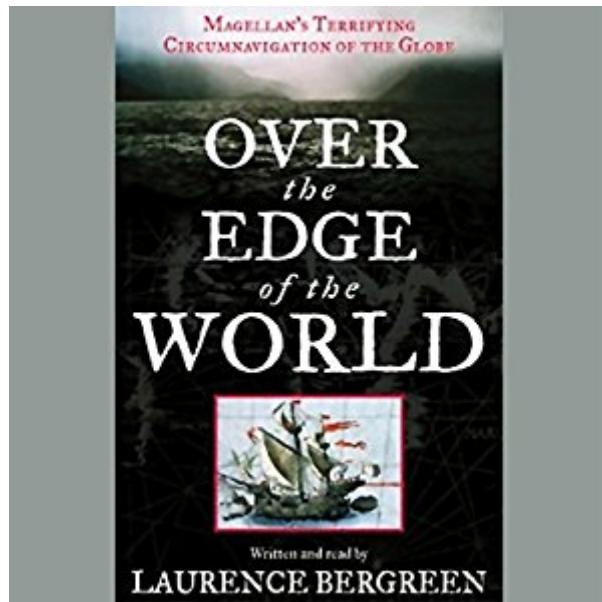


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Over The Edge Of The World: Magellan's Terrifying Circumnavigation Of The Globe



Synopsis

In 1519 Magellan and his fleet of five ships set sail from Seville, Spain, to discover a water route to the fabled Spice Islands in Indonesia, where the most sought-after commodities -- cloves, pepper, and nutmeg -- flourished. Three years later, a handful of survivors returned with an abundance of spices from their intended destination, but with just one ship carrying eighteen emaciated men. During their remarkable voyage around the world the crew endured starvation, disease, mutiny, and torture. Many men died, including Magellan, who was violently killed in a fierce battle. This is the first full account in nearly half a century of this voyage into history: a tour of the world emerging from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance; a startling anthropological account of tribes, languages, and customs unknown to Europeans; and a chronicle of a desperate grab for commercial and political power. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Why couldn't they have used books like this as history textbooks back when I was in high school? All I was taught back then was that Magellan's expedition was the first to circumnavigate the globe (even though he himself died along the way); that the voyage took 3 years; and that although Magellan was from Portugal, he sailed for Spain. Here's some of the good stuff they left out (but which Mr. Bergreen includes): Magellan tried to get King Manuel of Portugal to finance the expedition. Magellan didn't have any luck. (Not surprising, since the explorer already had "a history" with the king, and the king didn't like him.) What could have been the last straw for Magellan was when, after an audience with the king, Magellan tried to kiss the king's hand (as was customary).

The king withdrew his hand and wouldn't allow Magellan to kiss it. Magellan finally decided to give Manuel the kiss-off, went to Charles I of Spain, and had better luck. Charles was quite interested in the potential profits from the spice trade. (He was broke after borrowing a wad of money from the Fugger family. The reason he borrowed the money? He had to pay a lot of bribes to the electors who were going to decide who the next Holy Roman Emperor was going to be. Charles wanted the position even though, as Voltaire later said, the Holy Roman Empire wasn't holy, wasn't Roman, and wasn't an empire.) Manuel of Portugal was quite upset with Magellan for offering his services to Spain, especially because he brought secret Portuguese navigational charts with him (which Mr. Bergreen explains would be equivalent to the theft of nuclear secrets during the Cold War). Manuel sent an envoy to Spain to try and talk Magellan out of the trip. When that didn't work, the envoy bad-mouthed Magellan to Charles I. That didn't work either.

Despite its obvious merits as cited by other reviewers, I found this to be a frustratingly uneven book. Yes, it has the compelling flow of a good novel, yet that flow was too often broken by unexpected failures to properly explain or illustrate key points. I was frequently distracted by the lack of good maps to supplement Bergreen's prose accounts of the Armada's route. Most saliently, the author or his editors have chosen to not include a map of the Strait of Magellan itself. Instead there are some admittedly fascinating depictions of portions of the Strait and a NASA photograph from space that I found utterly indecipherable. While Bergreen's long asides on peripheral topics often hit the mark -- such as his discussion of scurvy and its eventual decoding -- others, including some crucial to his account, fall substantially short. Despite the issue's importance, none of Bergreen's numerous attempts to explain the Pope's demarcation of Spanish and Portuguese spheres of control (the Treaty of Tordesillas) adequately clarify how it applied to the Spice Islands on the other side of the world and already explored by Portugal. Of course, this could possibly be the result of my own denseness; others may find his explication perfectly comprehensible. I did not. Also in this category of incomplete clarification is the author's mention of the International Date Line and the fact of its non-existence in Magellan's day. He references this drawback twice and both times he is satisfied with saying that the Dateline now extends westward from Guam. Of all the facets he could emphasize, this seems an odd choice given that the Dateline does (and must) run for the most part North-South. The location of the Date Line is in fact a highly complex subject (see [...

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