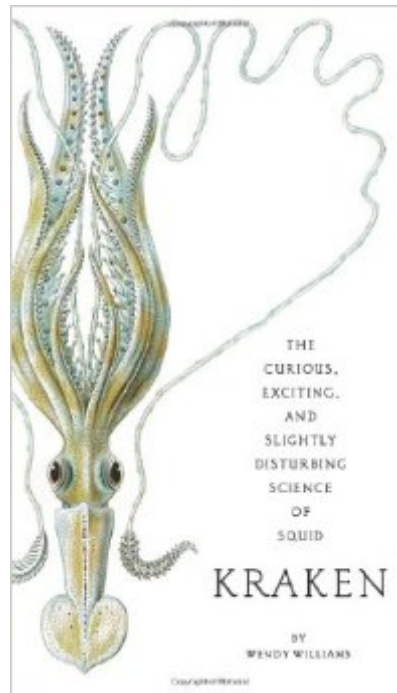


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Kraken: The Curious, Exciting, And Slightly Disturbing Science Of Squid



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. Praise for KRAKEN: The Curious, Exciting, and Slightly Disturbing Science of Squid

"Williams writes with a deft, supple hand as she surveys these spindly, extraordinary beasts and their world. She reminds us that the known world might be considerably larger than in the days of the bestiary-makers, but there is still room for wonder and strangeness." -Los Angeles Times.com

"Williams's account of squid, octopuses, and other cephalopods abounds with both ancient legend and modern science." -Discover

"[Exposes squid's] eerie similarities to the human species, down to eye structure and the all-important brain cell, the neuron." -New York Post

"just the right mix of history and science" -ForeWord Reviews

"Kraken is an engaging and expansive biography of a creature that sparks our imagination and stimulates our curiosity. It's a perfect blend of storytelling and science." -Vincent Pieribone, author of Aglow in the Dark

KRAKEN extracts pure joy, intellectual exhilaration, and deep wonder from the most unlikely of places--squid. It is hard to read Wendy Williams's luminous account and not feel the thrill of discovery of the utterly profound connections we share with squid and all other living things on the planet. With wit, passion, and skill as a storyteller, Williams has given us a beautiful window into our world and ourselves. --Neil Shubin, author of the national bestseller "Your Inner Fish"

Wendy Williams's KRAKEN weaves vignettes of stories about historical encounters with squid and octopus, with stories of today's scientists who are captivated by these animals. Her compelling book has the power to change your world-view about these creatures of the sea, while telling the gripping, wholly comprehensible story of the ways in which these animals have changed human medical history. --Mark J. Spalding, President, The Ocean Foundation

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Customer Reviews

Wendy has an enormous capacity for fascination, scale, and detail. It is hard to discern if she finds the scientists studying squid and octopus more fascinating or the creatures. She has a great facility with moving from small to large, from a remarkably clear rendering of the neuron's work, to a picturesque description of Woods Hole, Mass -- keeping story, history and science all moving forward. We learn about a squid who harvests light producing bacteria and evicts those who underperform; we learn that "neurosurgeons are surprisingly squeamish" (perhaps one of my all time favorite lines), and that Horace Walpole ("around the time that Ben Franklin was killing wild turkeys with electricity in the colonies") coined the term "serendipity" and that there is more in science that is "serendipitous" than you might expect. There is a mother lode of material here for a novelist such as Jeanette Winterston and for all of us whose senses have become a little dulled by the daily grind. I believe that this is an important book, such that I will tell you that I found the first chapter slow going. I think that Wendy may have been trying to give us too much of an overview before the reader was sufficiently engaged. So, skip the first chapter if you must, but don't be deterred. You will go back to read it because, by the end of the book, you will be entirely engaged with the marvel of the squid and the writer's mind which encompassed it. Congratulations, Wendy.

I can't honestly say I loved absolutely every second. There were moments when I found Williams's prose a little cutesy, or her transitions jarring, or I wished there was more detail about something. But for a slim book, it packs in an incredible amount of breathtaking information and also does a great job of presenting enough of the basic scientific context to let you understand the material. (E.g., I understand how neurons work a lot better now.) Consistently enthralling.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading *Kraken*. As a scuba diver I have long been fascinated by cephalopods, especially octopi and Caribbean reef squid. I marvel at their obvious curiosity and especially at their ability to mesmerize by changing their colors so quickly and beautifully. With reef squid, when you get close enough you can even see electric pulses going through their body that are iridescent and also very colorful. *Kraken* did a lot to explain how and why this occurs and goes even further to provide much information and discussion about the intelligence of these marvelous sea creatures. In addition to that, *Kraken* provided some big surprises. I had absolutely NO idea how valuable research on squid neurons has been to human research and medicine. That part of *Kraken* was truly fascinating. I highly recommend reading this book -- and you don't need to be a scientist or scuba diver to enjoy it and relate to it.

