



Pirate Hunters: Treasure, Obsession, and the Search for a Legendary Pirate Ship

Robert Kurson

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A thrilling new adventure of danger and deep-sea diving, historic mystery and suspense, by the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Shadow Divers*

Finding and identifying a pirate ship is the hardest thing to do under the sea. But two men—John Chatterton and John Mattera—are willing to risk everything to find the *Golden Fleece*, the ship of the infamous pirate Joseph Bannister. At large during the Golden Age of Piracy in the seventeenth century, Bannister's exploits would have been more notorious than Blackbeard's, more daring than Kidd's, but his story, and his ship, have been lost to time. If Chatterton and Mattera succeed, they will make history—it will be just the second time ever that a pirate ship has been discovered and positively identified. Soon, however, they realize that cutting-edge technology and a willingness to lose everything aren't enough to track down Bannister's ship. They must travel the globe in search of historic documents and accounts of the great pirate's exploits, face down dangerous rivals, battle the tides of nations and governments and experts. But it's only when they learn to think and act like pirates—like Bannister—that they become able to go where no pirate hunters have gone before.

Fast-paced and filled with suspense, fascinating characters, history, and adventure, *Pirate Hunters* is an unputdownable story that goes deep to discover truths and souls long believed lost.

Advance praise for *Pirate Hunters*

“A great thriller full of tough guys and long odds . . . and: It’s all true.”—**Lee Child**

“*Pirate Hunters* is a fantastic book, an utterly engrossing and satisfying read. It tells the story of the hunt for the rare wreck of a pirate ship, which had been captained by one of the most remarkable pirates in history. This is a real-life *Treasure Island*, complete with swashbuckling, half-crazy treasure hunters and vivid Caribbean settings—a story for the ages.”—**Douglas Preston**

“*Pirate Hunters* is a gripping account of two courageous divers’ quest to uncover the shipwrecked vessel of Joseph Bannister, one of history’s most infamous pirates. Robert Kurson will keep you on the edge of your seat in this high-stakes journey around the globe that ultimately teaches these explorers about much more than an old ship.”—**Sen. John McCain**

“There’s nothing in the world like buried treasure—and people hungry and obsessed enough to risk their lives for it. *Pirate Hunters* isn’t just a good story—it’s a true one. Searching for the souls of its explorers, it takes you to the far tip of the plank and plunges you deep to the bottom of the ocean.”—**Brad Meltzer**

“A terrific read. I was pulled in from page one. Kurson brings us face to face with some of the most swashbuckling pirates ever to sail the Caribbean, even as he takes us underwater on a high-tech quest to discover the relics they left behind.”—**Daniel James Brown, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *The Boys in the Boat***

“Kurson’s own enthusiasm, combined with his copious research and an eye for detail, makes for one of the

most mind-blowing pirate stories of recent memory, one that even the staunchest landlubber wi

Pirate Hunters: Treasure, Obsession, and the Search for a Legendary Pirate Ship Details

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From Reader Review Pirate Hunters: Treasure, Obsession, and the Search for a Legendary Pirate Ship for online ebook

Karen says

I suspected after reading the first chapter that this true story would be extraordinary, following in the footsteps of one of my favorite books of 2004, *Shadow Divers*. And it was. What a great adventure!

This is an obsessive and all-consuming quest by renowned scuba diver John Chatterton and John Matterna to find the greatest pirate ship that ever sailed, the *Golden Fleece*. The story of this hugely expensive and once in a lifetime deep-sea discovery is filled with suspense, risk, frustration, exhaustion and thrills. Robert Kurson was masterful at putting together the pieces.

The pirate captain who steered the *Golden Fleece* was more notorious than Blackbeard, a real-life Jack Sparrow. His name was Joseph Bannister, a well-respected merchant captain in the mid-late 17th century. As captain of the *Golden Fleece*, he was tasked with delivering goods via transatlantic voyages between London and Jamaica. One day Bannister risked his life by stealing the ship, picked up a hundred bold men to serve as crew, and began a more profitable life as a pirate. These swashbuckling and plundering pirates of the Caribbean and Atlantic came from a special time – the Golden Age of Piracy - lasting from about 1650 to 1720 and were the kind of pirates who are dramatized in movies and books – no such thing as “arrgh” or “shiver me timbers” in real life though.

