



The Golden Empire: Spain, Charles V, and the Creation of America

Hugh Thomas

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From a master chronicler of Spanish history comes a magnificent work about the pivotal years from 1522 to 1566, when Spain was the greatest European power. Hugh Thomas has written a rich and riveting narrative of exploration, progress, and plunder. At its center is the unforgettable ruler who fought the French and expanded the Spanish empire, and the bold conquistadors who were his agents. Thomas brings to life King Charles V—first as a gangly and easygoing youth, then as a liberal statesman who exceeded all his predecessors in his ambitions for conquest (while making sure to maintain the humanity of his new subjects in the Americas), and finally as a besieged Catholic leader obsessed with Protestant heresy and interested only in profiting from those he presided over.

The Golden Empire also presents the legendary men whom King Charles V sent on perilous and unprecedented expeditions: Hernán Cortés, who ruled the “New Spain” of Mexico as an absolute monarch—and whose rebuilding of its capital, Tenochtitlan, was Spain’s greatest achievement in the sixteenth century; Francisco Pizarro, who set out with fewer than two hundred men for Peru, infamously executed the last independent Inca ruler, Atahualpa, and was finally murdered amid intrigue; and Hernando de Soto, whose glittering journey to settle land between Rio de la Palmas in Mexico and the southernmost keys of Florida ended in disappointment and death. Hugh Thomas reveals as never before their torturous journeys through jungles, their brutal sea voyages amid appalling storms and pirate attacks, and how a cash-hungry Charles backed them with loans—and bribes—obtained from his German banking friends.

A sweeping, compulsively readable saga of kings and conquests, armies and armadas, dominance and power, *The Golden Empire* is a crowning achievement of the Spanish world’s foremost historian.

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