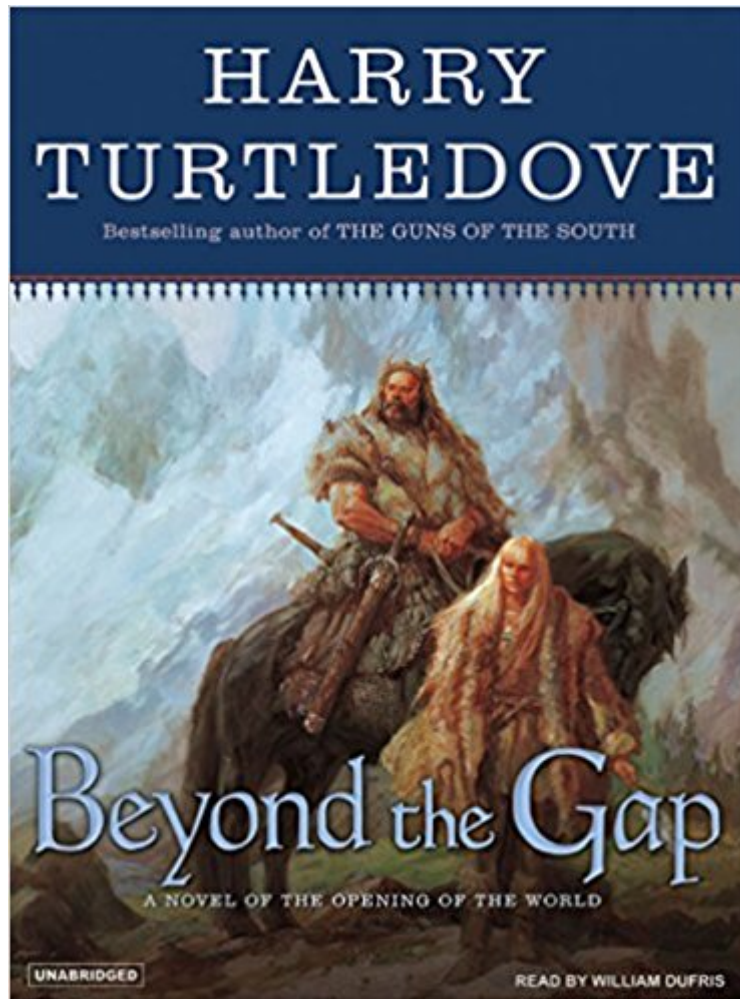


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Beyond The Gap: A Novel Of The Opening Of The World



Synopsis

Count Hamnet Thyssen is a minor noble of the drowsy old Raumsdalian Empire. Its capital city, Nidaros, began as a mammoth hunters' camp at the edge of the great Glacier. But that was centuries ago, and as everyone knows, it's the nature of the great Glacier to withdraw a few feet every year. Now Nidaros is an old and many-spired city; and though they still feel the breath of the great Glacier in every winter's winds, the ice cap itself has retreated beyond the horizon. Trasmund, a clan chief of the mammoth-herding Bizogots, the next tribe north, has come to town with strange news. A narrow gap has opened in what they'd always thought was an endless and impregnable wall of ice. The great Glacier does not go on forever-and on its other side are new lands, new animals, and possibly new people. Ancient legend says that on the other side is the Golden Shrine, put there by the gods to guard the people of their world. Now, perhaps, the road to the legendary Golden Shrine is open. Who could resist the urge to go see? For Count Hamnet and his several companions, the glacier has always been the boundary of the world. Now they'll be traveling beyond it into a world that's bigger than anyone knew. Adventures will surely be had...

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

My general opinion of Turtledove's output is that he does better when he's doing stand-alone books than when he's into the second or later volume in a series, and he does better with further-back alternate-history turning points than he does with 19th and 20th century turning points. (Down in the

Bottomlands, with a turning point about 6 million years ago, is one of his best ever.) This book bears out that general opinion. It may turn out to be the first in a new series (more about that later) but for now, it appears to be one of a kind. The turning point for this alternate history appears to be about 12,000 years ago - when, in our world, the last ice age started to end, and the glaciers receded to above the Arctic Circle. I can't be entirely sure how far forward after that turning point we are; civilization seems to have reached a late-Middle-Ages stage, with bows and arrows as weapons, but no crossbows or firearms, and horses being ridden but no mention of stirrups. (Those who have read Jared Diamond's "Guns, Germs and Steel" know that the invention of the stirrup may have been one of the biggest turning points in the history of warfare.) There's writing, but not everybody is literate; there are walled cities, but also nomadic tribes living at a level barely above Stone Age. The overall term for the clans of nomads is "Bizogot" and I don't know whether Turtledove intended us to assume that because this sounds a little like "Visigoth," the proto-Indo-European language that developed into the Western languages we know in our world developed in some similar manner in this fictional world. He may just have meant it to give us rough associations of "barbarians prepared to invade the empire."

For thousands of years, the great glacier has been the central fact of life for the Raumsdalian Empire and the barbarian Bizogots living in its shadow. But now a Bizogot ruler brings word that the 'gap' no longer simply drives a wedge into the glacier, it has actually divided it in two. A way is now open to the long-forgotten and mythical north. Perhaps, the Raumsdalian emperor guesses, even the great Golden Shrine can be found. He authorizes a small party of Raumsdalias including a mage, a scholar, and a couple of fighters to head north to explore. Soon after they leave, though, they are joined by a group of soldiers and the troublesome woman once wed to Hamnet Thyssen (one of the fighters), is now married to Eyvind Torfinn (the scholar), and is having an affair with the Bizogot ruler who brought the news. Gundrid delights in making trouble and especially in tormenting Hamnet who has never gotten over her betrayal. The journey to the north--into the land of the glacier takes the Raumsdalias a long way from home to a world where wood is virtually unknown, where crops cannot be planted, and where the nomadic life is considered normal. Fortunately for the Empire, the Bizogots have always been divided--and can be bribed to attack one another when they might otherwise threaten the Empire. What they discover beyond the gap, though, changes everything. Because there are people living there--people who style themselves the 'rulers' and who look at the opening in the gap not as an opportunity to seek knowledge, but as a chance to conquer the rich lands of the south. And the Raumsdalian Emperor has absolutely no interest in hearing

about a risk to his comfort. Author Harry Turtledove spins a strong tale of magic, character growth, and cold.

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