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Historical

Voyage of the Short Serpent
Bernard du Boucheron
Hester Velmans, translator
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"It has come to Our attention that the Christians of New Thule…are in grave danger of returning to the benighted days of heathendom…a vicious cycle in which the Eye of Faith recognizes the work of the Devil…" Cardinal Archbishop of Nidaros says to Abbott Insulmontanus in du Bocheron's award-winning novel, *The Voyage of the Short Serpent*. Montanus is selected to head a mission to New Thule Iceland; a Catholic colony at "the Northernmost reach of the world" which has been isolated by extreme weather.

Montanus must reestablish relations with colony, take an inventory of the possessions of the citizenry for the payment of tithes, and exert authority over all aspects of New Thule society.

Boucheron writes, "We have chosen you…to investigate the conditions of the Christian folk there and offer them the comfort of the Word, while not neglecting to castigate sin, if need be, by sword or by fire…" After a harsh and daring trip across unforgiving waters in his ship, Short Serpent, Montanus and his crew find a village abandoned and evidence of a grisly multiple murder.

Eventually, the Catholic hierarchy would be informed that to survive the Icelandic winters the people of New Thule adopted "heathen" native customs. Boucheron's writing is sometimes graphic but never gratuitous. He's known for his allegorical novels about characters of seemingly high moral fiber that are broken down into basic common denominators of instant gratification by the physical and emotional challenges of survival.

Like William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, Boucheron's novel is an experiment in Darwinism where the characters learn that it is not the survival of the fittest, but of those that can most readily learn to adapt.