

ROBIN HOOD

THE STORY SO FAR . . .

The bad guys are scheming . . .

For more than a decade, **Guy Gisborne** has used threats, violence and corruption to keep the declining industrial town of Locksley under his thumb. Now he wants to expand his influence across the whole county by becoming Sheriff of Nottingham.

Outgoing Sheriff **Marjorie Kovacevic** has even grander plans. She's entered the race to become national president and is ahead of her rivals in the latest polls.

Election day is less than six months away. If the pair win power, they'll be unstoppable in their quest to smash the rebels in Sherwood Forest.

While the good guys struggle . . .

After the destruction of their base in a devastating fire, rebel leader **Will Scarlock** is trying to establish new headquarters inside the luxurious but flood-damaged Sherwood Castle Resort.

Thirteen-year-old **Robin Hood** and the other Sherwood Forest rebels want a better society, where everyone gets quality education, housing and healthcare – and crooks like Guy Gisborne get a prison uniform instead of a sheriff's badge. But with temperatures below freezing and the forest blanketed in snow, the fight for justice must take a back seat as the rebels struggle to find the food, fuel and medicines they need just to stay alive.



1. TEN MAN ERIC

Robin Hood stumbled. The deep snow meant he never quite knew when his boot would hit solid ground, making it easy to stub a toe on a hidden rock or twist an ankle stepping awkwardly on tree roots.

‘Looks like a storm drain,’ Robin told the other three members of the search party as he probed around, stabbing his walking pole into the snow. ‘It’s not deep, but mind your step.’

Two plumes of breath curled out of Robin’s nose and up towards the dazzling cloudless sky. It had been a tough two-hour trek. His fingers and face were numb. While Robin was breathless enough to gulp air through his mouth, he fought the urge because frosty air sent sharp pains through his teeth.

Robin’s three companions were well insulated. Ten-year-old Matt Maid wore tatty pink ski pants and a hooded parka jacket. He’d moaned before they left, saying the trousers were too bulky, but now he was grateful his mum

had insisted, because they were super warm and repelled water better than Robin's sodden combat trousers.

Rebel security officer Lyla Masri led the way down into the drainage channel, while Ten Man Eric brought up the rear. Ten Man was a powerfully built German, with crude prison tattoos on his cheek and neck. He'd spent half his fifty years behind bars and earned his nickname because they said it took ten men to bring him down in a fight.

Lyla, reaching out with her walking pole, found a set of steps on the opposite side of the trench. Robin joined her, then stepped onto a low wall to get a view over a huge snow-covered car park and the burnt remains of Sherwood Designer Outlets.

The vast mall had been abandoned for over a decade, before becoming Will Scarlock's rebel headquarters. A few months earlier Sheriff Marjorie's helicopters had dropped incendiaries across the roof; now all that remained of the rebels' base was a snow-blanketed tangle of collapsed walls, melted beams and blackened interior fixtures.

'Someone's got a fire going,' Matt said, pointing to wispy smoke over the far side of the mall, near a frozen stretch of the Macondo River.

Lyla gave the rifle slung over her shoulder a reassuring tap. 'We heard there's bandits in the area. Hopefully they won't bother us if we don't bother them.'

Ten Man grunted, as if to say *I'll believe that when I see it.*



The quartet's equipment packs rattled as they jogged across one of the huge parking lots encircling the burnt-out mall. There was soot beneath the snow, which squelched underfoot and sprayed dark grey slush up Robin's trousers.

They stumbled over chunks of a fallen wall, and soon they were beneath the sagging metal frame that had once supported the mall's glass-domed atrium. Pebbles of shatterproof glass crunched underfoot. Although the air was below freezing, sunlight was melting snow on the metal frame, making an eerie chorus of drips.

Their target was on the far side of the atrium, where a football-pitch-sized area of charred wood and melted plastic roofing had cascaded down in a heap. It peaked at ten metres and had solidified into a huge lump as it cooled.

Ten Man squatted and began to take equipment out of his enormous backpack. Matt stared ruefully up at the snow-covered remains of the first-floor food court, where he'd spent hundreds of hours riding his skateboard and hanging with his crew.

'Sad to see it in this state,' Ten Man told Matt, in a voice too soft for his heavy physique and prison tattoos. 'Were you born in here?'

