
Who Was Christopher Columbus?

A tall man paced the deck of his ship. He and his men had been at sea for seventy days, since August 3, 1492. They had sailed over 2,650 miles from Spain. Now, land had been spotted. Had Christopher Columbus's dream to reach the Indies finally come true?

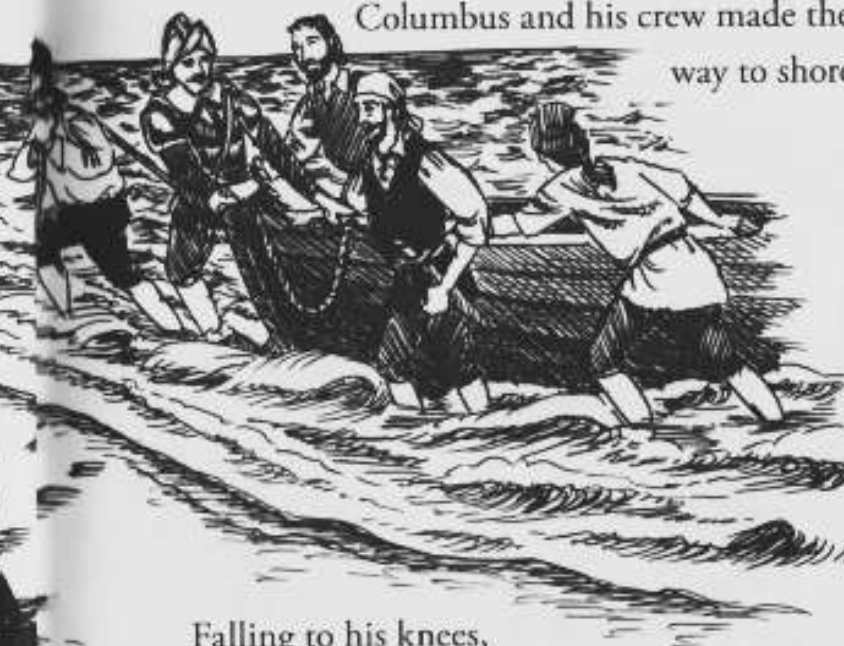




For years he had begged the rulers of Portugal and Spain to give him money for this journey. He wanted to find a route from Europe to the Indies by sailing west. The Indies included China, Japan, and India. No one had done this before.

As the sun rose on October 12, 1492,

Columbus and his crew made their way to shore.



Falling to his knees, he kissed the ground and cried. Oh, what riches awaited him! He would return to Spain a hero.

Columbus didn't know that this was not the Indies. So where was he? Columbus and his crew were on land that no one in Europe knew about. Christopher Columbus had discovered a new world.

Chapter 1

An Explorer Is Born

In 1451, a boy named Cristoforo Colombo was born in the city of Genoa, Italy. In the English-speaking world, he is known as Christopher Columbus.

Christopher's father was a wool weaver. His mother was the daughter of a weaver, and she



helped with the work. It was expected that one day Christopher would take over the family business.

But young Christopher did not want to follow in his father's footsteps. He loved the sea, the smell of the salty air. He loved the way the wind blew through his hair. Genoa was a busy port on the Mediterranean Sea. Christopher and his



younger brother, Bartolomeo, loved going down to the docks. They watched ships come into port, bringing in goods such as silk, tea, and spices from the East. And they watched the ships leave, loaded with wool, copper, tin, and weapons. Christopher hoped to work on one of those ships one day.

At that time, boys as young as ten went off to sea as cabin boys. A cabin boy did all sorts of jobs—cooking, cleaning, fetching tools and supplies. Christopher got his first job aboard a ship when he was about fourteen.

