



## Outlaw

*Angus Donald*

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**Outlaw** Angus Donald  
MEET THE GODFATHER OF SHERWOOD FOREST

When he's caught stealing, young Alan Dale is forced to leave his family and go to live with a notorious band of outlaws in Sherwood Forest.

Their leader is the infamous Robin Hood. A tough, bloodthirsty warrior, Robin is more feared than any man in the country. And he becomes a mentor for Alan; with his fellow outlaws, Robin teaches Alan how to fight - and how to win.

But Robin is a ruthless man - and although he is Alan's protector, if Alan displeases him, he could also just as easily become his murderer ...

## Outlaw Details

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Author : Angus Donald

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## From Reader Review Outlaw for online ebook

### Natalie says

Nearly a four, really!

Good enough that I'm going to read Holy Warrior, the next one in the series, as an e-book - just so I don't have to wait a whole day or two to follow Robin Hood and Alan-A-Dale on the crusades.

Why is it nearly a four? . . . people defecate. They urinate. They get sick. These three are a must for me in historical fiction -there's a reason "*Where do you go to the bathroom?*" is the question astronauts get the most. If you want to see the astronauts' solution watch this national geographic space potty training device video.

If you want to step back into the England of the 12/13th centuries, then there's no better narrator for the journey than Alan-A-Dale.

Why isn't it quite a four? . . . it's about an exciting time and exciting things happen but somehow it isn't a big time page-turner, it's a more casual read than that. What makes me want to keep reading anyway? The narrative voice of the character, Alan-A-Dale is quite natural and comfortable to listen to.

If you've read this far in my review, I have an Alan-A-Dale tidbit for you.

Sort of in-between songs during *Live at the Riverboat -1969* on a track recorded as *Important Song/D-Minor/Allen-A-Dale* Neil says Allen-A-Dale is a better guitarist than Eric Clapton.

Here's Neil talking to the crowd about Allen-A-Dale:

Neil Young: (sincerely, almost questioning the audience)  
"I learned this song from Allen-A-Dale."

*Crowd giggles.*

Neil Young: "Alright?"

Neil Young: (as an aside)  
". . . and, ah, what an awful thing to do right on stage"

Neil Young: (more emphatically)

"Anyway, You know who Allen-A-Dale is, don't you?"  
"Doesn't anybody know about him?"  
"You know who Allen-A-Dale IS ?"  
"You don't?"  
"Somebody doesn't ?"

"He's a guitar player from England. And he ah, He lived a long time ago. He's probably one of the greatest

musicians ever to come out of England."

"Although he'd never gone anywhere because they didn't have planes or anything back then. He had to hang around a forest. "

*plays a beautiful little riff*

"Well, I don't know, I was going to talk about him, but you don't sound too interested. I have a whole long thing about him. . . "

*plays a more beautiful music.*

"No. I made a study of him actually."

*Continues to play, louder.*

"He's better than Clapton. "

*plays stronger still.*

Neil Young: (says) something unintelligible.

*continues playing strongly.*

"Well anyway . . . ."

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## **Debbie says**

It's long been debated whether Robin Hood actually existed, in a 14th Century poem he makes an appearance and in the 15th Century he's been mentioned in ballads but whether he's fact or fiction doesn't seem to lessen his popularity as he's been immortalized in print, song, poem and in present times on film. One of the reasons he stays alive for us is because of the astute storytelling ability of some of his tale-tellers like for example this one.

In this fictionalized tale of Robin Hood we may find the most truthful version yet in Outlaw, the first in a new series by Angus Donald first published in the UK.

Between the years 1188 and 1189 is the timeline in this novel, Robin is the still the ultimate outlaw, he's still madly in love with lady Marie-Anne and is public enemy number 1 with the Sheriff of Nottingham, we'll find all the usual cohorts too including Tuck and Little John in addition to a few new names to add to the lore.

Angus Donald brings us his vision of the ultimate noir hero in "Outlaw", book number one in the Legend of Robin Hood series. He gives us the bigger than life hero/villain but shows him in a more realistic light, emphasizing the cruelty and barbarism of the 12th Century in the guise of authority, he shows us the leftover paganism melded with the Christian world and he shows us beauty the likes of which may no longer exist in this world and in fact showing a more factual Robin Hood who would have lived, loved and thieved in England in the late 1100's. The novel is narrated by Alan Dale, Robin's troubadour who was taken under wing as a young teen after being caught stealing in Nottingham and saved from certain death by the Sheriff. The dialogue is conversational, interesting and descriptive, readers will be able to picture Alan as an old man recounting his tumultuous youth, writing down the good, the bad and the ugly in excerpts as he also lets us know what's going on in his present. The characters in this adventure go above and beyond in their

portrayals as we get legend, myth and history in one piece of work.

