Doctor Who: Robot of Sherwood

Based on the screenplay by Mark Gatiss.

About the writer

Mark Gatiss is an actor, comedian, screenwriter and novelist. He appeared as Tycho Nestoris in the TV series *Game of Thrones*. Besides *Robot of Sherwood* he has written a number of other episodes of Doctor Who.

About the programme

Robot of Sherwood is episode 3 of the eighth *Doctor Who* series. It was filmed in Wales and first broadcast on 6 September 2014. The Doctor is played by Peter Capaldi and his companion, Clara, by Jenna Coleman

Summary

In the TARDIS, Clara says she wants to meet Robin Hood. The Doctor says that he is not real but he sets the programme for Sherwood Forest around the year 1190. When they land, the Doctor is surprised to find Robin and the other characters from the story are there. It later becomes clear that the knights working for the Sheriff are robots from the future whose spaceship crash-landed inside the castle. To repair the ship, the Sheriff starts collecting all the gold in the area and melting it down. The Doctor realises that the spaceship is too badly damaged to be fixed. It is leaking radiation and when it takes off will explode and kill many people. However, when it struggles for height, Robin shoots a gold arrow into it, allowing it to clear the atmosphere before the explosion.

Chapter 1: The TARDIS lands beside a small river. Robin Hood appears and wants to fight the Doctor. He draws his sword and the Doctor pulls a spoon from his jacket. After exchanging some blows, both men end up in the river. Robin takes the Doctor and Clara to meet the Merry Men, who seem real though the Doctor believes this is impossible. He's also puzzled by the bright sunshine so late in the year. Robin tells them about an archery contest for a gold arrow at Nottingham Castle the following day.

Chapter 2: The Sheriff and his men arrive at a small house near Sherwood Forest. An old man, Mr Quayle, and a young woman live there. The woman says that she came there for shelter after she lost her home. The Sheriff kills the old man and his men take the woman to the castle to work in the kitchens. The contest for the gold arrow comes down to the Sheriff and Robin Hood. The Sheriff's arrow hits the centre of the target but Robin's splits it. Then the Doctor steps in. He splits Robin's arrow then blows up the target with his sonic screwdriver. The Sheriff wants to see the sonic screwdriver and tells his men to bring it to him. As they close in, Robin draws his sword and cuts off one of their arms and they see that it's a robot arm. The Doctor tells Robin not to fight on because the answers are inside the castle. The Sheriff's men take the two of them and Clara to the dungeon. Later, a guard takes Clara to the Sheriff.

Chapter 3: In the confusion, Friar Tuck steals the gold arrow and the Merry Men run back to the forest. The Sheriff and Clara have dinner in the castle. He asks her about the sonic screwdriver. Clara avoids answering, but encourages the Sheriff to talk about his plans, which involve using his army of robots to take over the world. Every day, the Sheriff and his robot-knights collect gold from the people, take it to the castle and melt it down. The robot-knights don't know why the Sheriff needs all this gold, but they do what he says.

Chapter 4: In the dungeon, Robin pretends to be ill, which brings the guard to the door. He comes closer and Robin hits him over the head with a chair. Robin and the Doctor escape. As they go through the castle, looking for Clara, they come across a spaceship. The Doctor understands the ship is damaged and leaking radiation. This explains the unusually fine weather for the time of year. Using the computer, the Doctor shows Robin pictures from storybooks and films, and tries to persuade him that he isn't real and has been put there to give the people hope so they will follow the Sheriff's orders. Robin refuses to believe this. The Sheriff walks in with Clara and a robot-knight, whom the Sheriff orders to kill Robin. There is an explosion. Robin puts his arms round Clara and they jump out of the window into the moat.

Chapter 5: Robin carries Clara to the forest and lays her beside a fire to dry out. When she wakes, he and the other Merry Men ask her questions about the Doctor

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and the TARDIS. In the castle, the Doctor talks to the Sheriff and realises that the gold is needed to repair the spaceship. The Doctor doesn't believe that this will work. He is taken back to the dungeon where he finds many of the poor people of Nottingham and the young woman from Mr Quayle's house. Around them are many stolen gold plates. The Doctor tells the people to bang on the walls to attract the robot-knights. When they enter, the people hold gold plates up and deflect the robot-knights' lasers against each other so they all die.

Chapter 6: On a screen in the spaceship, the Sheriff sees Robin and Clara alive in the forest. He also watches the fight in the dungeon and realises that the Doctor and the local people are winning. The Doctor enters and tells him that if he takes off, the ship will explode and kill half the people in England. Robin and Clara arrive at the castle. She is happy to be with Robin. The Sheriff and Robin fight. They go up the stairs, above the bath of molten gold. Robin gets behind him and pushes him into the bath of gold.

