

The Eagle of the Ninth Study Guide

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For the novel by
Rosemary Sutcliff



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Synopsis

In the year 119 A.D., the Ninth Roman Legion, 4,000 men strong, marches into the wilds of northern Britain to quell rebellion among the Briton tribes—and is never seen again. Fifteen years later, Marcus Aquila becomes commander of his own, new, cohort in Britain, looking forward to a long, illustrious career in the Roman legions; and hoping to discover what happened to the Ninth Legion and his father, who led them. But before he has more than settled into his command, the native Britons attack the fort, and though Marcus secures victory for his troops, he is severely injured in battle. Finding himself abruptly lamed and retired, Marcus is unsure what to do with his life—until a rumor reaches his ears that the Eagle of the Ninth Legion has been seen in the north. So begins a quest deep into the northern wilds of Britain with his friend Esca to recover the lost Eagle of the Ninth Legion and to redeem his father's honor.

Chapters XVI–XVIII

Vocabulary:

In the blanks below, write the letter of the definition from the Definition Box next to the word it defines. In the space below each word, use the word in an original sentence of your own.

Definition Box

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. exhausting, tiring, demanding | g. intensely clear or bright |
| b. rummaged, searched | h. disappearing, shrinking |
| c. aloof and unfriendly in manner | i. soft sheen or glow |
| d. produce, call out, perhaps by magic | j. prey, something that is hunted |
| e. horribly, beyond endurance | k. a state of confusion and disturbance |
| f. a loud confusion of noise and clamor | l. deliberate, unprovoked, or cruel violence |
-

1. _____ turmoil

Your sentence:

2. _____ tumult

Your sentence:

3. _____ delving

Your sentence:

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Questions:

1. When the tribesmen begin searching through Marcus' packs, how does Marcus protect his medical supplies from damage?
2. Though Marcus regrets shaming Dergdian and his men, he still would not wish the Eagle back in their possession. Why?
3. How does Marcus use the superstitious nature of the tribes to arrange a private and separate place for him and Esca to stay in for three days while Esca "recovers" from an "old sickness"?
4. Esca proposes that Marcus go on ahead and he will slow the tribesmen, sacrificing his life to save Marcus. What is Marcus' response to this?
5. What is the hidden path that is death to travel without a guide?

Thinking About the Story:

6. An *extended metaphor* is a metaphorical comparison in which two things are compared at some length and in several ways. The following passages are examples of extended metaphors. Explain the general metaphor found in the passages, then describe at least three specific ways the comparison is being made. What does this particular metaphor demonstrate about the tribesmen, their behavior, and how Marcus views their pursuit?

"Here they come at last," he said to Esca; and then as a distant yell echoed over the mountainside, "Hear how the hounds give tongue."

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The lid of the bronze medicine box was wrenched back, and one of the hunters began to rummage inside like a little dog after a rat. Marcus said quietly to the Chieftain, who stood beside him with folded arms, also looking on, “Will you bid your hounds be less rough with the tools of my trade.”

7. We discussed foreshadowing in Chapters I–III. Looking at Chapter XVI, when Marcus and Esca are sitting in the ruined tower watching the sunset, what is being foreshadowed? What phrases and images does Sutcliff use to accomplish this?

8. *Juxtaposition* is the placing of two ideas or images side by side for contrasting effect or to startle the reader. In literature, a juxtaposition occurs when two images that are otherwise not commonly brought together appear side by side or structurally close together, thereby forcing the reader to stop and reconsider the meaning of the text through the contrasting images, ideas, motifs, etc. At the very end of Chapter XVIII, Marcus is waiting in the tower for the men who are hunting him, when he suddenly notices something totally unrelated to the danger he is in. Find this section and describe how the author is using juxtaposition here. What do you think the contrasting image represents?

9. Marcus alludes to the group chasing them as “The Wild Hunt.” Look up The Wild Hunt and explain what it is. Why does Marcus allude to them?

Dig Deeper:

10. Despite Marcus' lame leg, his pain, and their exhaustion, both Marcus and Esca continue to push grimly on toward the south as fast as physically possible. How are Romans 5:3–4 and Hebrews 12:1, 2, 12 even more applicable in this section?

11. As Marcus and Esca are pursued, they suddenly feel that the very countryside becomes hostile and menacing. Later, they are spotted and hunted with the “horror of the hunted in their racing hearts, while death with many heron-tufted war-spears stalked them through the dark maze.” Marcus and Esca are experiencing true fear. How do they seem to be handling their fear? Read the following verses. Psalm 46:1–3; Proverbs 3:21–26; Romans 8:31, 35–39; Hebrews 13:5–6; and 1 John 4:15–18. How are we to handle fear? How can these verses help you in the future?

12. In Chapter XVIII, Guern helps Marcus and Esca by travelling with them and guiding them through the bog to help them past the Epidaii hunting them. Why do you think Guern is willing to travel with them under such dangerous circumstances now?

After they cross the bog, and as Guern gets ready to leave them, he asks to see the Eagle once again. When he sees it, he reaches out for it, then drops his hands and just looks at it. Sutcliff writes, “The betraying gesture tore harshly at

Answer Key

Note: Most of the questions in Progeny Press study guides deal with students' understanding and interpretation of issues in the novel; therefore, most answers will be individual to the student. Progeny Press answer keys are designed to be as inclusive as possible for the teacher and/or parent, giving enough background and information to judge whether the student has grasped the essence of the issue and the question. We try to point out some directions students' answers might take, which directions might be best, and some errors that may appear. Students are not expected to answer as completely as the answers provided in the Answer Key.

Chapters I–III

Vocabulary:

1. b; 2. c; 3. a; 4. scarp: c, basilica: c; 5. b; 6. a; 7. b; 8. a; 9. c; 10. b; 11. c; 12. a; 13. a; 14. gilded: b, mizzle: c

Questions:

1. Marcus and his aunt's husband greatly hate each other. He applies for a Centurion's commission and enters the Roman legions.
2. He must follow the Centurion's torch from guard-post to guard-post, from barrack block to horse-lines, in particular, seeing that all is well with the frontier of the Empire.
3. He seems to be implying that he is only imagining things.
4. They keep a great charcoal brazier glowing and throw fresh grass and fern onto it to create a black column of smoke. The other garrison in response lights a smoke signal showing the call for help is received and help is on its way.
5. Marcus leads a rescue party to give a returning patrol a chance to get back into the garrison.
6. Answers will vary but may mention some of the following: Marcus feels tensions are stirring under the surface and does not trust the veiled attitude of the villagers; a druid is rumored to have been seen again; one of the watch hears movement and wakes Marcus; Marcus has all his men turn out to their action stations even though it might seem foolish in the night; the drizzle lifts and they are able to light a smoke signal to the nearest garrison asking for help; his patrol returns and they fight and manage to get almost back to the gates when the chariots arrive. Marcus throws himself onto the first chariot to crash it in front of the those following to stop their charge.

Thinking About the Story:

7. Answers should include two of the following: He tells Marcus that by the time he's been here a year, he will have toadstools sprouting out of his ears, and he is off to rub away the blue mould. He also says they lived for two months on top of Vesuvius, a volcano, but it never erupted.
8. The author is foreshadowing that the people are preparing for a fight. Sutcliff uses phrases like "put in fighting trim" and "a feather showing the way the wind blew." Answers will vary but should mention some of the following: The people's attitude seems veiled, Cradoc's war spear has been refurbished, there are rumors of the druid being seen, cattle break out at night, a new moon might be the perfect time to wage a holy war.
9. Vesuvius is an active volcano near Naples, in southern Italy, 4,190 feet (1,277 m) high. A violent