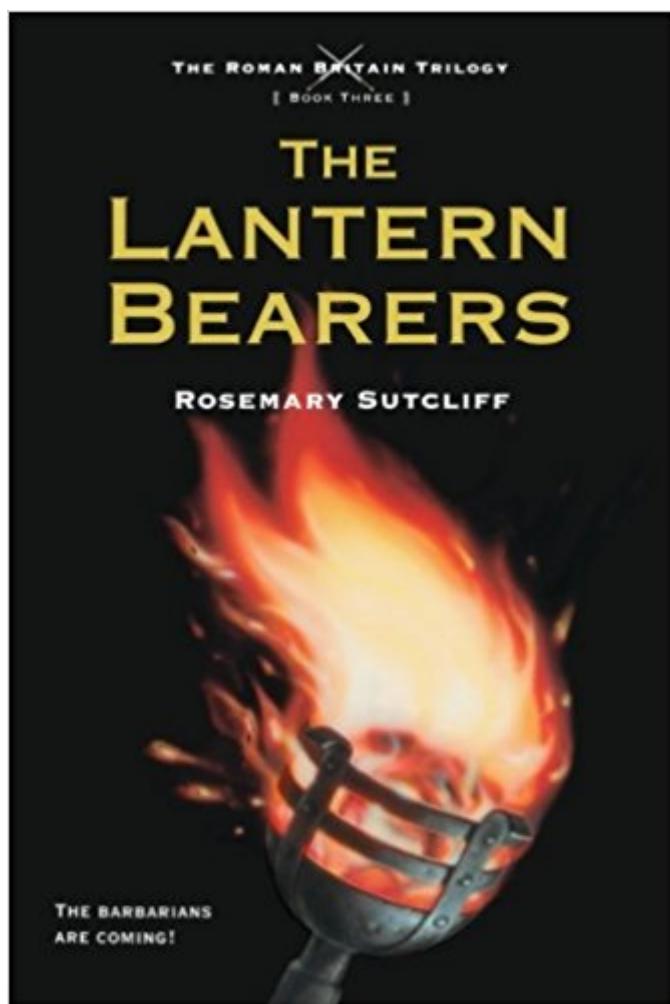


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The Lantern Bearers (The Roman Britain Trilogy)



Synopsis

The last of the Roman army have set sail and left Britain forever, abandoning it to civil war and the threat of a Saxon invasion. Aquila, a young Legionnaire, deserted his regiment to stay behind with his family, but his home and all that he loves are destroyed. Years of hardship and fighting follow, and in the end, there is only one thing left in Aquila's life—his thirst for revenge . . . The Lantern Bearers is the winner of the 1959 Carnegie Medal in Literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“A spellbinding historical adventure . . . Smoothly written, fast-paced, remarkable in the atmosphere it evokes.” The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books

Rosemary Sutcliff (1920-1992) wrote dozens of books for young readers, including her award-winning Roman Britain trilogy, *The Eagle of the Ninth*, *The Silver Branch*, and *The Lantern Bearers*, which won the Carnegie Medal. *The Eagle of the Ninth* is now a major motion picture, *The Eagle*, directed by Kevin MacDonald and starring Channing Tatum. Born in Surrey, Sutcliff spent her childhood in Malta and on various other naval bases where her father was stationed. At a young age, she contracted Still’s Disease, which confined her to a wheelchair for most of her life. Shortly before her death, she was named Commander of the British Empire (CBE) one of Britain’s most prestigious honors. She died in West Sussex, England, in 1992.

My 13 year old son, who has only read for information, never a story for enjoyment. Well Mrs. Sutcliff changed all that - he now owns his own copies of the three stories from this exceptionally well written history of Britain. The series begins with the Eagle of the Ninth (movie version is The Eagle), followed by The Silver Branch and finally with The Lantern Bearers. Some of the reviews of this book present a dark, somber story. The story definitely has those elements, but there is redemption and hope for Aquila. My 10 and 13 year old boys enjoy the story as our history - so give it a try. My only negative is I would much prefer a hardcover!