If you like true adventure stories, this is a must-read.

Perry says

Caribbean Booty Call: The Quest for the *Golden Fleece*

[4.5 stars]

'Mother, mother ocean, I have heard you call,
Wanted to sail upon your waters since I was three feet tall.
You've seen it all, you've seen it all....'

J. Buffett, "A Pirate Looks at Forty."

I've loved Jimmy Buffett's serenade to a pirate's life since my first trip to Key West and out into the Caribbean; it's a treasure for revelry of trips south and youthful daydreams of life one day on a small Caribbean island. Arrr, *what jewels and gold there be(!)* in this fascinating story of John Chatterton and John Matterna, *el cazadores de piratas barco*, and their decade-long obsessive search for the legendary *Golden Fleece*, a pirate ship that was captained by the notorious Joseph Bannister and reportedly sunk in the late 17th century *somewhere* in the Caribbean.

Bannister was an infamous and legendary English pirate who was a well-respected merchant captain who transported goods from England to Jamaica, until he ran off with his vessel, the *Golden Fleece*, and began a buccaneer's life during the Golden Age of Piracy (generally referring to the late 17th century). He and crew evaded the Brits' numerous attempts to find them until cornered in Samaná Bay off the northeastern coast of the island of Hispaniola (the part that is now the Dominican Republic). They successfully faced down two Royal Navy warships in a breathtaking battle, which Mr. Kurson colorfully describes in the book.

Kurson seamlessly blends this and other background tales of Caribbean pirates into the marquee tale of the hunt for the Golden Fleece by Chatterton and Mattera, a seemingly impossible odyssey in which they dealt with: threats of government interference; tropical storms; the loss of crewmates, partners, lovers and friends, to death, divorce and disloyalty; the depletion of all their life savings; troubles funding such an expensive venture, in which they had to go to places as far off as Spain to search the Spanish archives for original first-hand accounts of Bannister's exploits and to determine Spanish shipping routes, all for the purpose of learning to think as Bannister would have; and, just as they appeared on the verge of finding the sunken treasure, the surprise appearance of scavenger/squatters. If successful, the discovery of the Golden Fleece would only be the second time a pirate ship has been discovered and positively identified.

Bob Schnell says

Advanced Reading Copy review Due to be published June 16, 2015

"Pirate Hunters" by Robert Kurson is kind of a sequel to his break-out book "Shadow Divers" about the discovery and identifying of a sunken German U-Boat. The new book continues the exploits of adventure diver John Chatterton as he is now on the trail of the pirate Joseph Bannister and his ship Golden Fleece.

Because underwater treasure hunts can be brutally tedious, the author fills the pages with biographies of the major players, a history of pirate culture and legend, the story of Bannister and a lot of related stories from fellow divers. It all adds up to a suspenseful tale as the search team races against competitors, restrictive governments, dwindling finances and despairing frustrations. It is all written in a very manly, gung-ho style that brings to mind Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin series (with Russell Crowe as the personification of Chatterton, of course). This could be a turn-off for fans of narrative non-fiction that is more academic and less sensational. A gory chapter on shipboard amputations, for example, is completely lurid and unnecessary. There is plenty to like about this book, but a bit too much testosterone for my taste.

Carol says

My sincere thanks to Random House and Netgalley for allowing access to the e-galley of [Pirate Hunters: Treasure, Obsession, and the Search for a Legendary Pirate Ship](#) to be published June 16, 2015.

Demonstrating the same meticulous research, detail and respect as he did in [Shadow Divers](#), Robert Kurson has once again written a winner that is bound to resonate with readers. In [Pirate Hunters](#), Kurson follows the

adventuresome quest divers, the two John's, Chatterton and Mattera as they search for the lost ship, The Golden Fleece, once captained by buccaneer Joseph Bannister. Pirate Hunters is truly a swashbuckling read and treasure found.

