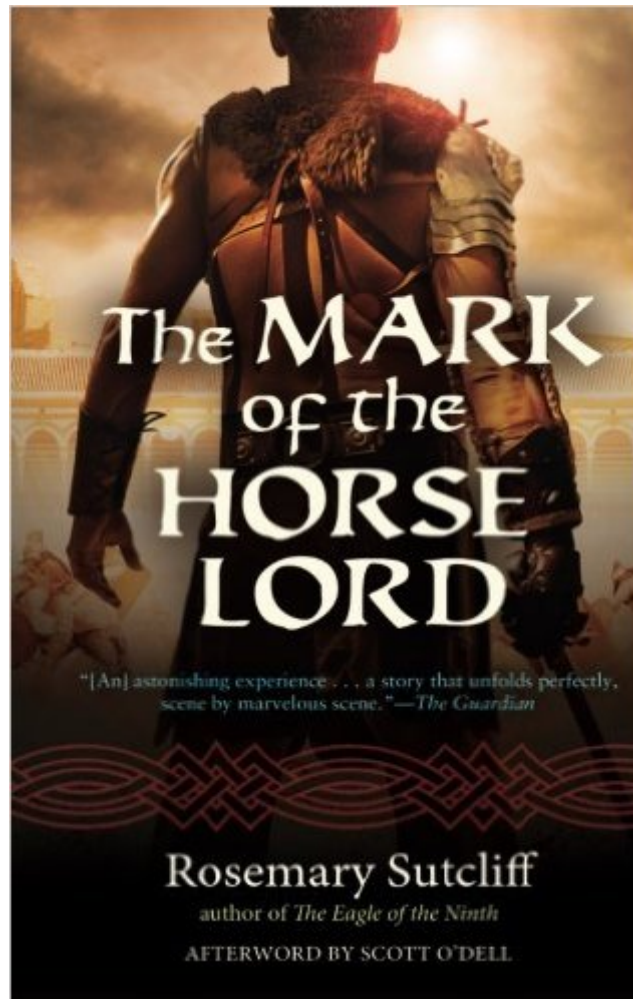


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# The Mark Of The Horse Lord (Rediscovered Classics)



## Synopsis

All that has been so much admired in Miss Sutcliff's writing--her concern with the nature of courage, the marvellous ease with which she moves within an historical situation, the power and beauty of her style--flower together to produce a single astonishing experience". --The Guardian

The old High Priest dipped a finger in the blood and made a sign with it on Phaedrus's forehead, above the Mark of the Horse Lord. So began the ceremony that was to make young Phaedrus, ex-slave and gladiator, Horse Lord of the Dalriadain. Phaedrus had come a long way since the fight in the Arena that gained him his freedom. He had left behind his old Roman life and identity and had entered another, more primitive, world--that of the British tribes in the far north. In this land of superstition and ancient ritual, of fierce loyalties and inter-tribal rivalry, Phaedrus found companionship and love, and something more--a purpose and a meaning to his life as he came fully to understand the dark significance of the Mark of the Horse Lord.

First published in 1965 but long out of print, *The Mark of the Horse Lord* has been acclaimed by many readers as the finest of Rosemary Sutcliff's many novels, imparting true insight into the nature of leadership, identity, heroism, loyalty, and sacrifice. Rosemary Sutcliff (1920-1992) wrote over 40 novels for young adults, including *Black Ships Before Troy*, *The Wanderings of Odysseus*, and *The Eagle of the Ninth*; five adult novels, including *Sword at Sunset*; and several books of nonfiction.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

An outstanding, deeply moving book, *The Mark of the Horse Lord* is one of the best books I've read in a long time. It is the story of Phaedrur the Gladiator, who poses as Midir, Lord of the Dalriadain (a tribe of Northern Britain). Set during the Roman period, it describes the customs and beliefs of ancient civilizations clearly and believably. Its realistic inclusion of cruelty and death, however, makes it inappropriate for very young readers. I highly recommend it for ages 12 and up--it may be classified as a "children's book," but it far surpasses many adult books I have read. Its central theme--the true meaning of kingship--is powerfully and beautifully developed as Phaedrur gradually grows in love for and understanding of his adopted people. Phaedrur himself is a very real person, as are the others--Midir, the true king of the Dalriadain; Liadhan, the woman who blinded Midir in order to take his throne; Conory, Midir's closest friend, who alone recognizes that Phaedrur is an imposter; and Liadhan's daughter Murna, who Phaedrur loves. In the end, Phaedrur recognizes the deepest meaning of kingship, and becomes the Horse Lord in truth, and not just in seeming. And, as in all the best books, the reader is left with the feeling that it all really happened--just that way--and that nothing could have happened differently.