This is far from the Robin Hood of our youths on TV or in the movies, this is truly an adult story with explicit scenes of violence and sex, so keep that in mind as you choose where to store it and who to share it with.

If you like your folklore with a huge slice of realism packed with danger, adventure, drama and action, Angus Donald is your man. If you love historical fiction with a bite this is for you. If you like your myths and legends on the wild side, here you go.

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## **S.J.A. Turney says**

am long overdue in reviewing this book, spurred on by the arrival in the post today of the third in the series (King's Man).

I generally avoid anything connected with Robin Hood in order to avoid inevitable disappointment. I have the same problem with King Arthur. Every time I read a book or watch a movie about Arthur I am thoroughly disappointed, often bored, and usually aggravated by the clear problems with any hint of accuracy. Ditto: Robin Hood. I tolerate the Errol Flynn and Disney animated movies because they are wonderful escapism. The modern Robin Hoods that try to hint at a reality set my teeth on edge with their awfulness.

I happened across Angus' first novel at the time I was busy touting my first and, against all my prejudices, gave it a read.

It is quite simply excellent, and broke my rules. Robin is far from the character you will see in Errol Flynn, Patrick Bergin, Kevin Costner et al. He is a villain, pure and simple. A mafia Don of his time. He is the Kray brothers. He is turf war gangster. The difference sold the whole idea, the series and the author to me.

I will say at this point that Robin is not the principal character of the book. It actually revolves more around the famous minstrel of the epics, Alan Dale, from whose perspective it is told. Alan is a character who grows all the time as you read and with whom you will sympathise.

The settings and actions in the book are wonderful and realistic and this is the closest, I feel, that any attempt at the telling of Robin Hood will ever reach to the truth behind the myth. Buy Outlaw. Read Outlaw. Love Outlaw. Review Outlaw.

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## **Speesh says**

'Outlaw', is an enjoyable, even memorable, re-imagining and re-exploration if you will, of the Robin Hood legend. All our favourite fiends, friends and enemies are here - 'Maid Marion', Friar Tuck, 'Little' John, the Sheriff of Nottingham, and Guy of Gisborne - there's action and adventure a-plenty and it all takes place in and around Sherwood Forest.

But forget what you thought you knew of Robin Hood. There's no swinging happily through Sherwood Forest's lush, leafy glades, no slapping thighs while dressed in Lincoln green. He still robs from the rich of course, but he keeps more than a bit for himself, as you would. This Robin Hood is a successful leader, an

inspiring personality, a friend, a lover - but he's also a constant, threatening presence; you're never entirely sure what he believes or what he will do next. It is the last throws of an older England, an ancient, honest England fighting to survive against the overwhelming odds of the all-conquering Normans.

However, the story is perhaps more about the young Alan Dale. From an impoverished childhood and an early - not entirely successful - career as common thief in Nottingham, he becomes involved with the real thieves and outlaws of Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest. Typically, one (Nor)man's thief, is another (English)man's freedom fighter and Alan Dale is inexorably drawn to the outlaws through necessity and curiosity. The book follows battles to remain alive, his 'education' at the hands of themtough forest outlaws - but also from a whole host of troubadors, Knights, lords and ladies - through many adventures up and down England, leading to the Outlaws' final confrontation in Sherwood, with the seemingly superior forces of the Sherrif of Nottingham. It's not really a surprise that he survives, of course; he has already made clear that he is narrating this in the latter days of a long life, but it is genuinely interesting, not to say tensely exciting, finding out how he is to do it.

"And there are many here who have been forced to leave their families, their hearths and homes by so called law-men, by bullies who claim power of life and death over you in the name of the King...And there are many here who have been injured, humiliated and denied your natural rights as free Englishmen"

Yet there is another all-conquering force at work in this book's (not so) Merrie England; Christianity. It seems there are many ordinary free Englishmen who are still unrepentantly Pagan and in this, the book reminded me a lot of the struggle to keep the pagan faith alive, that is central to another book I read recently, 'Viking: King's Man', by Tim Severin. Indeed, 'Little' John is clearly Viking inspired.