Kurson's Shadow Divers is an all time favorite of mine. Pirate Hunters promised some of the same elements that drew me to that story. It fills my need for edge of the seat adventure, vicarious experiences and the thrill of the hunt. Who wouldn't be fascinated with the idea of As Kurson needed to decide the approach of how to tell this story, I needed to decide how much to tell you without revealing too much.

There is a great deal to digest in Pirate Hunters. Initially Chatterton and Mattera had planned and search for a treasure ship, The San Bartolomé, which had sunk in the 17th century on the Dominican south coast. This galleon could be worth millions, they knew where it was, and its discovery promised to get them in the history books.

"And then their phone rang."

They received a call from Tracy Bowden, a well-respected treasure hunter. He asked them to come to Miami to hear a project he'd like them to take on. Though both men were focused on their quest for the San Bartolomé, they decided it wouldn't take much time out of their schedule to hear Bowden out. Bowden's home was a treasure trove of artifacts from wrecks he had found. On a visit to the latrine, Mattera discovered the tub filled with plastic bags containing silver pieces of eight. This combined with Bowden's prowess in storytelling caught their attention. Bowden asked

Have you heard of Joseph Bannister?"

With these six words the quest for The Golden Fleece begins. Sit back and be prepared to learn about the Golden Age of Piracy. Knowing little about this subject I came away with a better understanding of the men who became these looters of the sea than is presented in the movies.

I am extremely impressed with the sheer patience, determination, personal sacrifice, capital and even stubbornness it takes for men like Chatterton, Mattera and their crew to take on a project like this and not give up. Kurson covers a great deal of ground here providing a clear picture of the formative years of the main players, stories of treasure ships and their booty, background on The Royal Navy, the code of conduct for pirates, and many resources for further reading. [Pirate Hunters: Treasure, Obsession, and the Search for a Legendary Pirate Ship](#) is riveting.

Leo . says

I know that John Chatterton is a world renown diver. I have seen him dive a couple of times on the fantastic show The Curse Of Oak Island.

Pirates have always fascinated me. The secrecy. The brotherhood. A masonic connection? Sir Francis Drake was basically a pirate working for the Crown.

I watched the whole series of Black Sails and remember a poignant thing Captain Flint the Pirate says when spotting a British Ship on the horizon from the bay of Nassau.

"I fear the worst, civilization is coming!". Or words to that effect. Like it is a bad thing. This good ship citizenship.

Here is a short verse I jotted down:

Who were the Pirates of the high sea?

Were they all blood brothers? A secret family?

Savage but learned, masters of the water

Boarding ships, taking the crew, and the Captain no quarter

Made to walk the plank, as entertainment, to drown

Are Pirates sworn to Oath? A Band of Thieves? Against the Crown

Were they in the know? How civilization plays out

How we are all on the Citizenship, no doubt

Did they break away? Because they could see the Lies

That all is Piracy, commerce, society, Justice, all that applies

It's all the same, just two sides of the same coin, it is said

A Pirate, a Knight's Templar, a Freemason, a Lord, a King, all answer to the head

The Head with the One Eye that See's all Things

5G, NSA, Google Barges, Smart Meters, like Sauron, in The Lord Of The Rings????

If one is awake, use their Real Eyes

Will one see reality? Realize?

Or will one ever see... All Is Real Lies!

Will one look at the bigger picture? Live

Or see a haze? A Veil? Is it Vile? Is it Evil? Does it Give?

A false reality? A Matrix? An illusory Vision?

Compartmentalized, A fractal? A Schism?

Simply think outside the box, look at the Whole

Ignore the Cube, the Dark Sun, the Black Hole

The Obsidian Mirror, the Dark Screen, what does it hide?

That we are simply commerce, drowning in perpetual debt, a Maritime Law Tide??