To me, this is the best of Rosemary Sutcliff's many fine books, and my personal favourite. I suppose I should find the basic premise that one man can successfully impersonate another from an entirely different culture with only a brief period of indoctrination, but somehow it hardly seems to matter! You see Phaedrur the gladiator growing into the kingship he has assumed, and finally dying for his people as he has lived for them over his scant year as ruler. As with all Rosemary Sutcliff's books, it works on one level as a really good adventure story, with all the fine detail of battles and riding and chariot driving, but it is far more than that, and every time I re-read it I see something new.

I stumbled upon this book in a local highschool and have since purchased a copy of my own. It is shameful that such an excellent book is currently out of print. The book follows the life of a gladiator slave, Red Phaedrur, who takes on the role of Prince of the Dalriads through a scheme to regain power from the Royal Woman of the Caledones. This book hovers on the border of being epic with many rituals and battles being described in detail. The illustrations are not of the traditional form, yet their stark beauty helps provide a unique understanding of the story. I would readily recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in fictional history - particularly of Northern England and Ireland.

Who can weave a story of history, suspense, excitement, danger, heroism, and drama with more

skill than Sutcliff? I have read 9 of her books, but so far this surpasses them all! Former gladiator Phaedrus is made king of the Horse People, a northern British clan, impersonating Midir, the true Horse Lord whom the wicked queen Liadham blinded and so disabled him from coming to power. Phaedrus and his followers try ridding themselves of Liadham, but she escapes. Many battles against her follow. The Mark of the Horse Lord will draw you into the days of ancient Britain with the adventures of the new king. A superb piece of work, a must-read!

One of Rosemary Sutcliff's best books is back in print. Several of her titles have been unavailable for years: Dawn Wind, Knight's Fee, The Shield Ring, Frontier Wolf, Sword at Sunset, The Mark of the Horse Lord. Previous reviewers have provided a plot summary of this book; please see their comments on the story. Like much of her work, TMOTHL is based on real events. Sutcliff is perhaps the finest children's historical novelist. Folks of all ages enjoy reading her work. She could research an episode in Britain's past and add memorable people and descriptive period language. The resulting tale would be true to history and her characters' humanity. As other reviewers have stated, "She makes you believe it happened just this way." I hope Front Street Publishing succeeds with Horse Lord, and decides to bring back more Sutcliff books currently out of print.

\*\*\*SPOILER\*\*\* I don't usually see "spoilers" as necessary, but this time I believe it is, because it is the end that ruins the book. It ends with the main character committing suicide. Now, granted, he was faced with being paraded in Rome with the possibility of crucifixion or else handing most of the young men of his tribe over to become Roman soldiers. Plus, in that time (especially in the Roman mind) taking one's own life was more honorable than letting others take it from you, which explains why he did what he did. This is a work of fiction, however, and much as I admire her historical accuracy, I certainly wish Sutcliff would have drawn her story in a different direction. For other than the end, it was a wonderful story (which is why I gave it two stars instead of one). From the very first lines I sighed in contentment, ready for the beauties that were sure to come. Here was a story of a man learning to love, learning the ways of the harsh tribe he was thrust into. I could feel the wind on my face as he rode over the highlands! Then the end came. As I began the last chapter, I wondered how Sutcliff was going to pull this off. As I got to the last pages, I was repeating, "Please don't do this to me, please don't do this to me,"; but he did, and "He never felt the jagged stones in the ditch [below]"; but I did. When I put the book down, I felt that I never wanted to look at that book again. Since then I have learned to love it for the beauties that came before; still it holds a nightmare for me, and I would not recommend reading it. You might think that now that you are at least warned,

you'll read it anyway; but I would not advise it, for you will fall in love with the character only to have him die.

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