

Pirate Hunters Discussion Questions

by Robert Kurson

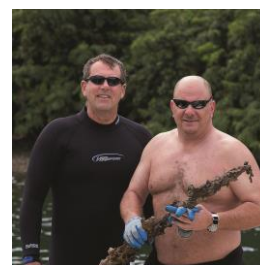
Author Bio: (Robert Kurson's website)

Robert Kurson is an American author. Kurson began his career as an attorney - practicing real estate law. Kurson has written for the Sun-Times, Chicago magazine, Esquire, Rolling Stone, The New York Times Magazine, and other publications. He lives in Chicago.



Characters:

- **John Chatterton** – (60's) – A famous shipwreck hunter/diver. Former underwater construction worker and Vietnam vet. Famous for identifying and diving a sunken German U-boat off of S. Carolina's coast. Dove the Britannic and the Titanic. He was one of the hosts on "Deep Sea Detectives" for 5 seasons on the History Channel. His goal is to search and find beautiful things that no one else can find. Boat is the *Deep Explorer*. 1st wife – Kathy. 2nd wife – Carla.
- **John Mattera** – (50's) – Shipwreck hunter/diver who loves history and research. A former executive bodyguard, bar owner, and police officer. Grew up in Staten Island with people associated with the Gambini crime family. Boat is the *Deep Explorer*. 1st wife – Denise. Moved to the Dominican Republic when he divorced. His fiancé is Caroline Garcia-Alencont.
- **Joseph Bannister** – Pirate. Sailed the *Golden Fleece*. Former merchant captain who became a pirate in 1680s. Hunted by the English Royal Navy.
- **Tracy Bowden** – (69) Legendary treasure hunter. Discovered 2 Spanish treasure galleons. Has salvage rights to Dominican waters. Gave Chatterton and Mattera the lead on Bannister. Has had documentaries written on him.
- **Howard Ehrenberg** – (38) – Long Island Native. Computer whiz and sound technician. *Deep Explorer* crew.
- **Caroline Garcia-Alencont** – Mattera's fiancé. Masters in Economics. Victor Garcia-Alencont's daughter.
- **Victor Francisco Garcia-Alencont** – Mattera's soon-to-be father-in-law. Former vice admiral and chief of staff of the Dominican navy. Has many other political ties in the Dominican government. Daughter is Caroline.
- **Jack Haskins** – Treasure researcher, shipwreck finder, and general nice guy.
- **Heiko Kretschmer** – (38) – Diver instructor and handyman. East German native. *Deep Explorer* crew.
- **Bob Marx** – One of them most successful treasure hunters. He is also an underwater archeologist. Has found almost 100 wrecks.



Places:

- **Cayo Levanta** – Island where the Golden Fleece reportedly sunk. (Now a luxury resort and Bacardi ad locale.)
- **Cayo Vigia** – Small island across from the Villa the men stayed at during the search. This is where the Golden Fleece was eventually found in 2009.
- **Port Royal, Jamaica** – Pirate and Privateer town in 1660's and 1670's. British controlled territory. Sunk in an earthquake in 1692.
- **Santa Domingo** – Dominican Republic. Oldest permanent settlement in the New World.

Facts:

