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"The Secret of the Maygores"

by Matt Fuchs

Deepdiver begged his brother Windpuncher not to go.

"I must," said Windpuncher, packing his scant belongings. He pointed to the dark jungle that covered beneath the seven foothills, and beyond them, the sunlit hill-mount where the Maygores roamed. "This land is cursed."

"What makes you think the Maygores will let you pass, when they killed the others?"

"I told you the secret: don't look the Maygores in the eye. Don't look them in the eye and they'll let you pass."

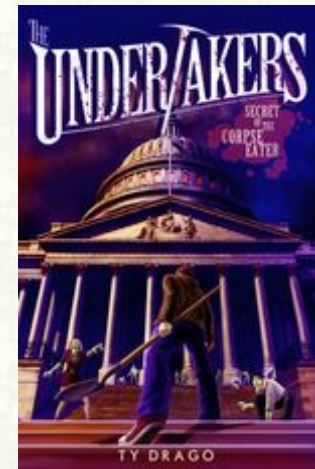
"I'll go with you," said Deepdiver, reaching for his own satchel. "We can Try together. I'd rather die with you than stay here by myself."

Windpuncher picked up his little brother's satchel and tossed it away. "If I make it, you can follow me. I'll wait for you on the other side."

The next day, the villagers undertook the rituals they hoped would grant safety to Windpuncher in his Try. The wisemen had changed the rituals, rewriting the songs, refining the holy powders sprinkled over the Triers. They altered the rituals because they'd never worked, except one time, it was said, a very long time ago.

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About Matt Fuchs:



Matt Fuchs writes speculative fiction. In his novella **Rise of Hypnodrome** (CCLaP, 2015), a political faction called the Lifestyle Party rises to

After the rituals, the villagers gathered to watch Windpuncher make his way up the first of the seven foothills. He gazed at the crowd while Deepdiver shook his head, blinking back tears. Windpuncher gave his brother a sad smile, turned and walked in the direction of the foothills.

Observing Windpuncher's approach, the Maygores came into view one by one, assembling on the hill-mount in tight formation. They formed a gauntlet. The sun glanced off their bodies which appeared smooth like black marble. They were giants--twenty feet tall, the wisemen said, and Deepdiver believed it. Even at this distance, he could see their long stony faces, each with a single spherical green eye, wide and alert.

As Windpuncher passed over the seventh foothill, the Maygores began their humming, so deep and loud, Deepdiver and the other villagers could feel the vibrations through the soles of their unclad feet. Windpuncher looked at his own feet as he entered the gauntlet. Sixty green eyes stared down at the new Trier.

Thousands of black birds filled the sky overhead. Maygore gauntlets always attracted them.

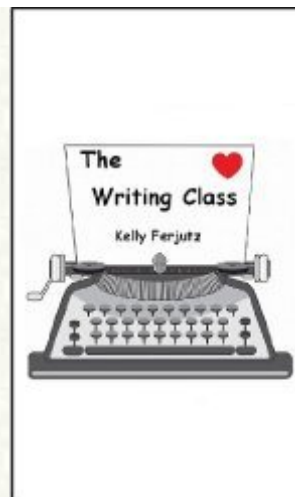
Deepdiver didn't know what he would do if his worst fears were realized. But when he saw the first Maygore pounce on his brother, he instinctively turned and ran for Swallow Sea, on the other side of the village. The expanse of Swallow Sea seemed endless; the village lay trapped between its waters and the hill-mount. Deepdiver ran to the edge of the Sea and waded into its coolness. He swam the surface for a long time, but he craved even more distance from the Maygores, so he dove and explored the depths.

It didn't take long before he heard it: the high-pitched song. He would come to love this melody. He would hear it in his dreams.

#

Many years passed.

Stuck in an accursed land, the villagers lashed out at one another; many more were killed than born. After Windpuncher's Try, they turned against the wisemen, blaming them for their awful lives, imprisoned in the jungle. They called them



power under the presidency of Deepak Chopra and rolls out a policy agenda to maximize personal happiness. Matt's fiction focuses on enlightened AI and fringe political ideas taking over. Links to stories in Compelling Science Fiction, **Centropic Oracle**, **Every Day Fiction**, and more can be found at fuchswriter.com. Other endeavors include law review articles on the first amendment and magazine pieces about adventure eating.

frauds and hatched conspiracy theories, accusing the wisemen of conjuring the Maygores into existence, though no one could remember a time when the Maygores hadn't guarded the hill-mount.

Deepdive probed Swallow Sea every day. He did it to get away from the turmoil of the village, but there was another reason he swam Swallow Sea: he had a feeling it contained the true secret to making it over the hill-mount untouched by the Maygores.

The other villagers warned Deepdive to stick to the land. In previous times, scores of ancestors had drowned swimming, and when they attempted voyages, their canoes went in circles and sank.

