 Mel Brooks TV creation, *When Things Were Rotten*, with Dick Gautier cast as a somewhat less-than-valiant Robin.

The newest version starring the dashing Costner was written by Watson and Densham, who had long wanted to turn their childhood memories into a grown-up enter-

tainment. "There is an enormous richness of characterization here," says Densham, cofounder of the Canadian-based Trilogy Entertainment. "These people are rebels; they don't have to live by anyone's rules. It allows them great variety in their personalities ... and it allowed us to write some terrific moments into the story."

Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves swung into action on Sept. 6, 1990, under the chalk cliffs of Beachy Head along the British coast. The filmmakers tried wherever possible to take advantage of historic locations in England and France, but often had to improvise.

Sherwood Forest (which no longer exists) was brought back to life courtesy of New Forest, a Crown-owned and -maintained hunting preserve, and Burnham

Beeches. And the exterior set of medieval Nottingham was constructed on the backlot of England's Shepperton Studios under the watchful eye of set decorator Peter Young, who won an Oscar for his work on *Batman*, that other crusader for justice.

Despite all the murmurs of a hefty production budget and time overruns, the producers of **Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves** are confident that their fresh-faced rendition will receive an eager reception. "It's the universal struggle of life, death, birth and survival," maintains Densham.

Of course, it's also a Kevin Costner movie — and these days, it seems, you can't get more universal than that.

— Michael Rechtshaffen

