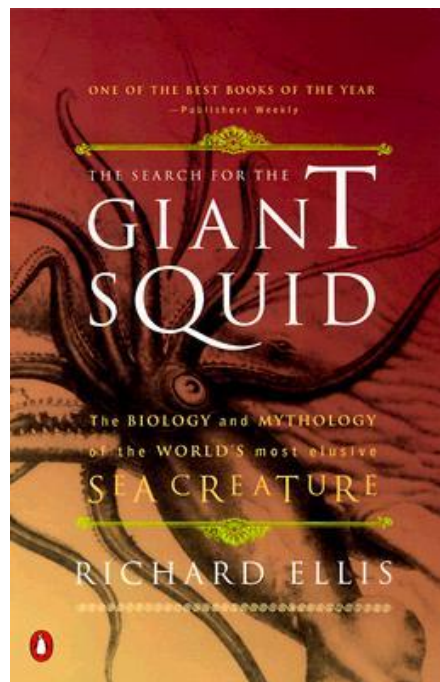




The Search for the Giant Squid: The Biology and Mythology of the World's Most Elusive Sea Creature

Richard Ellis

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The most mysterious and elusive of all sea creatures, the giant squid -at least sixty feet long and weighing more than a ton- is also one of the largest. With two whip-like tentacles, eight arms studded with toothed suckers, and two lidless eyes the size of dinner plates, *Architeuthis* has inspired myths and movies, nightmares and religious conversions. Yet it has never been studied while alive.

Marine biologist, explorer, and artist Richard Ellis delves into myth, literature, and science to bring readers face-to-face with this remarkable creature as it terrifies sailors and fishermen throughout history and battles for its life against the great sperm whale. Ellis continues his exploration into the modern era, when scientists rush to study a rare carcass, and the giant squid is a staple on the big screen.

Interweaving his narrative with a wealth of illustrations and photographs, Ellis gives us the first scientific and cultural history of the only living creature that can still truly be called a sea monster.

The Search for the Giant Squid: The Biology and Mythology of the World's Most Elusive Sea Creature Details

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From Reader Review The Search for the Giant Squid: The Biology and Mythology of the World's Most Elusive Sea Creature for online ebook

Mike says

A bit of a let down. While the book does a decent job of compiling all the basic knowledge of the giant squid up until 1998, strandings, sightings, and its appearances in art and literature to boot, the author's writing style leaves a bit to be desired. I figured I'd blow through the book, because what could be more exciting than giant squid, right? Wrong. This book D R A G G E D on forever and I just wanted to be done with it. Reading this book felt like listening to a dry college lecture, which is too bad because a book about giant squid should be anything but dry...

Michael Campbell says

Much more interesting than I had imagined, as I have only a passing interest in Giant Squids. The book is incredibly detailed, and that was a good thing in parts I found interesting and a bad thing in parts I found less than interesting.

The chapters on the history of the giant squid, it's representation in fiction, and it's relationship to the sperm whale were really interesting! The chapters on it's theorized biology, not so much, but that could just be a lack of interest on my part.

Overall, if you want to know more about squids, turn here. If you don't, it still has some fun facts and stories to read!

Danielle T says

At the time of publication, this was one of the most definitive compilations on Architeuthis. Alas, that was 1998, and this book is now showing its age, but it's still a very good survey of the historical and cultural accounts of the giant squid. I checked this out shortly after the Discovery special aired January 27th, 2013 because I was curious about previous information in deadtree edition. Also swore to actually finish an Ellis book because I frequently check them out, but never get to them in time.

Besides the obvious change from no live sightings until last year, the other science/technological difference I noticed is that while discussing how many species there could possibly be within Architeuthis, gene sequencing was never mentioned as a tool. All proposed species were based on morphology, and even then those could be variations between individuals, life stages, etc... but now that we have the power of sequencers, could we check out preserved specimens and discern patterns? Probably, and that's probably been written about elsewhere but I haven't gotten to it yet.

The species now known as the colossal squid is also mentioned, but not by that name- Mesonychoteuthis hamiltoni was the only one given, no common name at that point, only known by Antarctic carcasses. Another interesting thing- Architeuthis sightings and carcasses mentioned are predominantly in the Atlantic, with some in New Zealand but only a handful mentioned in the northern Pacific (which is where footage of

live giants have been obtained).

Still, a very interesting read, especially for the historical and mythological contexts of monstrously large cephalopod sightings and then-speculation as to what the living creature might actually be like.