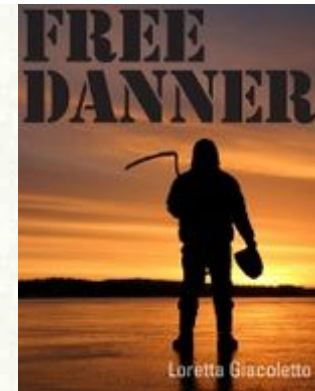
But he had no other escape. The day his brother died, when Deepdive first swam the Sea, he could hold his breath only a half-minute or so. He counted the seconds in his head. After five years of testing his limits every day, he could go without drawing breath for three minutes. And after eight years, six minutes.

He became well-acquainted with the marine life. He learned to recognize the different species, and eventually, individuals of each species. Deepdive could tell they recognized him as well. He felt at peace among them, whereas he never felt that way among the villagers. But one thing bothered Deepdive: no matter how long he searched, he failed to find the source of the underwater music.

Nearly ten years after his brother was killed, Deepdive finally detected a pattern to the music. Not just a pattern: the music formed a language, and he realized he understood this language. The melody told him the location of its source. He followed its directions to an underwater cave he hadn't noticed before, the mouth of which was hidden behind tangles of algae.

In the cave the song grew in volume. In the innermost chamber, Deepdive found a woman with blue eyes and long black hair that floated in the water above her head. She had gills instead of ribs, and rows of blue eyes on her chest instead of breasts. She smiled at him and the tune changed: *I am Cavesinger, and I know the secret of the Maygores. I have longed to sing it to you for many years. I can finally share it.*

The Maygores think no one understands their humming. They're wrong; the birds understand, and the birds confide in the wolves. The wolves speak to the bears, and



the bears pass their secrets to the fish, and the fish, you see, the fish speak to me all day long. That is how I know the Maygores' thoughts. They were as surprised as the villagers, hundreds of years ago, when they allowed the One to pass over the hill-mount.

Do what the One did, and the Maygores will let you pass as well. It is simple: you must believe in your heart the Maygores will not harm you. Then you will live to see the other side.

The humming stopped, and the Cavesinger's eyes closed on her face and her chest. She floated past Deepdiver and swam out of the cave, leaving him there. Deepdiver's lungs burned, telling him his six minutes were up. He swam to the surface of the Sea and gasped for air.

#

The day Deepdiver left the village, there were no rituals. There was no one left to perform them. All the wisemen had been killed by the villagers.

"You will die, Deepdiver," the villagers told him when they visited his hut. "Don't go. It's better to live, even in this cesspool of a jungle, trapped with each other, the wolves and the bears."

"It's suicide," his cousin told him. She was his last living relative; the rest of his family had been killed by fellow villagers, wild animals, or the Maygores.

"The Maygores won't harm me," said Deepdiver. "I believe it in my heart." He told his cousin about the Cavesinger's revelation.

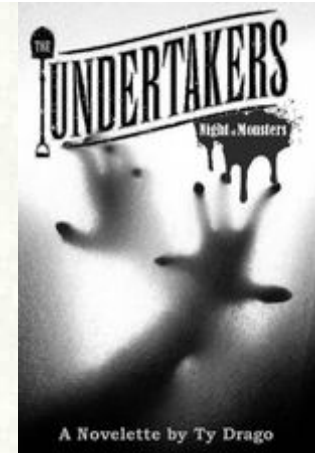
"How will the Maygores know you believe this?"

Deepdiver had also wondered that. "They must read minds."

"Fine, but how can you possibly believe they won't kill you, when you've spent your whole life watching them kill villagers just like yourself?"

"Unlike the villagers who died, I know the secret of the Maygores."

"What if the Cavesinger wasn't real? A mind without breath plays tricks."



#

The villagers watched Deepdiver make for the seven foothills. He felt at peace putting distance between himself and the village, a peace he had only ever known while penetrating Swallow Sea. This feeling confirmed for him that he had made the right decision in Trying to leave the village, even as he watched the first Maygore dash across the hill-mount. The Maygore assumed its position near the peak. Still, Deepdiver felt calm because he knew the Maygores' secret.

On the fifth foothill, Deepdiver looked up and saw that the Maygores had formed the gauntlet. Thirty Maygores stood tall on either side of the peak. Observed from the seventh foothill, they resembled a shiny black crown. Deepdiver looked back at the village. He wondered if his cousin was crying for him. He imagined what her reaction would be, when he passed the gauntlet unscathed.

Deepdiver couldn't wait to see the other side of the hill-mount. He couldn't wait to meet the One. Because he'd shared the Maygores' secret with his cousin, it would be just a matter of time before she Tried and joined him in the land of the unknown. No one since the One, he felt sure, had experienced such inner serenity while approaching the Maygores.

It was a marvel to view them at such close range. Seeing the flat smoothness of their bodies, Deepdiver concluded they truly were made of black stone. Some type of igneous rock – similar to, if not the same as the volcanic debris scattered through the valley of the village.

