



## Daughter of the Eagle (The Spanish Bit Saga)

By Don Coldsmith

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Don Coldsmith, voted one of the greatest western writers of the twentieth century by the Western Writers of America, single-handedly revolutionized the Western novel with his acclaimed Spanish Bit Saga. Set in the early sixteenth century, the Spanish Bit re-creates a time, a place, and a people that have been nearly lost to history. In it we see history through the eyes of those who lived it.

The Elk-Dog band has grown and prospered, yet still they cling to old traditions. Eagle Woman, the unmarried daughter of a sub-chief, is as skilled, as fearless, and as strong as most young men of the band. Defying tradition, she applies for warrior status-over the spirited objections of Long Walker, the handsome warrior who wants her for his wife. But the more he opposes Eagle Woman, the more determined she becomes. When a tragedy strikes her family, Eagle Woman sets out on a dangerous mission for vengeance against the treacherous Head-Splitters. And Long Walker rides with her-straight into a trap.

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## Daughter of the Eagle (The Spanish Bit Saga) By Don Coldsmith Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2355919 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Forge Books
- Published on: 2004-07-11
- Released on: 2004-06-29
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 10.00" h x 2.00" w x 7.00" l,
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 192 pages

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## **Editorial Review**

### About the Author

Don Coldsmith is the Spur Award-winning author of more than thirty-five books. After serving as a combat medic in the Pacific during World War II, Coldsmith served as a physician in Emporia, Kansas, until 1988 when he closed his office to devote himself to writing. Coldsmith and his wife, Edna, maintain a small ranching operation, and have raised cattle, Apaloosa horses, and five daughters, not necessarily in that order.

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### Daughter of the Eagle

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Eagle Woman moved gracefully around the dance arena, stepping precisely to the beat of the big dance drum. She had been a warrior sister for three seasons now, a priestess of the Elk-dog Society. Admiring glances from young warriors of the band told her reassuringly that she made a fine appearance as she fulfilled the ceremonial function at the opening of the Warriors' Dance.

Her white buckskin dress, with intricate quill work, was of the finest, reflecting her skills and those of her mother. Her glossy hair was parted and braided flawlessly, shining with blue-black highlights like the wing of a crow.

It was said that her looks were much like those of her grandmother, Tall One, at the same age. The older woman, still handsome in her maturity, was said to have been the most beautiful of her generation. She was the wife of Heads Off, chief of the Southern band of the People, known as the Elk-dog band because of their skill with the horse.

To that couple had been born two sons of distinction. The younger was now medicine man of the band, skilled in prediction, in healing, and, most of all, with the buffalo. It was said that of all medicine men in the entire tribe, none had stronger buffalo medicine than that of Owl.

The elder son, called Eagle from his earliest days, was now a respected subchief, one of the most important leaders of his warrior society. That was, in fact, how his daughter had become a warrior sister.

Eagle Woman enjoyed the ceremony, the pageantry, and the responsibility of the honored office. Besides, there were other advantages. She wished some day to marry and to raise strong warriors and capable women of the People. Yet there had been no suitor that came close to her ideals. A very independent girl, she had preferred competition with the young men rather than romance.

As children in the Rabbit Society, both sexes received instruction in the use of weapons and in athletic skills. The young daughter of Eagle had been aggressive and talented in her learning. Soon the others were jokingly calling her by her father's name, adding the feminine "woman." As names sometimes do, the appellation stuck, and she became Eagle Woman. The girl gloried in the implication and pushed harder to perfect the warrior skills.

Her masculine pursuits may have frightened away some suitors. Yet others seemed intrigued by her differences, and the persistence of one or two was becoming annoying. It was with some degree of relief, therefore, that Eagle Woman accepted the honor of becoming a warrior sister.

This position required a vow of chastity, so in effect she could decently sidestep any unwanted proposals. Her reason was the best. Her office in a warrior society forbade such activity.

There was only a slight gnawing of doubt in the back of her mind. Sometimes in the darkness, in the privacy of her own sleeping robes, Eagle Woman wondered. Was there something wrong with her? She had watched her contemporaries pair off in marriage until no woman her own age remained single. Even one of the other warrior sisters had resigned the honored office to marry.

Now, at nearly nineteen summers, Eagle Woman was the oldest unmarried woman in the tribe. Basically, however, she was happy with her lot. Her demeanor radiated confidence and satisfaction, which may have only added to her beauty.

Eagle Woman continued to step around the circle to the beat of the drum and the chant of the song, moving right to left with the other two warrior sisters. She passed her brother, Bobcat, seated at the edge of the arena, and he smiled proudly at her. He was two summers older, mischievous, and teasing, but he was obviously proud of his sister, her position of honor, and her well-recognized reputation for beauty.

The girl did not return his smile but maintained the stolid dignity of the ceremony. Straight before her and stiffly upright stood the eagle feather in each hand, symbolic of far vision and courage.

She passed others of her family as she circled. Her grandfather, the chief, sat with Tall One, both now showing the snow of many winters in their hair. The People had prospered under the leadership of Heads Off and the Elk-dog medicine he had brought from his far tribe. There were hardly people alive now who remembered a time before the horse. It was as if the Elk-dog had always been.

Eagle Woman stepped past the point where her own parents were seated, acknowledging their presence with a glance. Eagle was seated with his left leg extended before him, rather than squatting or sitting cross-legged like most of the People. He had walked with a limp since before Eagle Woman could remember. There had been a stampede during a buffalo hunt, with the young warrior swept away by the frantic animals. Badly injured, he had been missing for six moons, given up for dead. There had been strange circumstances about his rediscovery, but she could not remember. Something to do with her uncle Owl, the medicine man.

Suddenly Eagle Woman almost jumped, startled by the gaze of a young man at the circle's edge. She knew him well, had known him all her life. He was Long Walker, son of one of the chiefs of the Elk-dog band. The two children had always been rivals. On the few occasions when Eagle Woman had been bested in athletic skills or proficiency with weapons, her opponent had been this young man. At times she had hated him for his ability. Always he was a relentless competitor, keen and quick, ready to laugh at her discomfiture in defeat.

Now she read a new expression in the smiling face. His gaze was one of unabashed admiration. The girl was shocked, because she had never thought of him in this way. Long Walker was a rival, a competitor, not a potential romantic figure. She was irritated by his bold stare and shrugged him off with a toss of her raven braids. Outwardly she remained perfectly stoic, still wondering at this turn of events.

She knew that Long Walker had no wife. That was a matter of some wonderment in the band, too. He was quite eligible. Though still living in his parents' lodge, he owned many horses in his own right. His lack of interest in marriage had led to whispered speculation as to whether he might choose to be a woman-man. Still, he had not yet started to cross-dress, and he had a good reputation in the hunt.

Again Eagle Woman was irritated at herself for even wondering. What matter to her if some conceited young warrior wanted a wife or not? It was no concern of hers. She had better things to think about.

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