Christianity is obviously the religion of the rich and powerful. It is a 'top down' religion, closely bound up with and indeed cynically used by, the Normans. Used to instil a fear of their 'betters' - and a fear of the consequences of revolt - in the ordinary people of England. As a Norman comments on a speech Robin Hood makes on the eve of battle;

"He talks like a ranting priest, but he rants about the most extraordinary Godless, unnatural things: Freedom from the Church? Freedom from our rightful lords, who have been set above us by God? What nonsense, what dangerous, heretical nonsense."

However, the older, Pagan beliefs, are closely associated with the fields and forests and wild places. An honest, down to earth faith. As a denizen of Sherwood, living in a seemingly Christian society, this Robin Hood uneasily straddles the two faiths. But, as a true man of the people, he is more Pagan than Christian. Or is he? Several times through the book, just as Alan Dale seems to have got a fix on Robin Hood's values, or what he believes; Robin moves in another mysterious way. He seems to hate Christianity and perhaps with good reason, for Christianity is bound up with the Normans, the two forces combining to oppress the ordinary, hard-working, pagan worshipping English people. Robin's honest, down to earth people need a hero, they need a new King Arthur and Robin Hood is it.

Was he a real person? He is surely, historically speaking, more a fantasy figure, than a real, historically provable figure. Robin Hood is almost certainly a coalescence of the ordinary people's collective hopeful imagination - hoping for inspiration, help and comfort against the oppressive regime of the Normans and the voracious march of Christianity. Much in the vein of King Arthur, who is mentioned many times in 'Outlaw'; Robin Hood is a remembrance of a glorious 'golden' age of England, now lost, the return of which needs an Arthur-like spear-head figure. Robin Hood.

Was he a real? Probably not. But if he had been, he would certainly more like Angus Donald's Robin, than all the Hollywood or tv studio versions you're more familiar with. Looking forward to getting hold of the next in the series.

## Julia says

A friend gave this to me to read, so I gave it a go. Truthfully, I wasn't impressed. The book had very little new to offer, either to the Robin Hood mythology or in literary terms. Reimagining Robin Hood as a Godfather-like figure could have been interesting, but that potential was never realized. The author's writing was, at best, basic, and there were times that he had me laughing with disbelief at his choice of descriptors. For instance, Donald has the main character have a dream rife with obvious pagan symbology, primarily about the triple-figure of the Mother, and ends the description of the dream with, "[...] and I screamed, filled with a nameless masculine terror." Seriously? "Nameless masculine terror?" That was a particularly shining example of Donald's writing style, but there were many, many others.

Anyway, the book veers between graphic descriptions of blood and gore, graphic descriptions of sexuality, and fairly obvious plot-exposition scenes. The graphic descriptions seem needless; they seem to exist solely for the sake of being graphic. It seemed to me that Donald was trying to come across as hard-boiled and gritty with these descriptions, but instead came across as someone trying to come across as hard-boiled and gritty. He spent more time and effort describing a single gory moment than he does in describing any of his characters throughout the book. It was off-putting, frankly.

Further, we get our sense of the characters passively - first one outlaw, then another, describes to our narrator/main character/passive listener why they're with Robin Hood, which basically boils down to, "he's a bloody-minded jerk, but for some reason I can't help but love him and would follow him into death." We're never given any reason or opportunity to form our own opinion of Robin Hood; he remains a cipher whose main attributes seem to be a.) silver eyes, b.) a lot of anger, and c.) a predilection for gore. We're told that he's charismatic, compelling, fascinating, what have you, but nothing in the book gives substance to those assertions, save the fact that the assertions are being made. All the characters are one-dimensional, even those - like Robin - who are repeatedly stated to be complex, complicated individuals. Perhaps if the author were a little less expository in his writing style, I might have believed there were more to the characters than met the eye. Perhaps.

All in all, I wouldn't recommend the book.

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## Duckie says

This is not the worst Robin Hood novel I've ever read (that would be Scarlet), but it is the worst by someone who was a professional author (journalist) before writing a novel. The text is unintentionally hilarious, the characters have the emotional depth of tissue paper, and like a piss-drunk Robin Hood at a county archery contest, Donald manages to miss the target entirely.