The Lantern Bearers is the fourth in Rosemary Sutcliff's loosely-connected series about a Roman family in ancient Britain. The story begins when the last Roman legions are leaving Britain. Beseiged by wars with Germanic tribes on the European mainland, the empire can no longer afford to spend any of its military capital fighting off Saxon invaders on this remotest of its territories which it had by now largely abandoned, anyway. Young Aquila, a cavalry officer in the Roman army, is spending a rare leave with his father and sister on his family's homestead when he is urgently recalled to duty. Immediately upon his return he learns that preparations are being made for the last boatload -- literally -- of Roman legions to leave the island of Britain forever. Over the ensuing few days Aquila wrestles with his thoughts and feelings and finally, at the last moment, realizes that, though he considers himself a Roman, Britain is his home. His family has lived on the island for generations, he knows his father and sister will never leave, and he decides that he cannot leave either. So he hides in the lighthouse on the coast and watches while his ship sails off without him, then makes his way back to his family's villa. Just three days later his world is forever turned upside down when Saxons raid his home, burning it to the ground, killing his father, carrying off his sister, and leaving him tied to a tree in the woods for the wolves to find. By an ironic turn of events he is rescued and taken to the homeland of the Jutes (present-day Denmark) as a slave. Desolate at the loss of his beloved father and sister and the only life and world he has known, beset by bitter loneliness in a strange land, the desire to find his sister is the only thing that keeps him going. Thus begins The Lantern Bearers, a story that traces Aquila through the ensuing decades of his life as he journeys through hatred, grief, desolation and bitterness in a quest first to find revenge and then to find some measure of peace. At the same time the story traces the story of Britain as it gradually loses the influence of Rome and descends into the Dark Ages. As always, Sutcliff's writing is lovely, detailed and evocative, whether she is describing the British countryside, or a battle scene, or the physical decay of society in the wake of Rome's departure from the island. Unlike her earlier books in this series, The Lantern Bearers really isn't about a young man's quest for honor or bravery, and

doesn't involve adventure per se. Instead, it explores, through the life of Aquila, the painful overtaking of an older culture (in this case the Romano-Celts of Britain) by invaders (the Saxons). The bitterness, hatred, crossed loyalties, fragile peace and uneasy acceptance that Sutliff so skillfully depicts resonated with poignant realism; I am sure this is how it was in the many times in Britain's history (and that of other parts of the world as well) when two vastly different peoples battled for the same piece of ground, and their cultures (as inevitably happens) uneasily merged. The book also introduced the character of young Artos; the amount of attention given him, and the fact that he was a Romano-Celtic young man who was a charismatic battle leader, made it obvious that he was the King Arthur of legend. I look forward to reading the next book in this series to see how Sutliff develops his story.

The third volume in Rosemary Sutliff's Roman Britain Trilogy, THE LANTERN BEARERS is set roughly 300 years after her first, THE EAGLE OF THE NINTH in around 427 AD. 18-year-old Aquila is just starting out on life, and has spent a year as a commander of the Rhenus Horse Auxiliary Cavalry. What happens in the first few pages of this novel changes him for life, from an open-minded pleasant young man to someone who is not well-liked. But Ms. Sutliff has done such a wonderful job in showing us Aquila's life both before and after, that even though he is not a likable character, one cannot help rooting for him. By and by he acquires a wife and a son, but nothing can take away the awfulness of what happened to him. Eventually, however, he finds a certain kind of peace, and the last image of the book is both consoling and realistic. This book won the Carnegie Medal in 1959. More than just a fictional account of history, this book engages the reader at a deep level, forcing us to feel the agony of the difficult choices Aquila has to make. Five stars.

Most people know the drill already regarding Rosemary Sutliff: she wrote beautiful, melancholy children's books on key moments in British dark ages history that are so complex and beautiful that they appeal to adults as well. As many reviewers have noted, "The Lantern Bearers" is just such a "children's" book, but will appeal to readers of any age who enjoy rousing tales based on both fact and legend. This book follows the adventures of a Roman soldier who decides to stay in Britain when the legions depart in the early 5th century. He is quickly captured and enslaved by the invading Saxons but manages to escape and join the Romano-British resistance to the Saxon onslaught. This is one of Sutliff's finest--surpassed only by its adult-oriented sequel, "Sword At Sunset"--and her prose captures the sadness of seeing the end of an era. But like many of her books, it also has a message of redemption and hope and ends on an uplifting note. The action is

gripping, the characters are three dimensional and interesting, and the historical detail is astounding. Highly highly recommended.

Rosemary Sutcliff was the Grande Dame of historical fiction in the modern era. She set the standards high, not only for historical accuracy but also in beautiful writing. If you want to understand the reality of Britain in Roman and post-Roman times, she is the author to read. Her story moves along at a brisk pace, building as it goes until you are totally invested in the characters. It is not only history that she writes but that which moves the human heart. Read the entire trilogy in order - they are easy reads and will move you in unexpected ways.

Great finale to the trilogy. If you've enjoyed this particular series, I guess her Arthurian novel (is it the Swordsomething??) is supposed to continue this Roman-esque universe into the very practical and unusual take on the future legend of King Arthur. Looking forward to that one. Sutcliff can be dry, but you get used to it and then breeze through the books very quickly.

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