Cynthia says

I've never been fascinated by pirates but after reading Kurson "Pirate Hunters" that's changed. I am interested in history and Kurson brings lots of that alive in "Pirate Hunters" specifically the history of the golden age of Piracy in the 17th century around Hispaniola (now known as Santo Domingo). At that time it was a Spanish colony but the French and English were there in abundance as well for the lucrative trade opportunities. And where lots of goods are being moved you'll find those who want to exploit the situation for their personal gain...enter the Pirates. Bannister, the English pirate at the center of this book, was an unlikely villain. He'd been a loyal English merchant sailor for all his life. His motivations and his background make history come alive as does the modern day search for his sunken ship "Golden Fleece" and its treasure trove of history.

"Pirate Hunters" is also the story of two men who'd been devoted to underwater diving for most of their lives. Matera and Chatterton were relentless in their search for "Golden Fleece". The story rocks back and forth from their personal stories, their professional backgrounds, a paper chase in many of the world's legendary libraries, and their love of diving.

This short book is over way too soon. The only negative about it is how tiny the maps are. It's all but impossible to read them.

Thank you to the publisher for providing an ARC.

Jennifer Masterson says

I'm DNF'ing this at 60%. It's just too much back story on the men looking for the ship and not enough about The Golden Compass. I wanted treasure and they only touched on that in the beginning. Also this isn't good on audio because this book needs pictures. The narrator Ray Porter is good. Don't take my word for it. Lots of people loved this book.

Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says

My copy courtesy Random House/Net Galley - much thanks!

Covers both the search for a pirate ship from the "golden age of piracy" (roughly 1650-1720) off of Santo Domingo in the Caribbean, but also the pasts of the main searchers, from Vietnam to the fringes of the mafia, and the lives of the pirates.

The vessel being hunted is the *Golden Fleece*, which fought off two Royal Navy frigates which grossly out-manned and out-gunned it, though it sank in doing it, in 1686. Finding a bona fide pirate wreck is, by the way, reckoned here as being maybe the toughest thing in salvage diving.

Accidentally but appropriately enough, I was reading this on Talk Like a Pirate Day. I'd say "Arr!" but it seems pirates didn't say that.

Though they did have parrots.

Christine says

This book ultimately frustrated me. I really enjoyed the chronicle of searching for the ship, the story of Bannister and the backstory of both the men at the center of the story. But what has stuck in my mind since finishing are the things that were frankly unnecessary to the story or seemed shoe horned in.

There are several times that the author and men make rather objectifying statements about women, which may have been said, but really didn't need to be included in the book. It only added to the men's unlikability, which when coupled with arrogance, tempers and entitlement ultimately made me unsympathetic toward them and their quest. I started rooting for someone else to find the ship before them.

It's also clear that these men, the author included, care nothing about the Dominican Republic other than the money they can extract from an already struggling country. The story of the man on the motorcycle with a gun seemed included only for the purpose of showing how "savage" and scary the Dominicans are. The anecdote of Chatterton receiving help with a flat tire appeared thrown in add an afterthought and does not convince me of his so-called change of heart about the people and culture of this island nation. Nothing else points to that conclusion.

I would recommend this book for the stories and history, but caution against becoming too enamoured with the central characters add their true colors really shine through at the end.

Ken says

Pirate Hunters is more than just "the search for the lost treasure ship of a great buccaneer," it's history, biography, and psychology rolled into one page-turning tale. Ostensibly, this is the story of two treasure hunters, John Mattera and John Chatterton, who descend upon the Dominican Republic in search of the pirate Joseph Bannister's ship, the *Golden Fleece*. In a battle against two British war ships, the *Golden Fleece* went down in 1687, where it has rested in peace ever since. Author Robert Kurson uses the natural story lines built by hunters racing other hunters for one of the most elusive of prizes, a genuine pirate wreck (records for pirate ships were not kept by pirates and their sympathizers, making finds all the more challenging).

