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Review: The King Raven Trilogy

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Lawhead, Stephen King Raven Trilogy Thomas Nelson (Gr. 10-12)

Hood 2006, ISBN 1595543295

Scarlet 2007, ISBN 978-1595540867

Tuck 2009, ISBN 978-1595540874

Description

Unlike most authors, Stephen Lawhead has chosen Wales as the setting for his version of the legend of Robin Hood. Staged in three volumes, Lawhead presents the saga of the Welsh against the invading Normans through the eyes of Robin himself in *Hood*, from the perspective of imprisoned band member Will Scarlet in *Scarlet*, and finally through the voice of the band's fugitive clergyman in *Tuck*.

Robin Hood: The Legend Begins Anew

Saved from death by the old crone Angharad, Bran Ap Brychan, better known as Robin Hood, is bewildered by the old woman's questions about what he plans to do with his future and the songs she sings of the Elder World. Banished from the lands once owned by his murdered father and hunted by the Normans, Bran takes to the primeval Welsh forests where he is joined by the disenfranchised and the desperate. Donning the frightening costume of a large black bird he weaves the legend of King Raven in the minds of the people as he leads his band in attacks against the despised Norman rulers. Thus begins Robin Hood's struggle to regain his country from the invaders who are stealing lands and burdening the people with harsh demands.

Scarlet

Losing family, home and lands, Will Scarlet seeks out the legendary King Raven to see if the outlaw is truly the hero he has heard him to be. Satisfied with what he finds, Will joins himself to the band of forest dwellers. Will proves himself to be a skilled archer and in the end a truly loyal friend to Robin Hood. Political intrigue overtakes Will's fortunes when he is captured by the Sheriff Richard de Glanville. Declaring he will be hanged unless willing to expose the location of the rebels, the sheriff allows him to narrate his story to a priest in hopes that he will divulge some piece of useful information. The Norman lords are unprepared, however, for the lengths to which King Raven will go to rescue his faithful companion. Out of desperation, a daring plan of deliverance is created.

Tuck

As the brutal pressure imposed by Abbot Hugo and the Norman aristocracy increases and the plight of Rhi Bran y Hud and his band becomes more desperate, Robin is forced to reach out to the northern tribes of Wales for help with men and supplies. Far more dire are the circumstances of this group of forest dwellers as portrayed by Lawhead than that which is often presented in popular versions of this tale. During these dark days King Raven is joined on his northern trek by the feisty Friar Tuck whose cunning matches that of his leader. Relying on Tuck's wit and

resourcefulness, Robin fires a rebellion that forces confrontation between the Norman monarch and the rebel forces.

Critique

Using a mysterious new setting and gritty writing, Lawhead has managed to breathe new life into the timeless tale of the medieval folk hero, Robin Hood. Maintaining the main characters and the historical intrigue found in the original tale, this retelling adds layers of complexity missing in many renditions. His main characters are more fully developed and the difficult living circumstances are more clearly portrayed than in other titles. His people are not simply a happy band of rogues having a good time at the expense of the wealthy, but are real characters fighting for their very existence against power-hungry men scheming to rob them of money and lands. Robin is portrayed as a many-faceted hero and Tuck comes across as more than a jolly, food loving buffoon. Instead, Tuck is a vital part of the plans which spell life or death for the small band of outcasts.

With exciting action, rich imagery, well-developed characters, and Celtic legend woven throughout, The King Raven series is a thoroughly satisfying read.

Descriptive terms

Wales

Robin Hood

Folk tales

Traditional literature

English folk tales

Normans