



The Outlaw Ocean: Journeys Across the Last Untamed Frontier by Ian Urbina

Discussion Questions for Prologue and Chapters 1-3

Chapters
Part 1: Thunderstruck (pages 3 - 90) <i>Prologue</i> Chapter 1: <i>Storming the Thunder</i> Chapter 2: <i>The Lone Patrol</i> Chapter 3: <i>A Rusty Kingdom</i>
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Part 3: Smoke on the Water (pages 202 - 319) Chapter 9: <i>The Next Frontier</i> Chapter 10: <i>Sea Slavery</i> Chapter 11: <i>Waste Away</i> Chapter 12: <i>Fluid Borders</i>
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Background Information on Who Owns the Ocean ([summarized from Royal Museums Greenwich](#))

International waters, also known as the **high seas**, are areas of the ocean that are not under the jurisdiction of any single country. They are generally located beyond a country's Territorial Sea (12 nautical miles from the coastline) and Exclusive Economic Zone or EEZ (up to 200 nautical miles).

Seafarers, ships, companies, and countries are subject to **maritime law**: a system of rules, international agreements and conventions that govern activities on the high seas.

One of the principles of maritime law is the **freedom of the seas**, meaning all nations have the right to use them for navigation, fishing, and other activities without interference from others.

Icebreaker: What was one of the most surprising things from your reading so far?

Discussion Questions:

1. In the absence of robust law enforcement on the high seas, organizations like [Sea Shepherd](#) take maritime law enforcement into their own hands. What is your opinion of this approach? What are the positives and negatives of the tactics Sea Shepherd used in pursuing the *Thunder*?
2. What is the connection between ecotourism and illegal fishing? In and around Palau, what conditions led to illegal fishing? Do individuals, like yourself, have any means to combat illegal fishing? If so, what? What overarching lessons can be drawn from Palau's efforts in marine conservation?
3. In 1968, Garrett Hardin coined the phrase "[the tragedy of the commons](#)" to describe the potential for misuse of a common-pool resource. This concept is frequently taught in environmental science courses to illustrate how short-term gain for one party can cause long-term consequences for the whole group. It's clear that overfishing can cause environmental damage. From an economic perspective, what is the cost of illegal, unreported, and/or unregulated fishing to the seafood industry in this country and others?
4. How was [Sealand](#) able to establish itself as a country? Outside of the info presented in Chapter 3, are there other examples you can think of where people tried to establish micronations? What were their motives?
5. What are the impacts of open registries—where ships fly flags of convenience instead of their home countries—on labor, safety, and accountability at sea? Who gains, and who loses, from this shift?

Resources:

- [The Outlaw Ocean Wakelet](#)
- [NOAA – Understanding Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing \(IUU\)](#)
- [United Nations High Seas Treaty](#) 2023
- [Global Fishing Watch Map](#)