James says

of the known creatures of the world, the giant squid is one about which not a lot *is* known, so i recognize that this means that a lot of the info contained within such a difficult project as writing a scientific book about *architeuthis*, is going to be based on speculation and prior reports, rather than first-hand examination or research.

it would also make sense then, that in the interest of not plagiarizing, and not wrapping up within 50 pages, there would be a considerable amount of excerpting going on to provide that aforementioned known information. unfortunately, aside from just making the book feel like a research paper, it ends up that a lot of what is written about is hypothesizing on unconfirmed info.

this is, i guess, mostly just a personal complaint based on what i was hoping to get out of the book. much like many others, i'm fascinated by the idea of these giant cephalopods swimming around in the depths where we can't see them, and i've long been interested in both the fact and fiction about them. what i hoped for, then, was a little more clarity, and what i got was, well, a very little bit more clarity.

the chapters on the history of the squid and what we know of it & the squid in pop culture and fiction were the most interesting to me because they felt the most arguably concrete, being as they are about the mythology and fiction of the squid and therefore, it's not important that there isn't a whole lot of hard fact.

ellis's conclusion to the book also makes me want to give the book a 3.5, rather than a 3 because it puts everything else that's come before into perspective, consoling while not apologizing for not having a whole lot of definitive info. it also ends with an excellent quote from john steinbeck from *the log from the sea of cortez*: "men really need sea-monsters in their personal oceans...for the ocean, deep and black in the depths, is like the low dark levels of our minds in which the dream symbols incubate and sometimes rise up to sight like the old man of the sea...an ocean without its unnamed monsters would be like a completely dreamless sleep." ellis then ends with: "we need to find the giant squid, but we also need to not find it," and in many ways he's right for exactly those reasons that steinbeck mentions.

being a fan of horrors and monsters, though, i guess then i just wanted to see a little bit more.

Nick Black says

most of what was worth reading i'd already seen in Discovery or Nature or similar rags. the rest is, at times, border-nonsense and certainly rife with speculation, purple prose bursting forth like the jettisoned sepia of enraged giant squids presented with so many calamari taunts. all better texts teuthologic, however, are so frightfully expensive as to render them, for all real purposes, nonexistent.

THIS, SPRINGER-VERLAG-ELSEVIER-DICKCLICKERS, IS HOW WE WILL BURY YOU WITHOUT FIRING A SHOT.

i'll miss our plottings regarding the cephalopods, elise.

Charlie says

I love giant squid. This book is devoted entirely to all aspects of giant squid. I read it as a lonely, zoology-obsessed 8th grader and it's been one of my most re-read books ever since.

Amanda says

This book has a lot of information about giant squid - all of the scientific knows and unknowns and legends & fiction about the gigantic mollusks. It was very fascinating and compelling to read, especially the speculations and explanations for sea serpents, and the thoughts on what sperm whale and squid battles are really like.

There were great drawings reproduced of squid sightings and photos and the like. The only thing I thought was missing was a diagram of what the giant squid's rough anatomy and a map of where the squid sightings occurred. There were descriptions of both of these in the text, but I could have really used some visual aids.

Pete says

I read this because my son is fascinated with giant squid. But there was not enough info on the giant squid for a book apparently, as this one surely demonstrates. As other reviewers have mentioned, the chapter on giant squid models almost made me put the book down.

And despite time to explore that in excruciating detail, there was nothing on squid anatomy, and very little on how other squid work in general for comparison. Also, very little on the sperm whale which would've provided some information on the giant squids only predator. Instead we get a review of poetry involving the giant squid. Do not read this book.

Chriss says

This is a good book to get a history on thought and theory about the giant squid and other large cephalopods. There's also an interesting section relating 'sea serpent' accounts and how other researchers have postulated that these were really giant squid sightings.

This is a scientific book, though, and while it is easy to read it is repetitious. Each chapter begins with several paragraphs that set-the-stage, then come a bunch of paragraphs of data and quotations, than the chapters end with several paragraphs that sum up the chapter. It's not bad, it's just that you get a little overwhelmed by the repetition when you sit down to read the whole thing at once.

