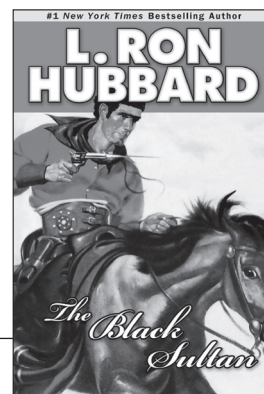


L. Ron Hubbard's *The Black Sultan* Discussion Guide

(also includes the short story
Escape for Three)



STORY SUMMARY & OVERVIEW

Fugitive American adventurer Eddie Moran escapes French authorities in Morocco after saving El Zidan, rightful heir to a kingdom in the High Atlas. Traveling to join him, Eddie is captured by the Black Sultan, Abu 'l Hasan and discovers Sheila Gordon, an abducted Englishwoman. After helping Sheila escape, Eddie improvises his own escape and becomes caught between Hasan's army and the French Foreign Legion. Using disguises, bluff, military knowledge and a daring deception, Eddie helps El Zidan defeat Hasan and reclaim his throne. Wounded but victorious, Eddie becomes grand vizier of the newly renamed White Kingdom.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: MOROCCO AND FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION

The Black Sultan takes place in Morocco during the period of French colonial rule. France established its protectorate over most of Morocco in 1912, but control over the country—particularly mountainous regions inhabited by Amazigh peoples—was not immediate or uncontested. The story's High Atlas setting allows the author to create a fictional kingdom in a region that Western readers of the 1930s often associated with remote mountain communities, tribal independence and resistance to outside authority. The story combines recognizable elements of North African history: the French Foreign Legion, colonial officials, fortified kasbahs, Amazigh communities, Islamic customs and conflicts over political authority with the conventions of pulp adventure fiction.

CHAPTER ONE: EL ZIDAN

📖 Eddie Moran believes the French authorities have helped turn him into the dangerous outlaw they already assumed he was. Discuss how authorities can sometimes reinforce the behavior they are trying to prevent. How much responsibility still belongs to the individual?

📖 Eddie is already in serious trouble when he instinctively intervenes to stop the attack on El Zidan and Godfrey Harrison. Discuss why people sometimes risk their own safety for strangers. Is Eddie acting from courage, instinct, recklessness or some combination of the three?

📖 El Zidan saves Eddie from immediate arrest by using his political and economic influence over the French officers. Discuss the difference between legal authority and practical power. Which seems more important in this scene?

CHAPTER TWO: THE OFFER

📖 Harrison believes Eddie is intelligent and educated enough to live a respectable conventional life, yet Eddie repeatedly chooses dangerous adventures. Discuss why some people may value uncertainty and adventure more than security.

📖 El Zidan says that American motion pictures taught him the idea of “rustling” horses as a way of harassing the Black Sultan. Discuss how popular entertainment can shape people’s ideas about cultures they have never experienced. What does El Zidan’s view of America reveal about stereotypes?

📖 El Zidan offers Eddie the possibility of becoming grand vizier of a kingdom, but Eddie knows almost nothing about the conflict he would be entering. Discuss why such an offer appeals to Eddie. What questions should he ask before becoming involved?

CHAPTER THREE: THE PALACE

📖 Eddie initially assumes that the riders approaching him belong to El Zidan, even though several warning signs suggest otherwise. Discuss how expectations can influence the way people interpret evidence. Why do we sometimes ignore clues that contradict what we hope is true?

📖 Once Eddie realizes he has been trapped, he chooses to charge forward rather than surrender. Discuss the difference between refusing defeat and taking an unreasonable risk. At what point does determination become recklessness?

📖 Eddie enters the Black Sultan’s palace and claims the protection traditionally owed to a guest. Hasan honors the obligation for three days even though he intends to kill Eddie afterward. Discuss why customs of hospitality can remain powerful even between enemies.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE GIRL AT THE WINDOW

📖 McKenna initially offers to help Eddie only in exchange for money and Eddie then uses an even larger promised reward to persuade him to rescue Sheila. Discuss whether a good action loses moral value when the person performing it is motivated primarily by money.

📖 Sheila tells Eddie that Hasan’s men abducted her from Fez and that she is expected to marry Hasan. Discuss how the story uses Sheila’s captivity to raise questions about personal freedom, power and the right to determine one’s own future.