Donald showers his text liberally with ill-executed references to masculinity, such as: "We were on the road again at dawn the next day, the motley cavalcade clattering out of the gates of the farm compound...as the cocks were bawling a noisy message about their masculinity to the heavens."

Yeah. Because when I think of masculinity, I think of this:

Later on, when young Alan Dale is learning swordsmanship from his master he remarks, "I'd poke at him, the clumsy boy, he'd give a manly guffaw, and skip lightly out of my path."

I applaud Donald's ability to write "manly" and "skip" in the same sentence with what was presumably a straight face.

By the end of the novel, after countless lines like "I found the company of perfumed ladies, day after day, a little stifling and often escaped to talk about manly military affairs with the Gascon guard," every time Donald mentioned Robin and his men I was picturing this:

MANLY.

Donald also frequently feels the need to spell out the blatantly obvious. When Alan Dale and Robin Hood discover a secret storehouse in the forest, Alan notes, "For any bowman, it was a storehouse of riches. Though it contained no silver, no gold or jewels, it did contain stack upon stack of the best quality arrows."

So after specifying that it was a storehouse of riches only for bowmen, Donald helpfully clarifies that this meant the storehouse contained no silver, gold or jewels. Thanks, Donald, but surprisingly enough, I got that far on my own.

Donald also doesn't seem to grasp how foreshadowing works. Foreshadowing generally means you drop one or two lines, maybe at the end of a chapter, indicating that something terrible is about to happen. Foreshadowing does not mean you write lines like: "And my laziness was to save my life."

Followed half a page later by:

"[W]e might have kept the horror that was about to fall on us at bay."

Followed a page later by:

"God be praised, that decision saved our lives."

Before you even begin to describe what the event is. By that point I'm not even mildly curious, I'm just annoyed.

The characters are a study in contradictions, and not in a good way. The novel is told in flashback by Alan Dale, now in his sixties, regarding a period of his life in his early teens. Alan's most memorable feature is that he thinks the status of his penis is the most interesting part of the story, and is constantly providing the reader with updates. This is not unusual for Alan the thirteen-to-fifteen year old boy. What's odd is that Alan the sixty-something year old man telling the story *still* thinks his pubescent penis is the most interesting part of it.

One would think that after a lifetime spent as a storyteller and traveling minstrel, Alan would have grasped that a play-by-play of the state of his dick is not something his audience has much interest in.

Alan the sixty-year-old man also repeatedly brags about the various pranks he pulled in his early teens, but it's unclear why this is since they're not particularly inventive and he's not that swift in coming up with them. At one point when a boy seated next to him at dinner every night always steals food from his plate, it takes Alan several days to come up with the idea of putting something in the food that would make the boy regret stealing it. This is literally the first thing most teenagers would think of, and it would probably take them less

than five minutes.

Other characters in the novel are little more than one-dimensional. Alan describes the Sheriff as "sibilant," "whining," speaking with a "lisp," and wearing "lavender-scented" cologne. Really, Donald, if you were going to go that direction, you could have just called him Pansy McLimpwrist and saved us all a block of pointless homophobic descriptions.

Probably the oddest choice in characterization is Robin Hood himself, since he's barely in the novel. He breezes in and out of Alan's life every year or two, he seems to enjoy violence as a sort of "Godfather" figure, and...that's it. That's all we really know. Which leaves me to wonder - why bother writing a Robin Hood novel if you're barely going to put the character in?

There's a lot of violence in this novel, but most of it feels forced, as if Donald is trying to impress the readers with how very, very violent this world must be. However, he chooses not to contrast it with the rise of rule of law during this time period, which is an interesting choice, I guess, since that's the whole point of the legend. This is where Donald's aim is way off. I don't think anyone is surprised any more by the knowledge that the Middle Ages were violent, and that lords were cruel to their peasants. Which is why it would help to see this violence contrasted with some cognizance that the forest laws were unjust and constituted a breach of the feudal contract. It's not the violence of the era that makes the legend notable, it's the idea that even kings and lords should accept limits to their greed in making laws that were fair to their peasants, because making laws that were unreasonably avaricious (such as declaring peasants' lands to be part of the king's game preserve, thus making them unavailable for farming) was effectively sentencing the peasants to death by starvation. Donald doesn't mention rule of law at all during the novel, however, except for Robin's speech at the very end where he throws in a reference to "unjust laws." Since Robin never addresses this topic previously, the reference seems really out of place, and out of character. And ultimately, that's what made this novel not worth my time.

