DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE
Educator's materials

What are they afraid of?

This book doesn't focus on phobias, the intense irrational fears of different things like acrophobia, arachnophobia, etc – the fears within the book are the fears of all of us, the people we consider normal and more or less fully functional.

> Fear is the fence we stand at, with the world on the other side.

We come close, we see some of the appeal and the beauty, but it's very rare to experience those moments of pure enjoyment, where worries are not drifting past, catching our attention. Walking in Arches National Park last year, I'd look at the scenes, the rocks and the vistas before me, and soon worry would drift in to capture my resting attention.

> "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" – Matthew 6:25-34

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The wise old squid

The wise old squid lives alone, with the dark wastelands separating him from the others. He is fascinated by the world, but afraid to leave the safety of his geode cave. Instead, he eagerly waits for treasures to be carried to him by visitors.

The wise old squid is living vicariously.

When we watch movies, television shows, play video games or spend time on the Internet, we're trading some of our lives, the limited time we all have, for the adventure, excitement or romance we're observing. Game designers rely on "achievement" systems to keep players engaged by maintaining a game's "longevity". These systems are effective and make video games addictive. Players rush home from routine days at school or work to refocus on their virtual objectives.

One reason a poorly-crafted movie or television scene is so jarring is that it breaks us from living out the scene ourselves and reminds us that we're watching a movie, not the one leaping from rooftops.

Even nectar is poison if taken to excess. – Hindu Proverb

In small measure, vicarious living enriches our lives, inspires us to try things we hadn't considered, or go places we've never been. We sometimes need reminding that whether we're living vicariously, or actually – these moments are spent in the only life we have and we cannot re-spawn our characters to play a stage again.

The wise old squid has kept the sunglasses for nearly a year, but he never considered putting them on to see the surface for himself. He's so accustomed to passively observing life, hiding in his geode cave that he has no actual life at all. Meeting Hatch, the wise old squid sees what he's lost.

> "The old squid turns to Hatch. "Please take them. When you come back tell me what you find up there. You are courageous, and I think you are right. I've hidden in this cavern my whole life curious about the world outside, but afraid to venture out into it. I think I have missed too much." – DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE

That's the cost of vicarious living in as short a sentence as I could write.

"I think I have missed too much."

Jellyfish

It is said that the bow and arrow have killed more people than the atomic bomb. I believe that if the actual destructive force of Facebook were measurable, it would be one of the most destructive inventions of all time. Marriages, friendships and careers are destroyed through Facebook every day.

I think that social media and the nearly unceasing texts and emails we receive keep our attention always on the surface. What drives this compulsion?

Are we afraid to fully invest ourselves and discover the measure of our best effort?

We're texting on devices designed to allow us to talk with each other. Texts don't tie us to the other person, we can send a message, and split our attention off again to some other superficial activity until a response arrives.

We skim the surface.

Thoreau had similar concerns with newspapers…

> "Just so hollow and ineffectual, for the most part, is our ordinary conversation. Surface meets surface. When our life ceases to be inward and private, conversation degenerates into mere gossip. We rarely meet a man who can tell us any news which he has not read in a newspaper, or been told by his neighbor; and, for the most part, the only difference between us and our fellow is that he has seen the newspaper, or been out to tea, and we have not. In proportion as our inward life fails, we go more constantly and desperately to the post-office. You may depend on it, that the poor fellow who walks away with the greatest number of letters, proud of his extensive correspondence, has not heard from himself this long while. – Henry David Thoreau, "Walden"

The jellyfish in DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE represent many of us living in the new millennium.

> "We like it here in Jelly Valley with everyone else," answers the next jellyfish. "We like the voices of everyone speaking all the time. We do not like the quiet.
> Hatch says nothing, but he's thinking about what the jellyfish said.
> They bump their way through hundreds of jellyfish. Each one asks where they are going and then drifts past without waiting for an answer." – DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE

"How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live." – Henry David Thoreau

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Bob the blobfish

Bob the blobfish didn't pull away from society. He didn't withdraw to the cold vent stack because he wanted solitude. He only stayed where he was, while gradually everything moved on without him.

As adults, we consider fears something we once suffered from and got over, like chickenpox. We encourage children not to be afraid of the dark and we smile sweetly at their innocent fears of monsters and boogiemen, knowing they will grow out of these. But, like chickenpox, fears do not go away, they are never cured, only dormant and if they surface later they may look like very different.

Older people have great courage, it goes with the territory. Our bodies aren't as resilient as they were in youth. I don't know though if we put ourselves out there in our relationships the way we do when we're younger. All those times that we've been hurt scar us and we remember. It's easier and safer to stand back and listen and watch the younger generations than it is to risk being hurt. We don't leave the world behind, we just gradually slow down trying to keep pace with it.

Stargazer

The stargazer long ago made his way up the winding path of the cold vent stack, followed the same path that Hatch's family did and they meet on top of the highest point. The stargazer came here long before, but unlike Hatch, this is as far as he can go.

> "Hatch asks, "You stare up at the bright world all the time, have you never wondered what is up there?"
>
> "Of course," says the stargazer. "I would like to see the giant creature that makes light up there. I would like to know, but I am afraid." – DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE

In the deep dark, all of the light is generated by bioluminescent creatures like Hatch and the glowing anemones, so naturally the stargazer assumes the great light above must come from a giant creature. He's comically incorrect in the physical sense, while blindly stumbling close to a metaphorical truth. The great light of the world does come from a being.

The stargazer has traveled far and sacrificed much. He's all alone at the top of the stack, staring always up and wondering, and he has made it as far as his exploring can take him. The next step requires pure faith and it has, so far, proven too difficult for him to take.

The stargazer is like the people that desperately pry at the mysteries of our life, our purpose. They seek and study, and may be able to quote chapter and verse, but stand stuck at the last step unable to take it.
Hatch and the stargazer traveled the same path and felt the same need for understanding. Hatch ascended while the stargazer waited uncertainly, miserable and unfulfilled.