In addition to the history propelled by the mystery, the false starts necessary to reach an actual strike, and the underwater (and above) descriptions built for suspense, the author stops the narrative to explore the background of both treasure hunters -- Chatterton's as a medic who risked his life repeatedly in Vietnam, and Mattera's as a boy growing up as part of the New York crime families network in the 60s and 70s. Both are

diverting tales, though the reader, appetite whetted, longs to get back to the Dominican and the hunt for a great pirate ship.

Also leavening the narratives are historical accounts of Joseph Bannister, the British captain turned rogue (and how often does THAT happen?) who took on his countrymen and fought them to a draw against incredible odds. For readers, the derring will do nicely and the reading is pitched once it comes to Bannister. Kurson also takes time to educate readers on pirates, on their love for democracy far in advance of any Founding Fathers, on their strict system of "justice" despite an undeniable love for money, liquor, and women.

For instance, neither "Aarghhh!" nor "Shiver me timbers!" were ever uttered by pirates of the Golden Age of Piracy (1650-1720). Instead, they were the invention of 1950s movie screenwriters. Among invocations the real pirates said: "Eat what falls from my tail!" "Damn your blood!" "I'll cleave your skull asunder!" "I'll cut you in pound pieces!" and "I come from hell and I'll carry you there presently!"

There's also an interesting ledger of what pirates were compensated for body parts lost while in brave battle: e.g. 600 pieces of silver or six slaves for a lost right arm, 500 pieces of silver or five slaves for a lost left arm, 100 pieces of silver or one slave for a lost eye or lost finger, etc. There were also set punishments onboard for stealing from a ship's plunder, cheating fellow pirates, sneaking a woman on board (trouble!), cowardice, insolence, disobedience, or anything else impeding the ship's primary purpose -- to steal (and spend as quickly as possible, for as Kurson points out, buried treasure is another myth and would be considered laughable to "spend it today, if not yesterday" pirates of the time).

So go ahead, indulge the kid (or Capt. Kidd) in yourself. Read a rip-roaring tale about a real pirate who's little known and deserves to be better known. Yes, on small occasion the narrative waters grow choppy and slow, but for the most part the sailing is so smooth that Roger and most everyone else will grow Jolly reading it.

Dem says

I stumbled on this book while I was trying to find a book on the Amber Room (*The Amber Room is a world-famous chamber decorated in amber panels backed with gold leaf and mirrors, located in the Catherine Palace of Tsarskoye Selo near Saint Petersburg. Originally constructed in the 18th century in Prussia, the Amber Room disappeared during World War II and was recreated in 2003. Before the room was lost, it was considered an "Eighth Wonder of the World"*),

I didn't have any expectations before reading *Pirate Hunters: Treasure, Obsession, and the Search for a Legendary Pirate Ship* but a goodread's friend Diane S had given it a 4 star rating so thought it was worth downloading on audio and giving it a try.

The book revolves around John Chatterton and John Mattera treasure hunters seeking the whereabouts of the Golden Fleece a pirate ship which was captained and stolen by Joseph Bannister back in the day of piracy. Not only do we learn a lot about the lives of pirates but we also learn a lot about the lives of these two men and I found the background information quite fascinating. I loved the history of the pirate Joseph Bannister and his life as a Captain. I was amazed on numerous occasions throughout this book at the costs, time and technology involved in locating pirate ships.

I listened to this on audio and the narrator was excellent but I can't help wondering if I have missed out on a paperback edition as I assume there would be photos and maps which would really enhance the reading experience. Having said that I had a 5 hour trip at the weekend and this book was such good company. Not my usual read but so glad I stumbled across it as I was pleasantly surprised and educated by the books conclusion. Now back to my search for a book on the Amber Room and you never know what I will stumble on next.....

Sarah says

This was a really enjoyable and quick read. It's part biography part history. It tells the story on how a team of divers discovered the wreck of the Golden Fleece, using a combination of research and technology, and the struggles they faced along the way.

The Golden Fleece is the ship that belonged to Joseph Bannister, infamous English Gentleman turned pirate. So we get a few different stories in this book. The story of how the wreck was found, the stories behind the men who found it, and the history behind the wreck and the pirate himself.

