The Stamps offer a credible description of how Cook emerged from provincial obscurity, entered the navy, and began to make his mark in naval circles.

Once Cook made his reputation as a cartographer in surveys of the St. Lawrence River and Newfoundland coasts, he was prepared for the three major voyages to the Pacific Ocean. The authors follow the expeditions through the journals of Cook and his associates, quoting sections of these accounts in an effort to have the reader evaluate the explorer. This is an acceptable approach for general readers who may not wish to consult the published journals. The Stamps examine a number of scientific themes such as maritime medicine and the successful application of new navigational equipment. They offer a useful overview of Cook's campaigns against scurvy and in favour of lifesaving innovations. There are no footnotes, but most of the sources are acknowledged in the text. Occasionally, the lengthy quotations appear to be pinned together and the authors tend to adopt eighteenth century views from their subject. The "savages" receive rather unsympathetic treatment from the Stamps who have adopted Cook's view that most were cannibals. His own exposure to cannibalism in the South Pacific led him to suggest that the Hawaiians and Northwest Coast Indians followed similar practices.

Although the authors avoid negative comment about Cook and more specifically about his physical and mental deterioration during the Third voyage, the reader is given a good overview of his contributions. The enthusiasm of the Stamps for their subject and their knowledge of the small seaport towns that produced him allow glimpses of the real James Cook.