Christopher split his time between helping his

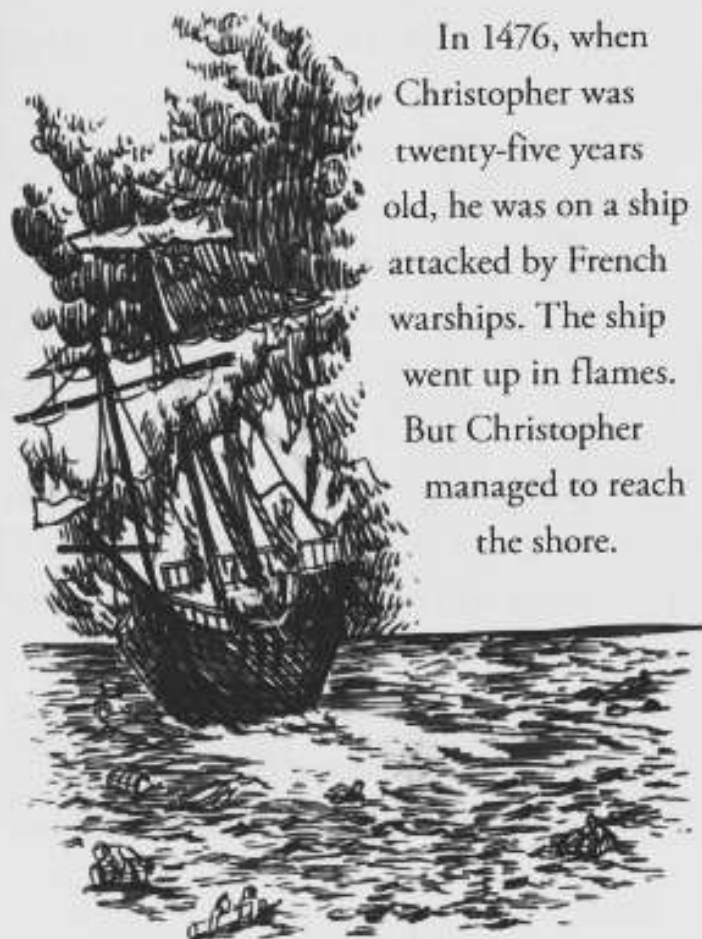


father and sailing the seas. He sailed to such places as Ireland and Iceland. He learned a lot about how to steer a ship in the open sea. This skill would be very important later in his life.

At nineteen, Christopher had grown into a strong young man. No one knows exactly what he looked like. Some say he was tall with wide shoulders. His skin was said to be pale, and he is believed to have had red hair and light blue eyes. Not only was his body strong, but his mind was sharp. Some said he was too stubborn and had a bad temper. He was also very, very sure of himself. Once he set his mind on something, he never let it go. And Christopher Columbus was very sure about one thing—he wanted to become a famous sea captain. Famous and rich.

Chapter 2

Mapping the World



In 1476, when Christopher was twenty-five years old, he was on a ship attacked by French warships. The ship went up in flames. But Christopher managed to reach the shore.

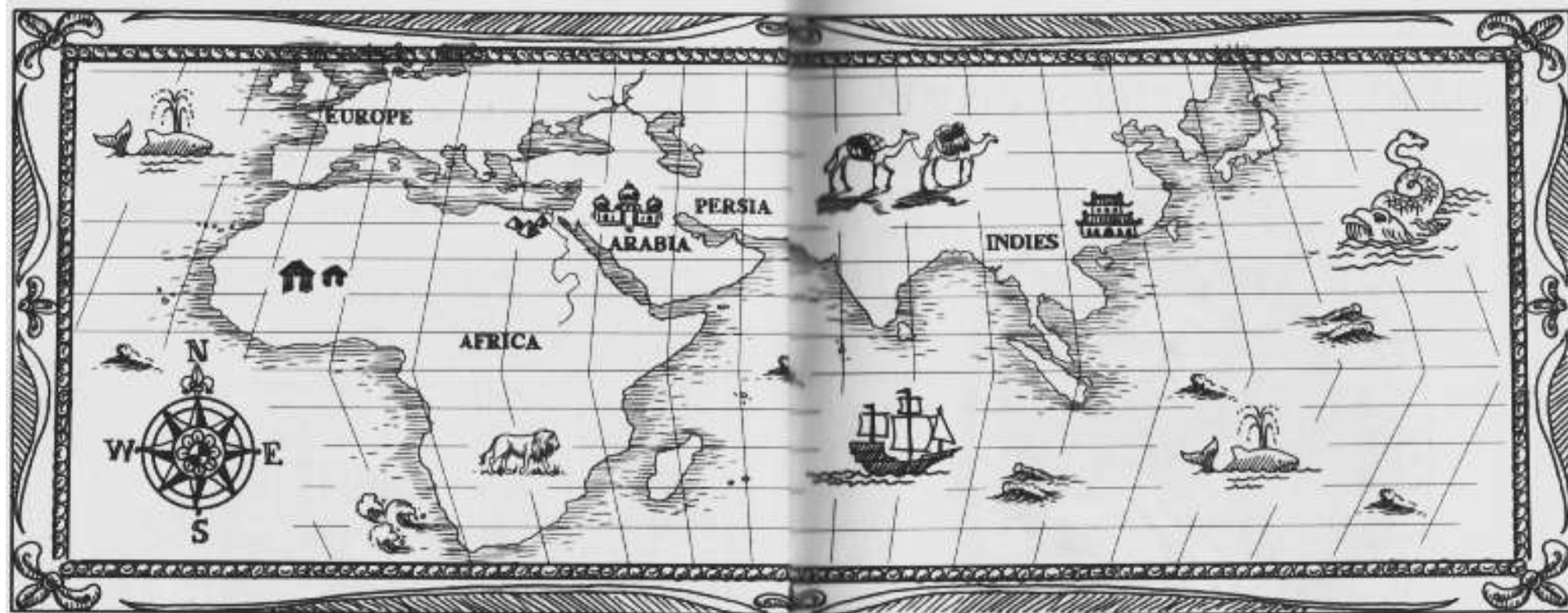
He was near a small fishing village in Portugal. Some villagers found him and took care of him. Christopher was happy for their help. However, he did not want to stay in a quiet village. He soon made his way to the capital city of Lisbon.