There is recent research (as in new this century, in the aughts/2000s) on the giant squid that isn't in this book because it was published in 1999. There has also been a successful scientific mission to videotape live giant

squid in the ocean during this century. Which, again, doesn't appear in this book. So, this is a good resource of past thoughts on the giant squid and great if you want to know about the history of giant squid hunting and sea monster. But you should get a book published 2005 or later if you want to know the current knowledge we have about these nifty critters. (note: this review was written in 2010)

Bioteo says

Interessante monografia sulla specie di invertebrato più grande e misterioso del pianeta. Come sempre Richard Ellis intreccia mito e realtà come solo lui sa fare. Alcune parti del libro, in particolare quelle in cui l'autore descrive minuziosamente ogni singolo ritrovamento di *Architeuthis*, risultano un pò noiose ma nel complesso il saggio si candida ad essere l'opera di riferimento per tutti coloro che vogliano approfondire la conoscenza di questo mitico animale. Il libro venne pubblicato nel 1999 quando nessun ricercatore era ancora riuscito a fotografare, avvistare o semplicemente osservare un calamaro gigante in vita. Tutti i reperti derivavano da animali spiaggiati o presenti negli stomaci dei capodogli. Tuttavia recentemente, per l'esattezza il 22 dicembre 2006, un ricercatore giapponese, Tsunemi Kubodera, del National Science Museum, è riuscito a filmare e fotografare una femmina di calamaro gigante di 7 metri vicino all'isola di Chichijima, 960 chilometri a sudest di Tokyo. L'animale venne attirato mediante un'esca fissata su di un cavo. Se Richard Ellis deciderà di pubblicare una seconda edizione del libro non potrà che descrivere minuziosamente questa fantastica scoperta!!

Stephen says

4 stars for the biology, 2 stars for the mythology. That evens out to a 3 right? The Giant Squid is a fascinating and elusive creature. Up to 60 feet long with nothing hard in it's skeleton except a vestigial shell (squids have evolved from mollusks like snails). All of our knowledge of the creature comes from remains that are washed ashore or the contents of whale's stomachs. No one has seen or observed an *Architeuthis* in its natural habitat so everything about it is open to speculation. What it eats, how it hunts, is it social or solitary, how it mates ... everything. The author does a good job of picking out the most likely scenarios for each based on the evidence and his research on other squid species. The mythology around the squid is another matter. The author's presentation boils down to critiquing inaccuracies in how the Giant Squid is portrayed in various popular media (books and films). Since he himself has a hard time describing the squid accurately, i miss the basis of his criticism. That part of the book could have been edited. It was mostly a good read though, particularly for a non-fiction work.

Nostalgia Reader says

3.5 stars, not good enough to round up, though.

For a book about a creature that seems to be relatively impossible to study accurately, this book is full of information on all aspects of giant squid, including detailed chapters on the various sightings and studies of beached squid.

However, much of the time I spent reading felt like I was reading a textbook designed for marine biology majors. For me, there was never a solid introduction to the squid, and much of the information was presented

in a way that, although I could follow, seemed to jump around and focus purely on measurements of the squid and where they were found. Of course this was interesting, but my mind a) doesn't think in numbers and b) wanted something that was tailored more towards a casual non-fiction reader. There were parts where I found myself very bored because the information was presented like a thesis paper.

The set up was also a bit odd... there were sections that didn't flow together very well, as if each was a separate article, then just pieced together for the book. It also seemed like the author wanted to point out every single mistake that early researchers and authors made in their reports and stories. And yet, in the conclusion, he makes a point that maybe he shouldn't exclude certain reports and sightings simply because they didn't fall into the "accepted" range of facts that he used to qualify a "giant squid."

Even though I was disappointed with the formatting and presentation of facts, I did still learn a lot about squid (giant and otherwise). I originally wasn't going to pick this up when I say it, but then decided that squid are cool and that I subconsciously wanted to learn more about them. Anyone interested in squid, both in a scientific and cryptozoological realm, should at least give this book a try. I'm sure there are other books that are more reader friendly, though, so if you don't read this one, there's probably others that are an easier read.

Bill says

If you know me, chances are you know my love for all things Giant Squid. It's an inside joke with some, it's on my favorite hoodie, and it's just kind of a casual interest of mine. So when I noticed this book on my buddy's shelf as I was helping him move, I asked to borrow it. It made for a pretty intriguing read, even if it was written pretty much entirely from a scientific standpoint (then again, it's a book about the search for the giant squid, so what did I expect?). My main issue is that the book tended to belabor a lot of its points. I felt that at times the author just repeated himself in the sake of stretching out the page numbers. Still, if you have a love for the squid like I do, it's worth the read; I know I learned much more than I ever thought I would.

Meg says

An interesting and rather detailed exploration of the giant squid. The author covered the topic well, considering no one has ever seen a healthy living giant squid before. I especially enjoyed the many photographs it contained. Stop after the chapter Battle of the Giants. The rest of the book focuses on Architeuthis in movies, literature, and museum models. To me, this seemed really out of synch with the other chapters, as though he just wanted to pad his scientific material with an extra fifty pages of squid stuff.