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## Terri says

This book may be a lot of people's cup of tea, but it was not mine. I quite enjoyed the start, up until approx page 60. It went down from there for me though.

I think there was some irreparable damage done for me with an early feast scene which included description that seemed more about the author living out fantasy than about importance to story. I was still okay with the book though and carried on despite my misgivings. This was the authors first book, so I expected some ups and downs. But the biggest damage came with a sex scene. I am not a fan of the sex scene in books. I find most of them are there for either the author to live out his or her own fantasies, or to heat up the story. If that is what they are there for, then I am not interested. If they are there because they are important to the character's story and they are done with class, then I can accept them. But this sex scene was probably the worst I have ever read in an historical fiction. Do the words "*hot jets of men's essence*" do anything for you? They do not do anything for me, but I am sure this sex scene would feel at home in Penthouse magazine letters of the week. Shaft and prick rated ample mention, and I felt when I was skimming over these scenes that 'hot meat injection' was only around the corner.

It was extremely difficult for me to come back from that scene. I can understand him wanting a sex scene there, but it was the way it was written that was appalling. The book had lost my respect and I rarely recover when that happens.

As for the rest of the book...it had it's moments where it was enjoyable. It read like Young Adult to me however. I do not mean that as an insult. It was simple storytelling told by a child protagonist in a child's words. I think it was clever marketing. A Young Adult book marketed as an Adult Fiction with a Young Adult cover. Genius. It taps into the teenage market as well as the adult historical action/adventure reader.

I was once told that Outlaw was more Young Adult than adult fiction, but then so many people told me it was not. I would agree with the first person, who told me it was YA as this book seemed very much written for the teenage boy or the teenage boy at heart.

I expect once Alan grows up in the series and the author hones his skill, that the series will improve.

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## **Graham says**

I'm a big fan of Bernard Cornwell (to say the least) and knowing that the author of this was inspired by Bernard to write his own historical fiction...well, I had to check it out.

I'm delighted that I did. OUTLAW is the beginning of a new series chronicling the adventures of Robin Hood, and it's a thrilling one. Well researched, well written and well told, this is just the sort of historical adventure I love to read: packed with action and intrigue and a memorable level of grittiness, too, this unashamedly masculine yarn is polar opposites to the kind of feminine, genteel historical fiction written by the likes of Jean Plaidy and Philippa Gregory.

The main thing to say about this book is that it's written to be enjoyed, rather than studied. There's little depth here, nor does there need to be. Vivid descriptions rule the page, and as a particular fan of the 'outlaws hiding out in the woods' kind of story, I was in heaven. Angus Donald brings his isolated locales to life, as well as showing the inside of a torture chamber and delivering some pretty unpleasant deaths and mutilations along the way. A nice guy Robin ain't, yet his character feels authentic and you end up wanting to read the next book about him.

There are only a couple of big action set-pieces, but these don't disappoint. There's a ghastly ambush in which the descriptions of death and slaughter are so real that you can almost smell the bloodshed, and a big battle finale that doesn't disappoint; it's one of the best battle scenes I've read in a while, and is up there with Cornwell himself. More like this, please!

Donald is a new writer, so there are minor problems. An interval at a pagan ceremony feels out of place and over-the-top, and there are some slow spots in the middle passages. But these dwindle into insignificance alongside the many, varied highlights: the wolf attack, for instance. Be warned, this is one of the most explicit historical novels I've read in its depiction of bloodshed, which gives it the gritty edge.

All in all, this is a book I found very enjoyable, and I look forward to sitting down with the sequel.

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## **Sam says**

Picked this up on a whim and how glad am I that I did. Although the Robin Hood story has been told on countless occasions and in many ways, this is one of the more original versions to date. Donald has managed to create a Robin that is believable and balances the hero character that we all know and love with the more realistic criminal/outlaw that he would've been.

The story is told through the eyes of Alan Dale, who ends up joining Robin's crew as a result of a single criminal act born from hunger and nothing more. As Alan becomes more and more a part of Robin's crew, we meet all the usual suspects of the Robin Hood tale from Little John to Maid Marian (or Marie Anne as she is in this tale) and of course Friar Tuck. Donald has kept the familiar traits of each of the characters while building on them further and making them seem not only more real but more human as well, with everyone

having both good and bad sides.