- Golden Age of Piracy: 1650 – 1720
- Pirates were rare even in the “Golden Age of Piracy”. There were maybe 20 ships and approx. 2000 men at any one time.
- In 1670, England and Spain signed the Treaty of Madrid stating that England had to condemn piracy. In 1683, England sent Royal Navy ships to stop piracy in the Caribbean.
- Pirate William Kidd was hanged 2x by the British. (The rope broke the 1st time.) His body was left to hang over the Thames for 3 years in warning against piracy.
- Joseph Bannister
 - Stole the *Golden Fleece* and went pirate in 1684.
 - Bannister is captured and tried for piracy. Was found Not Guilty. Restole the *Golden Fleece*. Continued his pirating ways.
 - 2 Navy frigates (the *Drake* and the *Falcon*) caught and sank the *Golden Fleece*, but after 2 days of fighting they ran out of ammunition so the frigates left without capturing Bannister or his crew.
 - Recaptured in 1687 and hanged.
- **Careening** – Where crews beach a ship and then clean the underside of barnacles and other marine life.
- Only 1 confirmed pirate ship ever found. The *Whydah* lost in 1717 and found in 1984 by Barry Clifford.
- **UNESCO** – International treaty about shipwreck giving any treasure back to the country the ship sailed from. Would basically stop independent shipwreck hunting.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. The book was written from multiple characters' points of view. Was it successfully done?
3. After finding a world famous wreck (like the German UBoat), would you have retired or kept diving dangerous wrecks like Chatterton did? Why or why not?
4. Chatterton and Mattera had spent 2 years researching sunken treasure galleys and were just about to start searching for one when the Bannister opportunity appeared. Would you have given up on the already researched “sure thing” *San Bartoleme* galley to look for a risky and unknown pirate ship on the word of a “crazy” old man?

5. Would you go looking for a pirate ship even knowing you probably couldn't find conclusive proof it was the ship you were looking for?
6. How would you deal with a spouse like Chatterton? Someone who put his life on the line for no appreciable rewards? Someone who dives the most dangerous spaces available? Someone with such risky behaviors that he was complimented with the line, "When you die, no one will find your body."
7. The German U-boat Chatterton found almost broke him. It took 6 years, destroyed his marriage, took 3 lives, spent 2 life savings, and almost killed him. Why do you think he continued diving it until he found the U-Boat's name?
8. "Treasure is Trouble" because it turns honorable men greedy and brings out the worst in humanity – Broken marriages, shattered friendships, and cheated investors, etc. What do you think of that statement?
9. England initially loved pirates – in fact they outfitted many of them as pirates/privateers. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of a country supporting piracy?
10. Bannister was a successful and respected merchant captain. Why do you think he took the Golden Fleece and went pirate in 1684 (after England started hunting them)?
11. Do you think the English actually hanged Bannister or did he escape like Mattera and Chatterton believe?
12. If a pirate ship was sailing on your merchant boat, would you surrender? Why or why not?
13. Pirates were very democratic and showed startling levels of racial equality. Does that surprise you? Why do you think pirate ships were focused on crewman equality?
14. Did you find it odd or understandable that pirate captains treated their crews better than most merchant/naval captains treated their crews?
15. What real pirate customs surprised you? What customs were you disappointed to learn weren't real?
16. Bowen was very against the *Golden Fleece* being in Cayo Vigia. He kept insisting it was in Cayo Levanta, even though Cayo Lavanta had been thoroughly searched. Why do you think he refused to listen to Chatterton and Mattera?
17. Why do you think the men did not look on land for evidence of the *Golden Fleece* earlier in their search?
18. If you found a sunken pirate treasure, what would you do with the money you made?
19. The divers never found anything naming the ship they found as the *Golden Fleece*. Do you think the circumstantial evidence is enough to verify their claim that the wreck they found is the *Fleece*?
20. After finding the *Golden Fleece*, Mattera and Chatterton went on and started looking for another shipwreck. Does that surprise you?
21. After find the *Golden Fleece* and almost finding the *San Miguel* treasure galley, Chatterton and Mattera still have not received any payment. Do you think the search and the money they spent looking for the ships was worth it?
22. Robert Kurson has written 2 other nonfiction books. Will you read them?

References:

- Robert Kurson's website - <http://www.robertkurson.com/>
- Novelist – <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=eacde315-8be1-4293-be27-05b2ab91a9b2%40sessionmgr4010&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10408978&db=neh>

Robert Kurson's Books

- Shadow Divers (2005)
- Crashing Trough (2008)
- Pirate Hunters (2016)

If you liked Pirate Hunters, try...

- Meet me in Atlantis – Mark Adams
- Jungleland – Christopher Stewart
- Frozen in Time – Mitchell Zuckoff
- Lost City of Z – David Grann
- The Silent World – Jacques Cousteau