Caleb says

I wish this book was better...My wife gave it to me for my birthday some years ago, and I anticipated inky deep-water unknown science, like James Burke or Lawrence Weschler (who wrote "Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder" which I loved). The story is compromised by a confused timeline and too many stories of squid pieces washing up on indistinguishable shorelines. Neither enough science, nor enough human quirky stuff (like E. Annie Proulx might have included).

Allyson says

Gosh this is a slow mover! The first part was really dry, a lot of biology and quotes from scientific journals. Here's my favorite, from Captain Arthur de Capell Brooke, who wrote of his travels in the northern seas: He trusts fishermen because they are "an honest and artless class of men, who, having no motive for misrepresentation, cannot be suspected of a wish to deceive." Therefore, he totally believes their accounts of sea monsters that are actually Architeuthis (giant squid).

OK, too much scientific language for me. I began to read the words automatically without 'listening' to them anymore. That is when I know I'm wasting my time with a book. But I enjoyed skimming the rest of the book, looking at the pictures and reading a few paragraphs here and there. I will be in my 80s when the next big squid uprising is predicted to happen off the coast of Nova Scotia. It will be interesting to see if the predictions come true.

Immanuel says

Richard Ellis's novel the search for the giant squid vividly compares and contrasts myth, legend, and fact about the giant squid. Richard Ellis carefully balances his information about this elusive sea creature with legendary stories and artifacts that tell us about this beasts long and forgotten past. Richard Ellis's novel explores deeply into the unimaginable, while taking you on an adventure with a ghostly secret. I enjoyed this book mainly because of its pace. The books plot and information is given to the reader at a steady pace. I would say that some of the information is repetitive and sometimes quite hard to understand. I recommend this book to a reader who enjoys reading a mysterious book. The book does not give a lot of straight facts, the reader must interoperate the facts according to his/her judgment.

Eric says

This book was given to me as a birthday gift from my friend Chris Werle, entomologist and musician. He likened it to the book Wasp Farm and I related it to other books of the same style, identified below.

This is a great book in the marine social-scientific realm. It discusses the anatomy, mythology, historical context, and modern understanding of the giant squid. A favorite for me are the numerous "encounter" stories retold in the book, of tentacles chopped from an attacking squid or of a strange beast floating by a merchant schooner... The book is fairly dry otherwise, like a college biology text.

Although less engaging, I'd put it in the same category as Cod and The Secret Life of Lobsters, both exceptional books in their ability to communicate the entire essence of an animal, particularly in relation to the human environment and social conditions it is involved with.

The last chapters of the book are interesting but almost formulaic in their presentation, again invoking the "textbook" feel. I can appreciate the thorough research, but a catalog of models of giant squid is almost too much. The conclusion of the book leaves the reader with the assertion of an open mind on the part of the author and tries to rekindle the flame of possibility he spent much of the book dismissing. This is like asking a question, answering it yourself, then asking it again just so no one can say you didn't allow your definitive answer to be questioned. Probably something forced by the editor to soften the text.

Overall a very good book if you've got an open mind about it! Interesting the way that works.....

Wendy says

This is a thorough--possibly over-thorough--examination of a creature we know very little about. The author seems aware of this, and for the most part does a decent job juggling mythology and science of the kraken, poulpe, or calimari gigante. First he covers all the mythological creature sightings throughout history that could conceivably be explained by giant squid. Then he covers, in text-book level detail, every last dead squid that washed ashore since the early 1800s, including lengths of bodies and tentacles, level of decay etc. (I couldn't help zoning out through much of this). Then we're back to mythology, this time a catalog of every instance a giant squid starred in a fictional work, from Moby Dick to Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea to The Shipping News. This was a fun bit, but strangely out of place after those pages and pages of squid chemical composition and reproductive structures. I did enjoy how the author smirked at those amateur authors and movie producers who completely butchered their squid portrayals. The tentacle on the cover of Beast has hooks in the center of the suction-cups! For shame! If I ever write a kraken into a novel, I'm so going to nail it now that I've read this book. Richard Ellis will be so proud...

SR says

Fun snarky history by an eyerolling expert on a fascinating topic. The only fault I found with it is the repetition of certain historical reports - the book makes good use of page citations, so not sure why I had to read that passage from Moby-Dick four times. Regardless, good fun, and an excellent example of intrafield arguing.
