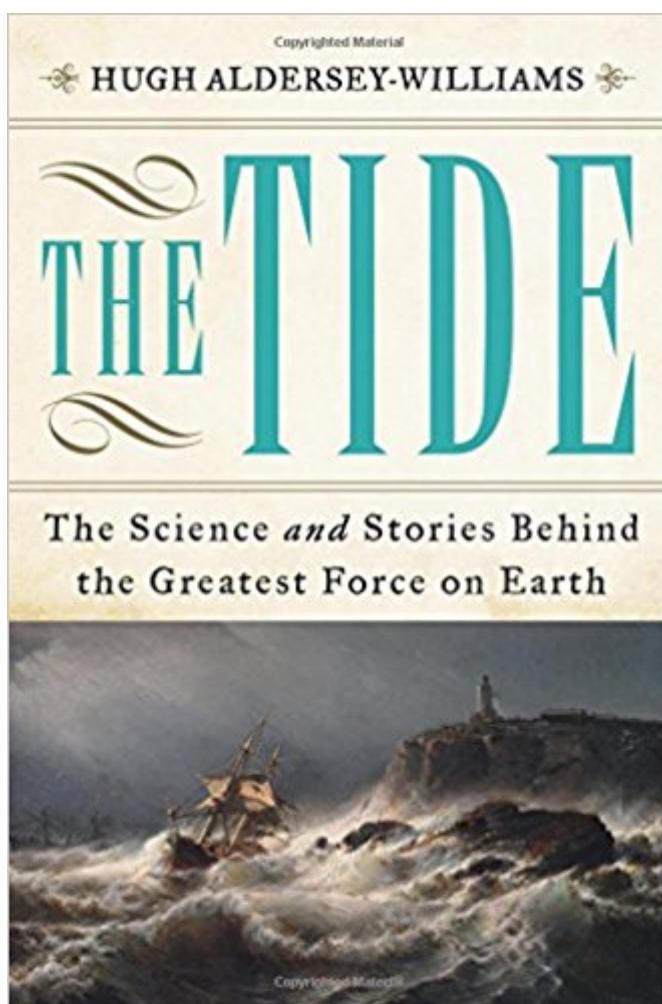


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# The Tide: The Science And Stories Behind The Greatest Force On Earth



## Synopsis

A rich and sweeping exploration into the science and history behind the most mysterious, primal, and powerful force on earth: the tide. Half of the world's population today lives in coastal regions lapped by tidal waters. But the tide rises and falls according to rules that are a mystery to almost all of us. In *The Tide*, celebrated science writer Hugh Aldersey-Williams weaves together centuries of scientific thinking with the literature and folklore the tide has inspired to explain the power and workings of this most remarkable force. Here is the epic story of the long search to understand the tide: from Aristotle, who is said to have drowned himself in his efforts to figure out the Greek tides, to the pioneering investigations into the role of the moon by Galileo and Newton, to the quest to understand and even control the tide in our own time. Throughout, Aldersey-Williams whisks the reader along on his travels in search of the most remarkable tidal phenomena. He visits the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia, where the tides are the strongest in the world; arctic Norway, home of the raging tidal whirlpool known as the maelstrom; and Venice, to investigate efforts to defend the city against flooding caused by the famed acqua alta. Along the way, Aldersey-Williams delves into classic literary portrayals of the tide from Shakespeare to Dickens, Melville to Jules Verne. And he reveals the tidal truths behind the Homeric tale of Scylla and Charybdis, the biblical story of Moses parting the Red Sea, the conquests of Julius Caesar, the Boston Tea Party, and the D-Day landings in Normandy. 12 illustrations

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“This fascinating book deftly explores the dramatic history, critical importance, and scientific wonder of the tides. Hugh Aldersey-Williams is a marvelous guide who takes the reader on a sweeping and thought-provoking adventure into the heart of one of the most captivating, mysterious, and elemental forces of nature.” - Eric Jay Dolin, author of *Brilliant Beacons*  
“Prepare for a voyage with the best of companions.” Hugh Aldersey-Williams is a storyteller supreme, and he has found a subject worthy of his talents. - Edward Dolnick, author of *The Clockwork Universe*  
“A wonderfully enjoyable exploration of the mysterious rhythms of the sea. I loved the combination of literary, historical, scientific, and experiential accounts of the tides, each ebbing and then flowing to allow the others to wash up on the pages of this remarkable book.” - Mark Miodownik, author of *Stuff Matters*  
“A superb book [and] a delight to read. . . . Imagine, if possible, a gently studious Bill Bryson crossed with an upbeat and relaxed WG Sebald.” - James McConnachie, *Sunday Times*  
“Exposes new facts and ideas every other page.” - Horatio Clare, *Observer*