For nine years he lived in Lisbon. His brother Bartolomeo lived there, too, and they opened a business together. They were mapmakers. This was a perfect job for a man who wanted to learn more about the world. At the docks, the brothers would meet the captains of incoming ships. They would collect information and create maps based on what the captains told them.

At the map store, Christopher heard merchants talking about trying to find a new route from Europe to eastern lands known as the Indies. Why were these merchants so interested in traveling there? Spices. Spices such as pepper, ginger, cloves, and cinnamon. People used spices in cooking to flavor food. In Egypt, Italian merchants could buy

spices from the Indies. Then they sold them all over Europe for a lot of money. But if an explorer found a route directly to the Indies, he could buy up spices. There would be no need to rely on the





Italian merchants. Whoever found a sea route to the Indies would grow rich from the spice trade.

At that time, most people knew the world was round. What they didn't know was how big it was. It was thought that one landmass—Europe and Asia and Africa—was surrounded by one body of water called the Ocean Sea.

The only travelers so far to reach the Indies had gone by land. *The Description of the World*, written by the explorer Marco Polo, told of his travels from Italy to China. Columbus read the book. He was fascinated by Marco Polo's stories of rubies as big as a man's fist, and palaces with floors made of gold.

MARCO POLO AND THE SILK ROAD



IN 1260, TWO BROTHERS, MARCO AND NICCOLÒ POLO, TRAVELED EAST, OVERLAND, FROM EUROPE TO CHINA. (IN THOSE DAYS, CHINA WAS PART OF THE MONGOL EMPIRE.) IN 1265, THEY ARRIVED IN CHINA AND MET THE RULER, KUBLAI KHAN. OVER THE NEXT TWO HUNDRED YEARS, TRADE BETWEEN

INDIA, CHINA, AND EUROPE GREW. MERCHANTS TRAVELED THE OVERLAND ROUTE, KNOWN AS THE SILK ROAD, AND TRADED GOODS SUCH AS SILK, PEARLS, GOLD, RUBIES, PEPPER, NUTMEG, CLOVES, AND TEA. BUT THE ROAD WAS LONG AND DANGEROUS. TRAVELERS HAD TO CROSS DESERTS AND MOUNTAINS. BANDITS WAITED TO ROB THEM OF THEIR GOODS. BY THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY, EUROPEANS DESPERATELY WANTED TO FIND ANOTHER WAY TO THE INDIES.



Columbus was determined to be the first to *sail* all the way to the Indies. The king of Portugal had tried to send ships to the Indies by following a route around Africa, then east. But the ships kept turning back. The sailors said this route was too long. And they did not know where they were going. But Columbus had another idea. A *better* idea, he thought. He would sail *west* to the Indies.