Matt shook his head. 'We came when I was a toddler, but all my memories are here.'

Ten Man had started work in a German coal mine aged sixteen, but quickly realised it was no fun. At eighteen, he stole a truck filled with mining explosives and used his





tunnelling skills to rob banks and high-end watch stores all over Europe.

The robberies had been a success, but a youthful appetite for lavish spending and fast cars meant that Ten Man caught police attention – and prison time – in four countries. After escaping to Sherwood Forest, he'd become one of Will Scarlock's most trusted people. Tough enough to make opponents back off without a fight, smart enough to be more than just muscle, and well liked, despite his scary nickname.

After a quick break, sharing cheese sandwiches and a warming flask of spicy noodle soup, the quartet got to work. Lyla climbed the skeletal remains of an escalator to stand guard from the first floor, while Ten Man and the two boys approached the mountain of collapsed roof wearing headlamps on elastic straps and carrying axes, metal detectors and battery-powered saws.

Rebel search parties had retrieved possessions and valuables from the mall after the fire, but locating valuable items trapped below tonnes of melted roofing seemed impossible, until Ten Man had the idea of using a stash of mining gear that he'd previously employed to burrow into a Berlin gold depository and Capital City's swankiest jewellery store.

Since they were after stuff from Will Scarlock's command tent, Ten Man clambered gingerly onto the part of the molten roof that was closest to the protruding beams from the watchtower. He was worried about ice,





and the chance that debris might shift when he put his weight down. But the molten resin had set hard and the mound felt solid.

As Ten Man walked, he swept a long-handled sonar probe over the wreckage. The ancient German device had a flickering green display, but a skilled operator could interpret the blurry lines as sand, clay, rock or even a gas-filled cavity that would blow you to bits if your cutting tool made a spark.

Robin and Matt kept close behind until Ten Man saw something he liked on the screen. He went down on one knee, got a squeal from a little handheld metal detector, then used a hand axe to make a fist-sized hole.

‘What are you seeing?’ Robin asked.

‘Something metal,’ Ten Man told him before moving on. ‘Let me know when you figure it out.’

As Matt trailed Ten Man over the tangle of wood and roofing, Robin kicked away as much snow as he could before lying on his belly in front of the hole Ten Man had made. He switched on his headlamp and looked down, but the hole was too small for him to see anything, so he took the battery-powered hand saw off his belt and set to work.

When the hole was the size of a dinner plate, Robin stuck his head in. His headlamp shone over a cavity the size of a small car, and he inhaled soot that tickled his nose and made him sneeze.

After wiping snot off his top lip, Robin held his breath as he went down for a second look. It seemed the metal





Ten Man had detected was a buckled scaffold pole that had once supported Will's command tent. Robin also recognised a run of brightly coloured cables that once fed data between the mall's internet router and a satellite dish atop the watchtower.

'We're definitely in the right area,' Robin announced.

He got no response, because Matt was noisily sawing another hole a dozen metres away. And this time Ten Man was excited enough to stand and watch.

'It's big and rectangular,' Ten Man told Matt excitedly as he studied a bright spot on his scanner screen. 'Exactly what we came for.'

Robin wanted to clamber over and join the excitement, but the soot had really done him in and he had to pause while the next sneeze built in his nose.

He sneezed twice. When he looked up after a third, a big-eyed child said, 'Bless you.'

Robin was startled by the small sturdy girl, standing on the debris less than two metres away. She was no older than six, with matted hair and a soot-blackened face. Lyla hadn't spotted her approach, and Robin realised she wasn't wearing enough winter clothes to be more than playing distance from home.

He decided to grab the girl and find where she'd come from, but she gasped and hurtled back down the mound before he could get close. At the same moment, Ten Man noisily stamped out a section of charred roofing that Matt had cut along three sides.



‘This is it,’ Matt said, excitedly as his headlamp flickered inside the new hole. ‘I can see Will Scarlock’s safe!’

Robin grinned and gasped. On the night Sherwood Designer Outlets had burned, the safe had crashed through the melting roof. It contained over £80,000 that the rebels desperately needed to buy supplies, and £7,800 that was Robin’s remaining share of the loot from a cash machine robbery he’d masterminded back in the spring.