Chapter 7: As the castle begins to collapse, Robin, Clara and the Doctor run to the forest. The spaceship climbs into the sky but the Doctor knows that without more gold it will explode. He calls for the gold arrow. Robin can't shoot a bow because of his injured arm so he asks the Doctor to do it, but the Doctor reveals he only won the contest by using a laser-guided arrow. All three sit down, and with the Doctor and Clara holding the bow, Robin shoots the gold arrow into the spaceship. The spaceship then goes much faster and higher before it explodes. The Doctor and Clara say goodbye to the Merry Men. Clara rather reluctantly joins the Doctor in the TARDIS. As it takes off, they see the young woman again. She is Marian, and Robin shouts his thanks to the Doctor.

Background and themes

Authority: Robin and the Merry Men steal from the rich to give to the poor. They are outlaws, not because they are bad but because of unfair laws of the time. They show that moral law can be more important than the laws of the country. Ask students: *Can laws ever be wrong? Is it right to break a law which is unfair? Are there any laws today which you think are unfair?*

Freedom: The idea of leaving behind the problems of everyday life and living in the forest is part of the reason why the Robin Hood legend still attracts us today. It ignores how hard life would be there because the legend is not about reality. Ask students: *What do you think life is really like for Robin and his Merry Men in the forest? Do you think you could live like this? Do you ever want to go and live somewhere far away from other people?*

Heroes: Clara wants to meet Robin Hood because he is one of her heroes. She also thinks of the Doctor as a hero. There are different levels of fiction here. For us, neither the Doctor nor Robin is real, while for the Doctor, Robin isn't real. Ask students: *Who do you think is the better hero – the Doctor or Robin? Do you have any heroes? Are they real or fictional? Are the best heroes only found in fiction? What can we learn from heroes?*

Discussion activities

Chapters 1–2

Before reading

1 **Discuss:** Ask the students what they know about the legend of Robin Hood. They should have some familiarity from films and TV. Go over the main points of the story, introducing the principal characters: Robin, Maid Marian, the Merry Men and the Sheriff. Make sure they are familiar with the meaning of the word 'legend'. Elicit from them the main themes of Robin Hood: freedom, justice for the poor, etc. Then put them into small groups and ask them to tell the others about similar legends from their own culture and what values they contain.

While reading

2 **Role play:** After Chapter 1, put the students into pairs. One is the Doctor and one is Clara. Clara wants to meet Robin Hood. The Doctor says he isn't real and they should meet a real person. In the text, he suggests Gandhi or Winston Churchill. The student playing the Doctor can suggest these, or other famous people from history, and try to persuade Clara that this would be more interesting than attempting to meet a character from storybooks.

Chapters 3–4

While reading

3 **Pair work:** Have the students stop reading after Chapter 3. When Clara says she had a cup of coffee and a small box of chocolates that morning, the Sheriff doesn't understand. Ask the students to make a list of five things from our time which wouldn't be

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understood in 1190. Then, in pairs, they take turns to be Clara and the Sheriff and explain these things to their partner.

After reading

4 **Guess:** 'He has everything, but he always wants more gold. What does he do with his bags of gold?' Alan-a-Dale says. Put the students into small groups and ask them to discuss why the Sheriff wants so much gold. It is unlikely that they will guess the answer, which comes in Chapter 5, that he needs it to repair the spaceship. However, after a few minutes, collect their ideas then say, *You have a bag of gold. What will you do with it?* Ask the students to share their ideas with each other.

5 **Pair work:** Put students in pairs and ask them to choose a short paragraph from Chapters 3–4. Tell then to make five changes to words in the text. They can take notes if they like. Students then read out their paragraphs to the other students, who have to identify the mistakes.

Chapters 5–6

While reading

6 **Role play:** Put the students into groups of three. Ask them to read out loud the conversation between Robin, Little John and Clara at the start of Chapter 5. Then ask them to think of other questions Robin and Little John would like to ask Clara about the Doctor and the TARDIS. Ask them to continue the conversation.

After reading

7 **Group work:** Write, *Why does Robin put Clara down near the big fire?* on the board and elicit the answer (because she's cold and wet). Now write the words *Why? What? When? Where? Who?* and *How?* on the board. Ask each student to write two questions from Chapters 5–6, with each question beginning with one of these words. Students then mingle with each other, asking and answering each other's questions.

Chapter 7

After reading

8 **Research:** Ask the students to look on the internet for films and TV versions of the Robin Hood story. They might focus mainly on *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991) with Kevin Kostner and *Robin Hood* (2010) with Russell Crowe. Ask them to look for what new elements later versions brought to the story.

9 **Discussion and artwork:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to plan a new Robin Hood film. They should consider what actors they would use and how to present the story in a new and relevant way. They can then design a poster to advertise their film and present their ideas to the others in the class.