



# Shadow of the Wolf

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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When the strapline of this first novel from David Fickling's new imprint exhorts you to 'forget everything you've ever heard about Robin Hood?', it is, of course, inviting you to do exactly the opposite. Sure enough, this Robin Loxley has a hood and a bow, lives in Sherwood Forest in some kind of Middle Ages and is best friends with Marian. However, this is a world of shadow, violence, mystery, massacre, torture and malevolent sexual magic; in which legends of knightly deeds collide with dark fairy tale, Celtic myth and a post-apocalyptic landscape of burning villages and bodies swinging on gibbets: Robin Hood via Hieronymus Bosch. What little there is of light in the greenwood occurs early in the novel when lowly Robin and haughty Marian live a childhood idyll of freedom in a high tower and then, separated, Robin attends a school for knights ? something like being in the army cadet force at an all-boys public school, I imagine ? where he makes friends and plays war games. But all this comes to an end when Robin tries to rescue Marian from the evil and very ugly Sherriff of Nottingham, is blinded for his trouble, and stumbles alone into the forest. There he acquires preternatural powers of perception in an obscure alliance with the forest goddess involving the slaughter of a monstrous spectral wolf and some off the page sex. You may notice in my description, a note of scepticism creeping in. I admire Tim Hall's ability to get this show on the road and keep it there with economical and gut wrenching prose through the twists and turns of just under five hundred pages, and I enjoyed and was intrigued by the first part of the novel, which sets up questions about Robin and Marian's origins that remain to be answered in the novel or novels that continue this story. But I found the technicolour violence and monochrome characterisation of the latter part of the novel, where Robin's new found powers allow him to spray death and shatter bodies in a manner beloved of twenty first century video gamers, rather less interesting. Curious, too, that, in a novel in which the dismemberment of living bodies can be so graphically described, there is such coyness when it comes to a sexual encounter. Ah well, it is a book for young people.

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