📖 Eddie promises McKenna five thousand dollars he does not actually possess and even claims to be Rockefeller’s favorite nephew. Discuss whether deception is justified when it is used to rescue someone from captivity. Does Eddie’s purpose excuse the lie?

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PALACE GARDEN

📖 Eddie remembers Leonardo da Vinci’s ideas about parachutes and uses that knowledge to improvise an escape device from silk draperies and rug threads. Discuss how knowledge that appears impractical in ordinary circumstances can suddenly become valuable. What does this suggest about broad education and curiosity?

📖 Eddie knows his improvised parachute may fail, yet jumping appears preferable to certain execution. Discuss how circumstances change our definition of an acceptable risk. Would the same action be foolish under less desperate conditions?

📖 After escaping his room, Eddie could concentrate entirely on getting away, but instead he confronts Hasan and then disguises himself as the Sultan. Discuss why Eddie repeatedly turns dangerous situations into opportunities rather than simply escaping them.

CHAPTER SIX: MACHINE-GUN BUSINESS

📖 Eddie discovers that McKenna abandoned Sheila when they were attacked. Discuss how people reveal their character when fear suddenly conflicts with promises they have made.

📖 Eddie hears French Lebel rifles ahead and knows approaching them may lead to his arrest, yet Sheila is somewhere near the fighting. Discuss how personal loyalty can alter someone's calculation of danger and self-interest.

📖 Throughout the chapter, military technology becomes important to survival: Eddie identifies weapons by sound and must understand rifles and machine guns as well as terrain and tactics. Discuss how technical knowledge changes the traditional adventure-story idea that courage alone determines who survives.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ONE SLIM CHANCE

📖 Eddie is ordered not to kill the Legionnaires and deliberately uses the Hotchkiss machine gun to prevent them from advancing rather than slaughtering them. Discuss the importance of restraint during combat. Can refusing to use all available force sometimes require more discipline than using it?

📖 Sheila points out the absurdity of men trying to kill people they have never met simply because each side believes the other is dangerous. Discuss how misunderstanding, orders and assumptions can turn groups into enemies even when neither side originally wanted a fight.

📖 Surrounded by the French on one side and expecting Hasan from the other, Eddie decides that his best chance is to ride directly toward Hasan. Discuss the kind of thinking required to recognize an opportunity in a situation that appears hopeless.

CHAPTER EIGHT: READY FOR THE SLAUGHTER

📖 Eddie allows himself to appear bound and helpless while secretly holding El Zidan's automatics beneath his clothing. Discuss how controlling what an opponent believes can sometimes be more powerful than controlling what he physically possesses.

📖 Eddie convinces Hasan that El Zidan has disguised his men as French Legionnaires. Hasan accepts the story partly because it fits what he already fears and expects. Discuss why believable deception often depends upon telling people something they are already prepared to believe.

 Eddie deliberately insults Hasan's intelligence and courage until Hasan reveals the secret route out of the pass. Discuss how pride can become a strategic weakness. Why is understanding an opponent's personality sometimes as important as understanding his military strength?

CHAPTER NINE: DEATH AT THE PASS

 Eddie's entire plan depends upon timing, yet he cannot communicate freely with El Zidan or know exactly what the French and Hasan will do. Discuss the difference between careful planning and gambling. How much uncertainty can a good strategy reasonably contain?

 Although badly wounded, Eddie continues fighting because he knows the machine guns in the forts could destroy El Zidan's men and the Legionnaires. Discuss whether courage means overcoming fear, ignoring pain, accepting responsibility or something else.

 Eddie uses grenades to disable the second fort just before El Zidan and the Legionnaires reach the killing zone. Discuss how terrain and defensive technology can allow a small number of soldiers to threaten a much larger force. How does Eddie overcome that advantage?

CHAPTER TEN: A LETTER TO THE VICE-CONSUL

 Hasan claims that his attack on the Legion resulted from a misunderstanding created by Eddie's deception, while Nicolle holds Hasan responsible for attacking French troops. Discuss how responsibility should be assigned when one person deliberately manipulates another into making a disastrous decision.

 Nicolle accepts El Zidan as ruler largely because he believes El Zidan can maintain peace in the region. Discuss the relationship between legitimacy and political usefulness. What makes someone a "rightful" ruler: inheritance, popular support, military victory, foreign recognition or effective government?

 Eddie begins the story as a penniless fugitive threatened with extradition and ends it as grand vizier of El Zidan's kingdom, preparing to summon a Christian minister while Sheila writes his letter. Discuss how much of Eddie's transformation results from luck and how much from the choices he makes throughout the story.