Donald has also recreated the atmosphere and hardships of life in 12th and 13th England during a time of political turmoil, long drawn out wars and the day to day battle against squalor and starvation. Within this setting he portrays not only the importance of Robin's men for the 'everyday folk' but also how his actions may have influenced those in higher stations, including the Knights Templar who make a subtle yet suitable appearance. The battle scenes are vivid and dynamic and pull the reader right into the middle of the action and keeps you there until the very last sword stroke, while maintaining a sense of realism that other Hood tales occasionally lack. Overall an exciting first installment and one that has got me looking forward to the next with great anticipation.

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## **Ben Kane says**

This was been on my radar for a long time - pretty much since I saw the iconic cover when it came out actually. Anyway, I finally got around to buying a year or so ago. Started it a few months later, and devoured it. I've since read the next two books as well.

The main hero and narrator is Alan Dale, a young thief who's taken in by Robert Odo, the outlaw chief. I liked this approach, because all too often, books are written from the historical or main hero's point of view, and that can be a little boring. Having someone who's not on centre stage all the time is very useful. Alan is a clever and endearing character, whom I liked a lot. Robin wasn't the person I expected either - in Donald's book, he's a brooding, complex character who can be very brutal, even downright cruel. There's no 21st century sensitivity here. It's a refreshing and very realistic approach for which Donald is to be applauded. Only the outstanding Robert Low, author of the Oathsworn books; *The Whale Road* is the first - springs to mind for bringing this to the fore. Centuries ago, no one could be a strong warlord without also being brutal.

Donald's descriptions of 13th century England are excellent, well researched and full of detail; so too are his gripping fight scenes. His torture scenes are excruciatingly well written - I found myself cringing at two of them in particular. I won't go into details here...

In short, *Outlaw* is a thoroughly welcome addition to my bookshelf.

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## **Andy says**

So its about Robin Hood you surmise..... Well..... not really..... as the tale centres on Alan Dale who is also the aged narrator of the book at the start. We have his early life as a young thief in Nottingham who has to abscond to the "forest" after being caught; facing losing his hand he is taken on by Robin Hood & his band of outlaws. For the most part its a coming of age story, which is sound as this youth is mature beyond his years so no its not a YA style read with lots of Teen angst. He is surrounded by a gang of outlaws who are more rough diamonds than savage beasts of whom many a name is known to us readers through lore.

Each character is introduced in turn (Robin Hood, Friar Tuck, Little John, Guy Gisbourne, Will Scarlet, Will Mutch, Maid Marion) & they're back history filled in for us through their contact with Alan who goes through various initiations & training with the band of outlaws. Its bloodthirsty for sure & carries/adds a pagan element to Robin's character which is interesting & fits for someone who lives in the woods & has a problem with the church. Defo not the Errol Flynn version been told here & quite an earthy, hardened, strong willed but fair man portrayed who treats loyalty well whereas treachery is punished harshly to keep his realm

intact which is constantly under assault from the crown.

It flows well for the most part & is a tale which transports you back to the time capturing the feeling of the downtrodden & unjustly treated by the Norman nobility who at this time are still portrayed as aggressive interlopers. Its in part a coming of age story heavy on adventure finishes as Alan Dale makes his mark in the final chapters & comes to manhood.

A series I shall be riding on with & a score in the high 3's rounded upto 4 stars for me.

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### **Mark Harrison says**

There is nothing subtle or clever here just a thunderous good adventure as Alan Dale hides with Robin Hood, John, Tuck and Marie-Anne against all the evil doers of Nottingham. Lots of battles, scandal and debauchery and huge piles of great fun. Perfect antidote to some more cerebral reads I have recently had. Will be investing in the series.

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### **Steve Justice says**

Outlaw describes itself as a "gripping, action-packed historical thriller that delves deep into the fascinating legend of Robin Hood". Outlaw is none of these things and somehow succeeds in turning the "fascinating legend" of Robin Hood into a worse-than-average piece of confusing half-ideas and shallow characters.

Firstly the main description of the novel is totally misleading - "historical thriller" - Outlaw is not historical as there is still no proof of Robin Hood's existence, and it is not a thriller in any shape or form. There are few moments of suspense or surprise and the one supposed twist at the end is predictable and over-explained. While I'm at it, it is not gripping or action-packed either.

