



Where Eagles Never Flew: A Battle of Britain Novel

Helena P. Schrader

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Dense and entertaining, Where Eagles Never Flew is an epic historical novel centered on the Battle of Britain.

Helena P. Schrader's gripping historical novel *Where Eagles Never Flew* is about RAF pilots who faced off against Nazi planes to defend England against Hitler's invaders in the Battle of Britain.

Robin, an aerobatics pilot, narrates this story from the front lines, capturing the brutal, bloody engagements that were the deciding stroke in the Second World War. In spite of his credible service in France, he is treated like a second-class pilot. In the skies, he faces certain death, and the Nazis are systemic about bombing and destroying British planes on the ground as well. Although Robin is eager to prove himself, he also develops a relationship with a Salvation Army volunteer, Emily, that shifts his attention to civilian life.

Meanwhile, in Germany, a young woman, Klaudia, joins the Luftwaffe's communications service. In sections that alternates with Robin's, Klaudia narrates the German perspective on the four-month Battle of Britain. As the tide turns in England's favor, Klaudia's sense of confidence ebbs. Told through the alternating perspectives of Emily, Robin, and Klaudia, the novel is immersive, showing how embattled citizens coped with the threat of occupation.

Beginning with dogged resistance in Britain and France, the book's breakneck pace only intensifies as the plot unfolds. Robin is a frisky lead character whose bird's-eye view of the Battle of Britain is unforgettable. Seeing a squadron of Nazi bombers, he thinks, "They were ugly, vicious planes without any kind of natural grace. They had bent wings and massive, fixed undercarriages like the extended claws of an attacking eagle. They had been designed to intimidate without majesty." He sees wartime England and France from the sky, and his cinematic descriptions of the untouched countryside are gorgeous and rich; these serene pastoral scenes are a powerful counterpoint to the edgy battles happening a thousand feet above.

Though its details are precise, the novel is at its best when it focuses on the battle's action. Its high-octane descriptions of air maneuvers and daring escapes are breathtaking. Robin's heroism is also detailed with verve and a dash of gallows humor, within domestic scenes that show how Allied soldiers were treated by civilians and what people ate and danced to during the war. The book skims over explanations of metahistorical factors, including the foreign policy of the war; its characters only hint at the actions of their higher ups, all of which influence the battle's events. The human element is a satisfying counterpoint to the drama in the air as Robin, Klaudia, and Emily contend with the fallout of the war.

Because of its ambitious scope and phenomenal details, down to the last "Mae West" jacket, the novel is compelling, humanizing a historical event that most textbooks distill into a single paragraph. Within the three and a half months of the Battle of Britain, the lives of the novel's three primary characters are indelibly altered, as are the places where they live.

Dense and informative, but also entertaining, *Where Eagles Never Flew* is an epic historical novel centered on the

Battle of Britain.

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