



In Pursuit of the Essex: Heroism and Hubris on the High Seas in the War of 1812

Ben Hughes

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On 26 October 1812, during the war between Britain and the United States, the frigate USS *Essex* set sail on the most remarkable voyage in the early history of the U.S. Navy. After rounding Cape Horn in South America, she proceeded to systematically destroy the British South Seas whaling fleet. When news reached the Royal Navy's South American station at Rio de Janeiro, HMS *Phoebe* was launched in pursuit. So began one of the most extraordinary chases in naval history.

In Pursuit of the Essex follows the adventures of both the hunters and the hunted, taking into account the host of colorful characters that crossed their paths along the way. Traitorous Nantucket whalers, Chilean revolutionaries, British spies, a Peruvian viceroy and bellicose Polynesian islanders all play a role. The brilliant yet vainglorious Captain Porter of the *Essex*, his nemesis Captain James Hillyar of the *Phoebe*, and two young midshipmen, David Farragut and Allen Gardiner, serve as principal narrators.

From giant-tortoise turning expeditions on the Galapagos Islands to the perils of rounding Cape Horn—including desperate skirmishes with spear-toting natives on the Marquesas and a defeated duelist bleeding his life out onto black, volcanic sands—the reader is immersed in the fantastical world of the British and American seamen who struggled for supremacy over the world's oceans in the sunset years of the age of sail.

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