Cephalopods, a group of animals that include octopuses and squid, may be some of the oldest creatures in the known world and can vary in size from a fraction of an inch to hundreds of pounds. In this wonderful exploration of one of the sea's most mysterious class of creatures, Wendy Williams explores the strange and unique aspects of the cephalopod and explains why this odd creature may have done more for the advancement of medical science than any other animal in the world. She shares the reasons people are so squeamish when it comes to this animal and the unique way they display intelligence that scientists are only now beginning to discover and tap into. Drawing upon research that stretches back hundreds of years, Williams shares the common misconceptions that have hounded squid and octopuses from their earliest days and delights her audience with the weird and wholly unexpected reality and astounding facts about the cephalopods that abundantly fill Earth's oceans. I'm a nut for science writing, particularly nature writing. In my efforts to discover all that I can about the flora and fauna that populate the world, I sometimes come across a book that I can't ignore. This was such a book. I had never really given squid and octopuses much thought because, frankly, they seemed a little too gelatinous and slimy for my liking. But when the opportunity to review this book came up, I jumped on it because it fed my need to know more about nature and the strange things in the sea. I wasn't disappointed in the slightest by this book and found that Williams has not only a conversational and accessible style, but that she used the most fascinating analogies and illustrations to show just what being a cephalopod is all about. Both octopuses and squid have developed and adapted all sorts of body weaponry over the millions of years they have evolved. They are known as experts at defending themselves, which seems counterintuitive because they don't have the protection offered by bones or shell with which to repel

predators. Some cephalopods even take fleeing from prey to the next level, like the Japanese flying squid, who can launch its body out of the water to avoid predation. Some are adept at using their skin cells to change colors, and this technique is not only used for camouflage, but also to turn parts of their bodies into either an attractant or repellent by producing some truly startling colors. All cephalopods live in salt water and some can live up to fifteen years. Most cephalopods, however, do not live that long at all. This book was so packed with interesting information that it was like a treasure trove for readers looking for strange tidbits to keep the brain churning. For example, did you know that there are a few squid who can expel a mucus-filled ink that actually mimics the form of the squid when it's released, making it easier for the animal to escape? Or that most cephalopods have three hearts and copper-based blood (as opposed to human iron-based blood)? Many people have probably heard that a cephalopod arm is capable of separating from the body, but did you also know that the severed arm has the capability to live independently for hours? Some cephalopods can even leave the water to hunt on land at certain times. One of the most interesting things I found while reading is that some cephalopods are filled with a protein based bio-luminescent bacteria that enables them to turn lighter and darker beneath the waves, enabling them to be both invisible to predators and giving them light with which to hunt more capably. The research side of this book was also fantastic. Because of cephalopod research, the field of neuroscience has advanced monumentally, and studying cephalopods has helped science fill in questionable evolutionary gaps that have remained unsolved for hundreds of years. Research on squid has even proved promising in the search for a cure to Alzheimer's. It was also interesting to discover that squid share many characteristics with humans, such as binocular vision, similar neurons and neurotransmitters, and even some intellectual developments. The book also shares the fascinating logistics of cephalopod reproduction (which was an eye-opening section indeed), and expounds on the ability of cephalopods to solve complex and multifaceted puzzles. In fact, researchers at this point are a bit stumped in devising puzzles for these animals that will challenge them, because at this point, they have figured them all out in record time. As of this book's writing, scientists are trying to discover a way of quantifying cephalopod intelligence, which is proving to be a difficult task indeed. Reading this book was like being in a natural science class, but unlike a science class, the book was always entertaining and relevant and never repetitious or boring. I found so much here to pique my interest, and as far as science writing goes, this book was top-notch. Maybe I'm the only one who thinks that the myriad creatures of the sea are fascinating, but I have to say, if you pick up this book and give it a few pages, you will be just as engrossed as I was, I'm sure of it. In this fascinating look into the science of cephalopods, no stone is left unturned.

A remarkable read.

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