



## Hidden Creatures

The oceans account for more than 70% of the Earth's surface. The deepest parts of the oceans remain largely unexplored, so it's no wonder that there are still enormous creatures that we know very little about. These are some of the most strange.

### The Battle of the Squids

Scientists have discovered two species of enormous squid. The colossal squid is sometimes called the Antarctic squid. Scientists currently reckon that it is about 12-14 metres long when fully grown. Its eyes are the size of beach balls. The suckers on the tentacles of the colossal squid are covered in sharp, swivelling hooks.

The other species is known as the giant or Atlantic squid. Scientists still can't work out which is bigger. The colossal squid is stouter and wider and so much heavier, but the giant squid has much longer tentacles and grows to be much longer in size. Specimens of giant squid have been found that measure 18 metres long. Their eyes can be as wide as 50 cm.

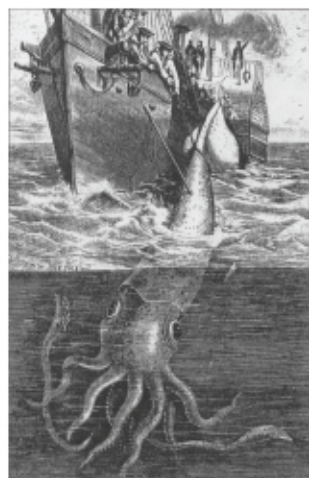
Both types of squid appear to be the main food source of the sperm whale, so there are clearly enough in the ocean to feed such large animals. However, fewer than 100 hundred of them have been captured in the last 100 years. These enormous squids are most likely the origin of the Kraken legend.

### The Immortal Anemone

There are 6500 species of sea anemone in the world. You might recognise some of them as the jelly-like blobs found on stones in rock pools. They use their stinging tentacles to stun and snare passing prey. One of the most amazing things about sea anemones is that they don't age. Their bodies are constantly repairing themselves and renewing their cells. This means that they have the potential to live forever. Unfortunately, most of them are eaten by predators before they get the chance to prove this.

### Mermaids

For hundreds of years, sailors often wrote of seeing creatures swimming in the water that were half-fish and half-human. The most likely explanation for their sightings were sea mammals



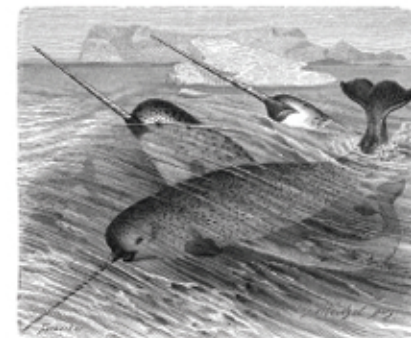
called manatees. These tend to live in shallow waters or mangrove swamps, which were often dangerous for ships to sail in. This explains why mermaids were often thought to lure ships to their doom.

### Giant Serpents

Measuring nearly 12 metres long, the oarfish is the longest bony fish in the world. Most sightings of giant sea serpents are likely to have been of oarfish. It normally spends its life around 200 metres beneath the surface of the sea. It comes to the surface when it is sick or injured. This is when most sailors will catch a glimpse. When fully grown, they can weigh 180kg (roughly the same as a giant panda) and have a circumference of over a metre.

### The Unicorn of the Sea

Narwhals are instantly recognisable by the long tusk that sticks out from its head. The tusk is actually a tooth that grows longer than the rest. It was thought to be a magical creature for hundreds of years, and its tusk was highly-valued. They can dive to nearly 1,500 metres in search of food. Narwhals have a very limited diet and habitat. This makes them at risk due to climate change.



## RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What are the two types of squid known as?
2. Which type of squid is longer?
3. Why don't anemones live forever?
4. Manatees were often confused for which mythical creature?
5. Why do narwhals dive to great depths?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

- S** How might anemones be able to live forever?
- I** Why might sailors have thought mermaids were dangerous for ships?
- I** Why were narwhals referred to as unicorns of the sea?
- V** What does the phrase "origin of the Kraken legend" mean?
- E** Why has the author used titles such as Mermaids and Unicorns of the Sea? What impact does that have on the reader?