

In the nearby woods there is an infamous cave complex that is surrounded by different kinds of rumors. Some say it is much more than what meets the eye and some say it's nothing but an old relic of times and people that are long gone by now. As life in a small town such as this grows boring from time to time, kids still, even in this modern society we live in today, find their way into the woods in their free time. Over the years this has led to some missing children, most of who haven't been found, a total of twenty over the last ten or so years. A few of them were found when they emerged from the woods after multiple days of being missing. Upon questioning, all kids manage to mention the cave but not much else which makes sense as the cave gets quite dark the further you venture into it and it can be tricky to find your way back out. However, some people believe there's more to the story and that the children seem disturbed and shaken by the whole situation. Most just chalk it up to being lost and scared but some insist that in this case there is something the kids aren't telling them because it makes no sense that these children are still noticeably different multiple years after being rescued. Evidence of this has been observed in the form of constant night terrors and strange attacks or fits that leave the victim almost paralyzed by fear where they refuse to or cannot move and mutter under their breath with a visibly disturbed expression on their face. This has led to big-city psychologists to visit our little town, but even their vast knowledge and expertise hasn't been able to pin-point exactly what the cause is and they just call it a case of extreme PTSD. No treatment has helped either and time after time these children suffer from these strange attacks and episodes in the night.

This, of course, means that more and more rumors have sprouted wings and are swarming the community in the whole town. I've even heard someone mention some ancient disease of the mind that hibernates in the cave and the further you go the worse it will get and the longer its effects will last. People have also tied these children with the ones that never returned, thinking they must still be in that cave as it is the only place we cannot search completely due to lack of equipment as well as knowledge of the layout of the thing. Now that I think of it, I don't think anyone in this town knows how deep or even which direction the cave spreads. Mostly for the lack of equipment, but partly also for the eeriness that starts to build up as you go further into the cave, people never make it too far into it. The popular theory is that only children would be gullible and innocent enough to go deeper into the cave with no regard to their instincts and only thinking of proving the older kids wrong. We have tried everything from setting up lights; tying ropes around people and having them go as far into the cave as they can but we run out of lights as well as rope before we reach anything that would even resemble an end. The passages just keep winding on in a maze-like structure that defies all rules of natural cave formations, almost like someone had dug it out somehow. The textures of the walls do seem to indicate that the cave has been naturally formed, but even the best renowned geologists have been left stumped as to what the origin of it might be.

Now you could think that a cave as strange as this would garner much attention from the outside world and you would be right, but only partly. There was a time about five years ago when there was a big media interest and there was a lot of coverage of our little town, but as people do, they moved on. Now what's left is just a few caving enthusiasts that have come and gone over the years. These people come in all excited for their upcoming adventure but after a few days they just mysteriously leave, as if they have grown bored or frightened by the massive system that exists under our feet. We have tried to ask these people as to why their interests dwindled, but they mostly keep to themselves and don't talk much even though they were full of excitement and hope at the start, almost like they shared some symptoms with the children that had gone missing, but not nearly as severe. Some even mentioned having nightmares after their first caving experience!

As you might have noticed, I am incredibly fascinated by this monstrosity that lies underground and over the years I have listened to the talk around town regarding the cave and the children as well as the hobby cavers. I have my own theories which I am eager to prove right or wrong and have devised a plan to visit this cave and get to the bottom of it all, literally and figuratively. Over the last year I have consulted the cavers that have come to visit and have paid for a few lessons in caving before they left. I also ordered some equipment from the nearest city, including headlamps, sturdy rope recommended for caving

specifically, food rations and other equipment including a helmet, knee and elbow pads, warm clothes, some toiletries, duct tape, lighter, pocketknife and a small first aid kit. These are the essential items that were recommended that I get when I was talking to the other hobbyists. I also have some paper and a pen to mark my route on in case I get lost. I also packed a cheap camera I found with some film left in it, hoping to collect some possible evidence or just help with backtracking and not getting lost in the tunnels. So here I am, writing this into my diary as I prepare to leave for the woods and what lies within. Everything is packed and prepared, I have informed my close friends of what I am about to do and even though they disapprove I am still determined. I must find out what's in that cave for better or for worse and if I can find at least the remnants of the missing children it will bring peace to the parents at least. Tomorrow morning I will leave and I will not come back until I have touched the bottom of that rigid, dark place.

I spent the night lying in my bed and going over my plan of action for the next day, which included double-checking my inventory and making estimates for climbing time and when to take breaks and what to do during them. I carefully planned out meals from the rations and snacks I bought to make sure I would have enough for the day. I also calculated that I would have enough food to last me three days so I needed water for a similar amount of time. I did not think it would take that long to reach the bottom but saving some for the way back would be best. After being certain of everything I could think of I caught a bit of shut eye.

Possibly due to all the strenuous mental work I've done on the topic of the cave and exploring it, I saw a dream that night that made me second-guess my plans for a moment after I woke up and before I realized that it was not real and nothing but feverish thoughts of an over-worked mind. In the dream, I remember being in the cave but the environment looked different and distorted, I did not recognize them from the few times I've actually been in it before so it must have been further into the cave. I also felt like I was being watched or generally just uneasy being in the environment I was in. I say watched because of the last thing I remember. It was bigger than me, in the soft glow of my head lamp I could only make out the silhouette against the cold stony walls up ahead in the tunnel but I could tell it was big, whatever it was and there were three pairs of eyes reflecting my light right back at me, giving an eerie shine to them. It must have been expecting me as I could make out a strange sound, almost like it was laughing, while shuffling towards me. I froze in my tracks and tried to turn off my head lamp but as often happens in dreams, I could not move, nor could I scream even though it was the thing I wanted to do most at that moment. As it crept closer to me, I could hear it trying to whisper something although I could not make out any words or any sounds that would resemble human speech. Before the creature could come fully into the light so I could see it properly, my inner defense mechanism of hoping it's all a dream kicked in and I woke up, sweaty and terrified in my bed with my mind racing before calming down as I realized what had just happened. Just a dream.