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L. Ron Hubbard's *Escape for Three*

Discussion Guide

STORY SUMMARY & OVERVIEW

Three disgruntled Foreign Legionnaires: John Smith, Blucher and Santos are pleased when their hated officer, Lieutenant Moraine, is captured by Berber fighters in Morocco. Hoping to desert, extort money from Moraine and eventually kill him, they secretly enter enemy territory and rescue him. Their selfish scheme unexpectedly becomes an act of extraordinary courage as they fight their way through overwhelming opposition and carry the wounded officer back to French lines. Afterward, each discovers that the others had secretly intended the rescue rather than desertion. Embarrassed by their accidental heroism, the three return to complaining about Moraine exactly as they had before.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: MOROCCO AND THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION

Escape for Three is set among the French Foreign Legion in Morocco during French colonial expansion in North Africa. The story specifically describes Berber resistance to French colonization and places the Legionnaires deep in mountainous territory where French forces are attempting to overcome that resistance. The French protectorate in Morocco began in 1912, but French control was contested for years, particularly among Amazigh communities in mountainous regions. The rugged terrain made military campaigns difficult and gave local fighters important defensive advantages. The French Foreign Legion also provides an important background to the story. Its ranks historically included men of many nationalities, which the author reflects through his three central characters: Smith is American, Blucher German and Santos is presented as another foreign Legionnaire.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

📖 Smith, Blucher and Santos openly celebrate Moraine's capture because they consider him arrogant, cruel and contemptuous of ordinary Legionnaires. Discuss how poor leadership can destroy loyalty. What responsibilities does an officer have beyond simply giving orders?

📖 The three initially describe their plan as an opportunity to rescue Moraine, force him to take them to Casablanca, demand money and then kill him. Discuss how the story deliberately makes its central characters appear selfish and dishonorable at the beginning. How does that affect the reader's expectations about what they will eventually do?

📖 The Legionnaires believe the Berbers expect a conventional French attack at dawn, so they exploit that expectation by entering enemy territory at night. Discuss the importance of unpredictability in military strategy. Why can understanding what an opponent expects be as useful as understanding his weapons?

📖 Smith, Blucher and Santos capture a Berber and use torture to force him to reveal Moraine's location. Discuss how this episode complicates the idea that the three men are becoming heroes. Can courageous actions elsewhere in a story change how we judge morally troubling behavior?

📖 Santos disguises himself in a dead Berber's clothing and deliberately leads the village's fighters away while Smith and Blucher search for Moraine. Discuss why successful deception often requires understanding what other people expect to see and hear.

📖 When the Legionnaires finally find Moraine, they discover that he has been wounded and badly beaten but has not suffered the elaborate torture they had imagined. Discuss what this difference between expectation and reality reveals about prejudice, rumor and the tendency to imagine enemies as more brutal than the evidence demonstrates.

📖 Although Smith, Blucher and Santos claim they want Moraine alive only because he can provide money and help them escape, they repeatedly place their own lives in extreme danger to rescue him. Discuss the difference between what people say motivates them and what their actions reveal about their actual values.

📖 During the escape, Santos accidentally speaks French while disguised, exposing the group and triggering a violent fight. Discuss how quickly a carefully constructed plan can collapse because of one small mistake. What does the group's response reveal about adaptability under pressure?

📖 Santos is wounded during the escape but continues fighting and uses captured grenades to clear a path through the attackers. Discuss how the story defines courage. Is courage primarily demonstrated by ignoring danger, enduring pain, protecting others or continuing despite fear?

📖 Smith eventually carries the wounded Moraine over his shoulder even though Moraine protests that he can walk. Compare this action with the contempt Smith expressed for Moraine at the beginning. What might cause someone to risk his life for a person he genuinely dislikes?

📖 After the rescue, Smith discovers that Santos and Blucher believed *he* intended to desert, while he had believed the same thing about them. All three had actually used their supposed desertion scheme as an excuse to rescue Moraine. Discuss why none of the three was willing to admit his honorable intentions beforehand. What does this suggest about pride, masculinity and reputation within their group?

📖 The story ends with the three men immediately returning to their complaints about Moraine, even after risking their lives to save him. Discuss why this humorous ending is important. Does their continued dislike of Moraine make their rescue more heroic because they saved someone they believed deserved no personal loyalty?

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