Hugh Aldersey-Williams is the author of many books, including *The Tide*, *Anatomies*, *Periodic Tales*, and *The Most Beautiful Molecule*, a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times Book Prize*. He lives in Norfolk, England.

Lots of stories about the effects of tides, but very, very little science content

Great book on the tide! and related stories.

The subtitle of the book is rather misleading. The author collects plenty of entertaining and interesting lore about the tides, but the science is absent. He puts it nicely on page 311 when he cites a scientist "Go where the data is" ... "That's a really good piece of advice." Unfortunately Aldersey-Williams does not take it but goes on: "For a scientist, to be sure. But I am conscious that my topic is already complicated enough ..." and we wade through another 29 pages of stories that hold less and less interest. In the end, the book unfortunately accumulates many historical, scientific and geographical tidbits, but the sum of all this seems to be less than its parts. Finally, the book contains a number of photographs taken by the author. Some (most) hold interest, but they are presented without title or caption. To learn about the subject one has to go back to the beginning of the book and consult a list of figures. Overall, a disappointment. I recommend getting it from the nearest public library, have a good weekend with it and return it afterwards.

These are a series of fascinating stories about different aspects of the tides. I particularly enjoyed Chapter 11, "Into the Maelstrom" which describes different whirlpools described in literature and located around the world. The author gives detailed description of the different whirlpools and even visits some of them when they are active (times of high tides).

This is a difficult book to assess fairly. It is one that I enjoyed while reading, because it is well-written, but one that left me unsatisfied and only slightly more knowledgeable. It is an exploration of the impact of tides on humans from both a historical and a modern perspective. The book does not follow any obvious story-line but is rather a number of unconnected observations, some of which are more interesting than others. The opening is rather dull as we accompany the author while he observes a complete tidal cycle for thirteen hours at a marshy creek in Blakeney, Norfolk. He does not draw any memorable conclusions from the exercise and I was unable to arrive at any for myself. The author goes to considerable lengths to investigate massive reported tidal effects such as Charybdis and Maelstrom. These efforts mostly turn out to be rather unsatisfactory, in some cases because their locations cannot be found, in others because they may never have existed, and in yet others because, although they exist, they turn out to be much tamer than previously reported. The book contains illustrations in the form of rather murky photographs which are not directly referred to in the text, nor are they accompanied by figure captions - the reader has to return to the list of illustrations in order to find the titles. One wonders why the author and the publisher thought they were worth including in the book. Perhaps my greatest disappointment is that, although the word "Science" appears in the title, the book does not provide any convincing explanation for tidal action and for its hugely varying magnitudes between, say, Blakeney and the Bay of Fundy. The author does describe efforts by Aristotle and successors to explain the tides and why they were not wholly successful but leaves us without a modern answer. This is an interesting and important topic but it deserves a better book than this one.

This book is barely about tides, even though the author spent an entire chapter just watching the tide in some creek. I almost put the book down for good after that. He visits various places to see stuff like whirlpools, tidal bores, mudflats, etc. He goes on and on about the careers of scientists who once wrote a sentence about tides. It has some photos the author took. I didn't finish it because I didn't want to read an entire chapter about what true sea level is. That was really boring. This book should've been fifty pages long. Update: Forced myself to finish this so I could cross it off my

checklist. I read John Steinbeck's Log from the Sea of Cortez before this one though. Mr. Hyphen-Williams says Steinbeck's boat was the same name as the title (the Sea of Cortez), even though Steinbeck says it was the Western Flyer. That's pretty darn lazy.

Wonderful book compiling the history and science woven with a narrative that is both instructive and insightful. I look out on the tide every morning and feel that I know can see it more clearly and with much greater appreciation!

This is a fine book that covers a lot of ground, er, water, but the binding was defective and began cracking apart as I read it. Shame on Norton and other publishers for cutting corners in the publishing process.

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