

ROBIN HOOD

THE STORY SO FAR . . .

Things are bad in Sherwood Forest . . .

Evil gangster **Guy Gisborne** has the declining industrial town of Locksley under his thumb, controlling everything from petty drug deals to senior judges.

He works in an uneasy alliance with the Sheriff of Nottingham, **Marjorie Kovacevic**.

The ambitious Sheriff likes to portray herself as a successful businesswoman and get-tough politician who locks up criminals and cracks down on immigration. But deep in the forest, Sheriff Marjorie's army of private guards deals brutally with anyone who gets in her way.

But the people are fighting back!

When **Ardagh Hood** dared to speak out about corruption in Locksley, Guy Gisborne had him beaten, framed and sent to jail.

His thirteen-year-old son **Robin Hood** escaped to the forest, joined a band of rebels based in an abandoned outlet mall and mounted a series of daring raids and heroic rescues.

For his many fans, Robin is a hero leading the fight against injustice. But cops and the government say Robin and his rebel friends are terrorists who must be hunted down and thrown in jail.



1. YOU STEPPED IN SOMETHING

Record-breaking summer rain had flooded vast tracts of Sherwood Forest, and for the first time in decades the Macondo River ran deep enough to take a boat the three hundred kilometres from Lake Victoria to the Eastern Delta.

The rains had continued into October and Robin Hood was sick of it, from emptying drip buckets in the night to stop his den flooding, to the mushroom stench of mould and clinging humidity that made him sweat through clean clothes in the time it took to tie his boots.

Robin sat in an open-hulled boat, trying to read a book with damp crinkled pages, while rain pelted a thick tarp that covered him up to the neck. Lanky trees blocked most of the daylight, as an outboard motor moved the boat at a crawl.

Lyla Masri had been charged with keeping Robin and his best friend Marion Maid out of mischief. She sat on a plank at the boat's rear, steering. She had a



Russian assault rifle propped between muddy legs and kept a careful eye on the deck compass. It was easy to lose the river's path on the flooded plains and this was one of many spots where satnav signals didn't reach the forest floor.

Robin's head felt fuzzy. His brain refused entry to the words on the page and he'd read the same line four times when Marion's boot nudged his ankle. She sat across from Robin, sharing the big tarp, her head protected with a wide-brimmed rain hat whose goofy neon strap looped around her chin.

'That your Chemistry homework?' Marion asked.

Robin thought about holding the book up so Marion could see the cover, but moving risked draining puddled water from the tarp into his lap.

'I downloaded crib notes,' Marion continued. 'You can copy my answers if you like.'

Robin sounded grumpy. 'It's not homework. It's a book about the Magic Cheese.'

Marion looked baffled. 'Magic *what?*'

'Magic Cheese were legendary computer hackers back in olden times. They did wild stuff. Developed the first computer virus, built the first scorpions to track mobile phone signals. They almost wound up in jail, but the CIA recruited them to hack the Chinese.'

Marion wasn't a big reader and looked unimpressed. 'I don't know how you get through. What is that, five hundred pages?'





Robin slapped the book shut. Marion wasn't the reason he'd read the same paragraph six times, but he blamed her anyway. 'How can I read if you keep interrupting?'

'My first words in half an hour,' Marion growled back.

As Robin rolled his eyes, Marion pulled a pack of chocolate-covered peanuts from her backpack. She tipped a dozen into her palm and put on a show, dropping them into her mouth one at a time as Robin pretended he wasn't interested.

'Want some, grumpy guts?' Marion asked. She rattled the bag.

As Robin leaned forward, Lyla steered the open-hulled boat between an embankment and a huge lightning-charred trunk.

'Ta,' Robin said.

But as he tried to take the chocolates Marion flicked her boot up, spraying him with rainwater pooled on the tarp.

'What was that for?' Robin gasped, as it went in his eyes and trickled inside his hoodie.

As Marion cracked up laughing, Robin flicked wet hair out of his eyes. He realised Marion had put serious thought into the prank because she had her phone filming it.

'Turn it off!' Robin said, as he made a grab.

'Got you in glorious slow motion,' Marion said. 'Your expression was gold!'

As Robin tried to get Marion's phone, she burrowed under the tarp and started crawling down the wooden





hull towards the rear. But Robin managed to dig fingers down her trailing boot and yank her back.

The boat was too large for the wrestling to make it unstable, and Lyla smirked as she watched them tussle under the tarp.

‘Delete or I’ll dunk your head!’ Robin yelled.

But Marion got free by yanking her foot out of the boot.

‘It’s going online,’ Marion yelled as she crawled down the boat. ‘I’ll call it *Butt Face Gets a Soaking.*’

‘What did you step in?’ Robin said, making a gagging sound. ‘This boot reeks!’

Lyla watched Robin reach out of the tarp and try to dangle Marion’s boot over the water. But Marion straddled his chest and snatched it back.

‘Get your bum off my face!’ Robin demanded.

‘Fart’s a-coming!’ Marion said. ‘Inhale my breakfast, loser.’

As Robin escaped and clattered into a stack of empty cargo boxes, Lyla decided they were getting too crazy. ‘Enough!’ she roared as she grabbed the tangled tarp and stripped it away.

The two thirteen-year-olds were sprawled over empty boxes, breathless, soggy and smirking.

‘We’re still a couple of hours from Locksley,’ Lyla continued. ‘I’d better not hear either of you moan that you’re cold or thirsty, or . . .’

Lyla stopped abruptly because she was only twenty and realised she sounded like her mother.





The teenagers straightened their clothes and stacked the boxes they'd knocked over. Robin reached for a plastic tub and used it to bail rainwater over the side, while Marion realised she really had stepped in something nasty and leaned over the side, washing the sole of her boot in the spray coming off the bow.

'I need a snack and my shirt is itchy,' Robin said, putting on a baby voice to wind Lyla up.

At the bow, Marion shot upright. Her dripping boot twirled by its laces and she looked alarmed.

'Did you hear?' she blurted.

'What?' Robin asked as he shook drips off his Magic Cheese book.

'Gunshot,' Marion said.

Lyla looked doubtful, but she couldn't hear much of anything sat near the outboard motor.

'Sherwood's full of weird noises,' Robin said dismissively.

They couldn't risk ploughing into bandits, so Lyla cut the motor. The forest soundscape of birds, bugs and lapping water went uninterrupted long enough for Marion to feel stupid, but as Lyla reached around to restart the engine there was a squeal from a tiny human.

'Mummy, she's hurting me.'

Something muffled the little voice, making Robin queasy at the thought of a little kid getting hurt. The echo in the canopy made the sound hard to pinpoint, but it wasn't far away.

