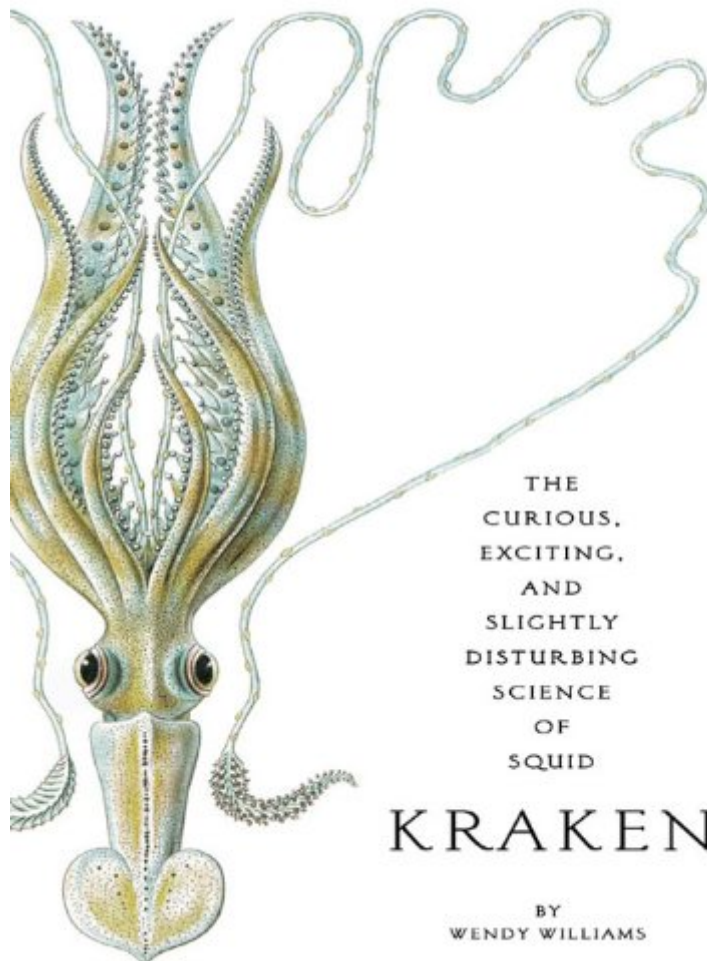




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# Kraken : The Curious, Exciting, And Slightly Disturbing Science Of Squid



## Synopsis

Kraken is the traditional name for gigantic sea monsters, and this book introduces one of the most charismatic, enigmatic, and curious inhabitants of the sea: the squid. The pages take the reader on a wild narrative ride through the world of squid science and adventure, along the way addressing some riddles about what intelligence is, and what monsters lie in the deep. In addition to squid, both giant and otherwise, Kraken examines other equally enthralling cephalopods, including the octopus and the cuttlefish, and explores their otherworldly abilities, such as camouflage and bioluminescence. Accessible and entertaining, Kraken is also the first substantial volume on the subject in more than a decade and a must for fans of popular science.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is very much in the pop-science model. It's not a textbook about science, but it isn't a textbook. There's a lot less detail in some ways, but there's a lot more reader-friendly writing so as not to run off people who don't have advanced degrees in zoology. There's a lot of really interesting stuff here. We start out with a short history