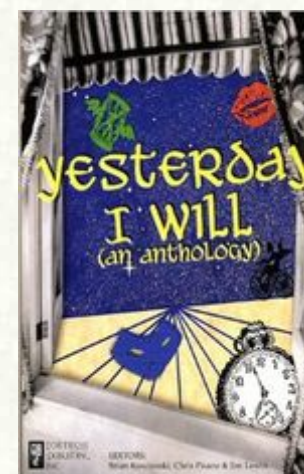
The first of the Maygores turned to him. "Hello."

Deepdiver could scarcely believe his ears. "You speak my language?"

"Of course." The Maygore's voice was deep and mellifluous.

The unexpected ability to converse with the Maygores put Deepdiver at even greater ease than before. He had many questions for this Maygore. "Is it true the hill-mount is a volcano?"

"Yes."



“Is it true the volcano is your mother?”

“Yes.”

“And the volcano is also your God?”

“No, it is not our God.”

“Are you Gods?”

“No.”

“Were you one of the Maygores who killed my brother?”

The Maygore considered the question, blinking its green eye several times. Then it answered: “Yes.”

“You killed him because he believed you would kill him?”

The Maygore smiled. It had no teeth. “You remind me of your brother.”

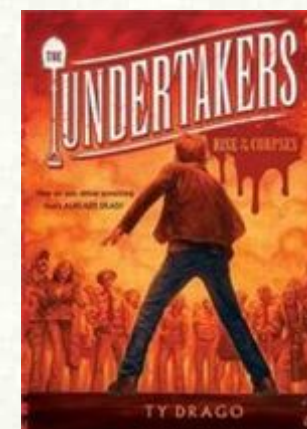
Deepdiver frowned. “How?”

“When we killed your father, your brother wanted to escape his sorrows and the havoc of the village. So he built a contraption that functioned like wings of a bird. The contraption let him fly. He flew so fast, he caught up to the birds. He plucked them from their flocks.”

“Of course. It’s why the villagers called him Windpuncher.”

The Maygore continued: “Due to our leaping ability, your brother couldn’t fly over us. He didn’t even Try. But high in the sky where the air is thin, he imagined a beautiful woman. He imagined this woman told him the secret to passing the gauntlet was not to look us in the eye.”

Deepdiver shook his head. There were tears in his eyes. “How did you learn all of this?”



“The birds don’t know we understand their cries. The birds overheard your brother having his imaginary conversation. They talked about it with each other, and that is how we found out.” For a moment, the Maygore looked puzzled. “I hear you’re a fast swimmer, Deepdiver. Tell me, did you catch up to the fish? Did you pluck them from their schools?”

“I had no desire to,” Deepdiver sobbed, knowing he was about to be torn apart. “Just tell me, before I die, what is your secret? Why did you let the One pass?”

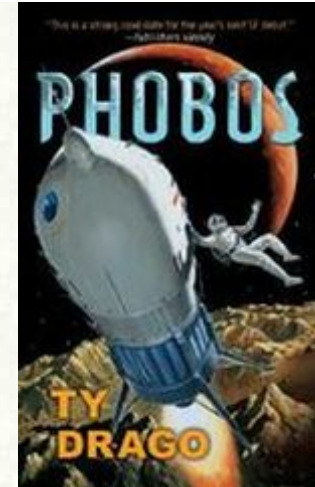
“The One is our God. That is why we let Her pass. If the One wishes to save you, you will be saved.”

Still looking at Deepdiver, the Maygore started to hum, making the earth tremble beneath Deepdiver’s feet. Moments later, when the other fifty-nine Maygores began humming, the sound was nearly ear-splitting. Deepdiver knew if he ran away, they would kill him. He was just as certain that entering the gauntlet would lead to his death. He stepped forward. He walked five feet. Then ten feet more. He wondered why the Maygores didn’t touch him. He counted each Maygore he passed, just as he had counted the seconds that passed while exploring Swallow Sea. The sweet memories of the Sea--the quiet down below, the variety of fish and amphibians--restored a measure of calm, even as sixty green monster eyes peered down at him. Regardless of what happened now, he realized, the dives had made his life worth living. Had his brother felt the same way about punching the wind?

He made it past the twenty-ninth and thirtieth Maygores at the middle of the hill-mount. For the first time, Deepdiver could see the other side. It resembled the jungle he’d come from, but this jungle extended to the horizon. There was no Sea. The land went on endlessly, it seemed, with unlimited possibility.

He kept walking. At the forty-ninth and fiftieth Maygores, he spotted a woman standing a hundred feet down the other side of the hill-mount. She stepped toward him. Everything else was still; she was the only living creature he observed beyond the gauntlet. The woman wore the traditional village attire. Even at this distance, Deepdiver could make out her wings. Cut into her sides were gills. A few eyes blinked at him at the edge of her tunic.

Fifty-eight ... fifty-nine ... sixty.



The black birds crowded the sky, blocking the sun.

Deepdiver listened to their cries, made sense of their message and wondered if it was true. He knelt in the shadows and kissed the quaking earth. The eyes on his chest blinked back at him.