So enough of dissecting the description on the back of the book. Outlaw's bold subtitle is "Meet the Godfather of Sherwood Forest". This stems from Donald's creation of Robin Hood as a darker figure, collecting tribute from the inhabitants of the forest in exchange for his protection. The idea of making Robin Hood more like a real criminal is a good one; too often the whole "rob from the rich and give to the poor" idea has painted Robin Hood as a blond charmer who never hurt an innocent fly, lifting bags of gold from the villainous Sheriff of Nottingham while his Band of Merry Men sing songs and drink wine. I would love to see a deeper, darker portrayal of this legendary figure.

Unfortunately, Angus Donald's Robin Hood is a bland shadow of a character (and I don't mean that in any positive, dark way). Donald seems to have forgotten rule number one of Creative Writing 101 - Show, don't tell. The protagonist, another confusing character called Alan Dale, is forced to join Robin's band of outlaws following a theft gone wrong. We see Robin Hood through his eyes, sometimes adoringly, sometimes fearfully, but we never really see Robin Hood do anything. Alan says he is charming or Alan says he is scary, but Robin Hood himself, when he makes an appearance, is just boring. He sits. He broods. He looks tired. He looks charming. Alan constantly talks about how what made Robin Hood unique was his ability to charm people even after committing horrific acts, but again we never see this. Just Alan talking about it. Donald tries to paint Robin mischievous, constantly giving winks in serious situations and laughing heartily on thefts, which is completely at odds with the original idea of him being a "Godfather".

Alan Dale is also a mess of a character, swapping randomly between whimpering child and ferocious warrior. Furthermore the flash forwards to Dale as an old man looking back on these adventures are completely unnecessary and break up the action. Alan's love for Marie-Anne switches on and off like a light switch and his proclamation at the end that his love is more like that for a sister is absurd considering they spent only a matter of hours in each others company.

To sum up, before this becomes more of a rant than a review, the characters are ridiculous and contrary, the story is predictable and clichéd, the premise is good but completely ignored a quarter in and the action scenes, few and far between as they are, aren't particularly interesting either.

There are dozens of great historical novels out there, many of them written by independently published authors. Do them and yourself a favour - save your money on this and buy a few indie books instead.

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### **William says**

A friend of mine was looking through my book shelf and pulled this one out asking if it was any good. All I could say was "Meh". The following week they handed the book back and before I could ask they uttered "Meh"

It's not a bad book and it's not a great book, it is in all definitions of the word "Meh"

I liked the whole idea of a Mafia style Robin Hood and his not so merry men and it was definitely interesting reading the spin off versions of a lot of the classic characters.

But the book never really hit home for me. It really fades into nothing in the middle of the book and I Just couldn't let go of how in just one year the main character Allen is transformed into this great warrior despite the fact he is still a child. Plus in my opinion the author refers to the Male genitalia a few too many times, I never understood what was with that.

And maybe its just me but there is a part in the final chapters that seems identical to the scene at the end of Godfather 2.

The second book does sound pretty good though, supposedly based on Robin whilst fighting in the crusades, which I don't think ive seen before. Most Robin Hood stories always seem to be based on after he comes back so it could be good.

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### **Mike (the Paladin) says**

This is a sort of...."hummm, interesting"....take on the Robin Hood legend. The author takes some time "afterward" to discuss this and why he writes what he writes.

This is a good book. It's a somewhat new angle to take on the legendary character. he's more bitter in some ways definitely a disillusioned hero. We get the childhood trauma card played here and the author wanted very badly to include a pagan take on the religion in the book.

Here we are told the story by Alan Dale (Alan-a-Dale) as he is forced to flee into the Green Wood and seek

Robert Odo (possibly based on Robert Fitzodo) or Robin Hood. There he meets Friar Tuck a Christian friar oddly helping the outlaws of Sherwood, Little John, Will Scaflock (Scarlet) and others.

He also meets Marianne for whom he's immediately smitten.

Robin is not fond of The Church and (just so you'll know) he participates in some rather disturbing pagan rites. This seems it may be a big part of the story as it goes along.

Without spoilers I'll say that while Angus Donald tries to set his own story up and is actually trying to more accurately reflect King Richard and what went before it's still a very good story. I can recommend this one pretty highly for pure story telling. just be aware that if you (like me) have strong religious beliefs (probably of any stripe) you'll have to just look at this as "a story" and not get up tight about some of it.

So, nice exciting take on the Robin Hood legend, good characters, good story telling. I'd say give this one a try.

By the way...I plan to follow it up soon with the next book in the series.

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