lesson, where we meet the first people to prove that large squids actually existed. We get lots of detail about squid anatomy. We take a cold, nighttime boat ride with a bunch of marine researchers as they do the messy, chaotic work of catching, tagging, and releasing Humboldt squid in Monterey Bay. We get details about cephalopod luminescence and about their amazing ability to change color in extremely detailed ways – especially interesting because they’re colorblind. We learn how the study of squids has led to breakthroughs in biology, medicine, and neuroscience. We get probably more info than we ever really wanted on the bizarre, endlessly varied mating habits of cephalopods. We get a lot of info about just how smart squids, octopuses, and cuttlefish are. I really think this is one of the most interesting scientific questions out there right now – there’s a pretty widespread consensus that cephalopods are smarter than we suspected they might be, but no one really knows if they’re as smart as a mouse, as a cat, as a dog, as an ape, or even higher. They seem to be very good at figuring out puzzles – but is that true intelligence or animal instinct? Are their camouflaging and color-changing abilities better indicators of intelligence? Researchers who work closely with these animals say they’re intelligent and even have individual personalities – but is that just mankind anthropomorphizing animals? And how on earth do you measure the intelligence of any creature as deeply alien to the human bipedal norm? This is deeply fascinating and extremely readable. Some things are covered amazingly well. We get a very real sense that scientists are sometimes frustrated by how much they know but how little they understand about animals like squids. And this book has the very best discussion I’ve ever seen about animal intelligence and the question of how to measure it. Researchers used to give dogs the same IQ test they’d give babies – paint a dot on their forehead, put them in front of a mirror, and see whether they realize that the image in the mirror is really them. The problem, however, is that dogs don’t have a strong visual sense, so mirrors aren’t particularly significant to them – sense of smell, on the other hand, is very powerful for dogs, so intelligence tests should focus on the ways dogs learn through their olfactory senses. So how do you design IQ tests for an octopus? If this book has a weak point, it might be that it gives very short shrift to the cephalopod in popular culture. There’s some discussion of some old novels and a monster movie from the 50s, but this really is a golden age for squid popularity in the mass media, and it was an element I was a bit surprised to see get so little attention in this very thorough and comprehensive book. Nevertheless, that’s a very minor nitpick for a book I really had a blast reading. Go pick it up.

Picked this up as part of some light research I needed to do. I was expecting something dry and

painful, something I would have to wade through with discipline and booze. Well, what a nicely paced, well-written, wonderfully informative book this turned out to be. It's not written to academia in that OMG-please-kill-me kind of way, but it's also not watered down so that your dog can read it along with you. It's intelligent, brisk and easily approachable, but filled up full with all kinds of crazy squid and octopus stuff that is all brand new and well researched and deliciously informative. Ms. Williams has done a fine job creating an interesting narrative that takes us not only through the tentacle-filled seas, but through history and humanity. Kraken is fine work that I highly recommend.

I have always had what I thought was an uncommon fascination with sea life, cephalopods in particular. Turns out, there are many who share this interest and this book is not to be missed. This book reads like a well produced nature documentary. (In fact, I would love to see a filmed version that explores many of the ideas and topics presented within this book.) Parts of the book were a little repetitive and simple, whereas other sections were more in-depth and complex. However, unlike many scientific books, the author never 'loses' you by getting too detailed. Just when you think the explanations of axons, for example, are started to get over your head, the author wraps it up and moves on. Although this book is presented as being primarily about squid, about half of the content deals with other cephalopods, such as the octopus. What I really loved about this book (and the true measure of great non-fiction) is that you are presented with countless ideas, concepts, and topics that encourage further investigation. On the Kindle Fire, this is as simple as highlighting a word or phrase and doing an internet search. You may find yourself getting caught up viewing various pictures and videos online in the midst of reading this book. I absolutely love that the author found a way to keep the narrative simple enough that the reader can either move along at a comfortable pace, or let his or her curiosity temporarily divert them away from the text. I would have loved if the photos were available in a higher resolution for e-reading. They are hard to see on my Kindle Touch, and just barely better on my Kindle Fire. There is also a passage at the very beginning of the book that is actually an image, which is too hard to see, no matter how much I zoomed in. If the publisher could have found a way to include or enhance the images, or presented web links from within the text - this book would be perfect.

I'm really enjoying this book, though the author tends to meander a bit. Still, I've learned so much about cephalopods, which fascinate me! It's just a bit frustrating when Williams meanders right when I want to learn something- like how copper-based blood actually WORKS, as well as octopi's breathing mechanism (some can manage out of water! how???). Maybe that'll be covered in later

chapters... but it was NOT covered right after she covered our kind of blood, which is weird, and what I mean by meandering. Still- it's fascinating, has a lot of Science well-described, and is engagingly written. A set of color photo plates in the middle would have been nice, but the B&W photos in the text were adequate. The book is very beautifully designed and published.

Wendy brings forth another view of intelligence beyond that of mammals. it's a shame these creatures only live a couple of years...

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