I listened to the audio version, and as always Porter's narration was excellent and very engaging. The book was well written and well paced. The parts about the Golden Fleece and the history were broken up by chapters about the divers, John Chatterton and John Mattera. Mattera's life in particular, was very interesting, like something out of Good Fellas.

I also appreciated the general research given about pirates, and learned some interesting new facts about them! One example I loved was that pirate ships were based on democracy, with every man having an equal vote on what they would do and where they would go. Another kind of cool thing- pirates were reimbursed for body parts lost in battle. The amount varied depending on the limb lost.

I highly recommend to anyone looking for an adventurous non-fiction read!

Diane says

This book spent a lot of time treading water.

Pirate Hunters is the story of three men trying to find the wreck of a 17th century pirate ship in the Dominican Republic. Joseph Bannister was an Englishman who turned to piracy, and the Royal Navy was sent to capture him. Bannister's ship, the Golden Fleece, sank in 1686 after a ferocious battle. It wasn't seen again until 2009, when our pirate hunters found it after months of searching.

This book was described as an adventure story, which is why I was keen to read it. However, there were too many pages on the background of the three pirate hunters: John Chatterton, John Mattera, and Tracy Bowden. There were lengthy profiles on each man, but I didn't think their personal stories needed such glossy attention. There was also too much time spent on the bickering between the men, and on all the false starts and stops of their hunt. The men would search in the water, then get frustrated and go to a library or archives to do research, and then argue with each other, and then go back out to the water. This process repeated itself many times, and my interest in the story declined with each loop. It felt like the author was

trying to pad out what should have been a magazine article.

In the beginning, I thought this book would be a 4-star read -- there were some good sections on Bannister and the history of piracy -- but the excessive padding made me drop a star. I think someone who likes pirate stories or tales of treasure hunting would still enjoy this book, but the writing could have been tighter.

Favorite Quote

"Treasure shows who you really are. It strips away every facade you've constructed, every story you believe about yourself, and reveals the real you. If you are a miserable, lying, greedy, worthless fuck, treasure will tell you that. If you are a good and decent person, treasure will tell you that, too. And you needn't find a single coin to know. It's enough to get close to treasure, to believe it within reach, and you'll have your answer, but once it happens it can't be lied about and it can't be bullshitted away. For that reason, treasure is crisis, because what you get in the end is yourself."

Diane S ? says

I fell in love with Kurson's Shadow Divers, so when this came up I just has to grab it. These divers are amazing men, the amount of time and money this takes is astronomical and this plays havoc on lives and relationships.

In this book they are looking for a pirate's ship, the Golden Fleece of John Bannister. Bannister is the only pirate that actually beat the Royal Navy. There is so much more to, this book, a history of piracy, the leasing pirates of the time and how they fought and the treasures they stole. Some of the descriptions of what they did to captains and crews of the ships that fought back were quite graphic but relatively short. An incredible time for piracy. One thing I found most interesting is that there was a true democracy on these pirate ships, way before democracy was even a thought elsewhere.

There was quite a bit of bouncing back and forth, but it was all interesting to me, so it was okay and did not take away from my enjoyment of the book. Interesting reading about this because I never had to great an interest in pirates, these men and Kurston seem to make everything and anything interesting.

ARC from librarything.

Carlos says

I loved this book, The mixture of underwater archeology, the historical background of the pirate ship and pirate themselves added a lot to the narrative. I'm a sucker for anything historical specially having to do with the golden age of Piracy which happens to be right smack in the middle of the Imperialistic age, which is always interesting to read about from a historian point of view. The only reason that I didn't give this book 5 stars is because I don't think everybody would appreciate the dense amount of background into the archaeologists themselves, in some parts it worked but in others it just felt like filler, like the author wanted to achieve a certain number of pages and felt the need to include background information that didn't have nothing to do with the archaeological record itself. But once you get past that , this book is really interesting to read and if you love history then this book will add another chapter into Pirate history.