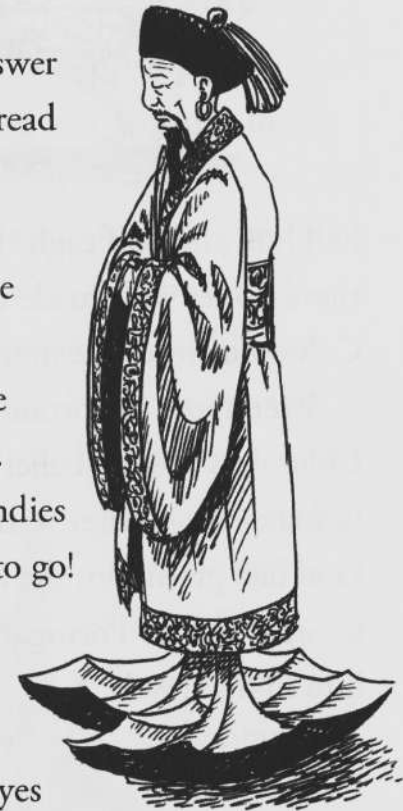
He would sail straight across
the Ocean Sea!



Other people laughed at his plan. Sail across the Ocean Sea? Why, that would take months! Columbus wouldn't be able to take along enough food and water. How would he and the crew survive?

Christopher had no answer for these questions. So he read more. He read book after book about traveling the world. One book said there were only three thousand nautical miles between the Canary Islands and Japan. Japan was a place in the Indies where Columbus wanted to go!

Another book about the Indies claimed there were men with umbrella-shaped feet, people with eyes on their shoulders, and creatures that were



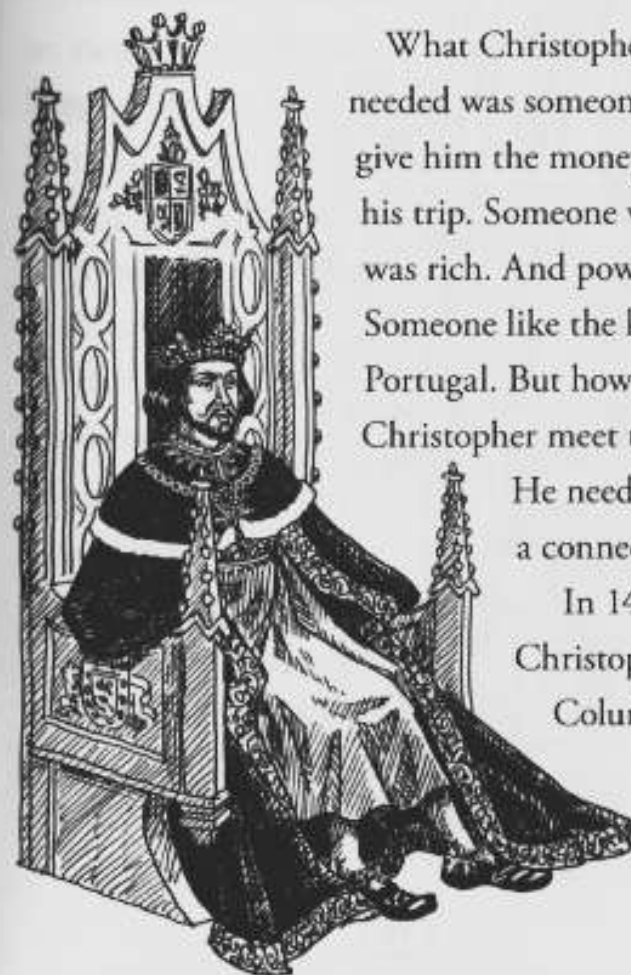


half lion and half eagle! Most people thought these stories were made up. Still, the more Columbus read, the more excited he became.

Even more important to Christopher Columbus was his belief that God meant for him to make the journey to the Indies. He believed God had given him the love of the sea. God had brought him to Portugal. And God would guide him in his travels.

Chapter 3

Waiting and More Waiting



What Christopher needed was someone to give him the money for his trip. Someone who was rich. And powerful. Someone like the king of Portugal. But how would Christopher meet the king?

He needed an in, a connection.

In 1478,
Christopher
Columbus

KING JOHN II OF PORTUGAL