

Malevolent Maine

Season 2 Episode 2: The Deepwoods

Malevolent Maine is a horror podcast, and may contain material not suitable for all audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

INTRO:

MARK: A mysterious man claiming to sell the soil the dead are buried in. A restricted section of a library that may contain dark secrets. And an encounter with a being that can only be described as extraterrestrial. These are some of the stories we're working to bring you in the coming weeks.

Hey guys, this is Mark. At Malevolent Maine we work to uncover the hidden truths and shine a light on the dark corners of the state. And we couldn't do it without your support. Make sure you like, follow, listen, and review our episodes wherever you can. More reviews means we work our way up the algorithms to a larger audience. Follow us on social media. If you're able and willing consider buying and wearing a shirt from our online store. Or if you're exceptionally brave, join our Malevolent Mob over at patreon.com/malevolentmaine. There you can interact with us and gain access to exclusive material not seen anywhere else. Special shout out to Alden Fouraker, our very own eldritch being and super fan.

Again, thank you for all your support.

The cave is dark and the stone presses in on you from all sides. The air is cold and stale. You're only able to move forward by crawling, pulling yourself forward inch by inch. Suddenly a dim glow from up ahead catches your eye. You emerge from the tight tunnel and find yourself in some sort of forest, dimly lit by glowing green fungus. Where are you? What is this place? You hear a hushed whisper from behind you but you only see dark shadows. You're all alone down here... or are you...

This is Malevolent Maine.

Guys, what was that?

I saw it with my own eyes

No, seriously, what was that?

It's just not scientifically possible.

I can't explain it.

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God.

This stuff is wild, man. It's real wild.

But... what was that?

This is a deep one, MMers. Those of us lucky enough to grow up in Maine, know full well the wonder of exploring the woods as a child. Carving your own path as you snap twigs and duck under low branches. Feeling the crunch of dead leaves under your feet as you avoid the prickly bushes. Whether we did this with friends or family we all have fond memories of it.

I know I do. My grandfather and I used to go on 'adventures' around our house which is set back a ways from the road. We would walk down to the brook, throw a few rocks, look at the sticks the beavers had chewed up, then head into the woods. We would walk around just a hundred feet from the house, but it felt like a different world.

As we grow up though we lose that wonder, some might still go out into the woods to hunt or hike, but many lose that drive for exploration. Still more people avoid the woods altogether, too

many ticks, an aversion to poison oak, whatever else it might be, the urge to stay away is powerful enough to keep that child-like wonder at bay.

Our story today, comes to us from two childhood friends who experienced that sense of youthful exploration in a unique and perhaps supernatural way. Alex Wilcox and Darren Gentry had all but forgotten about their childhood escapades in something they called The Deepwoods.

Lucas spoke with Alex just after the holidays.

LUCAS: I met Alex in South Paris at a small coffee shop. He grew up about ninety miles north in the small town of Eustis, right at the base of the Appalachian Mountains. He's 40 now, and works for an IT company. He told me it was weird talking about the Deepwoods again after so long because he hadn't seen Darren since high school. He said the two of them reconnected on social media after Darren heard an episode of our show. He told me as boys the two of them would always be out in the woods near the mountains, exploring, rough housing, just playing around. The summer before they had tried to build a treehouse but it was less than stable. They were going to go back out and fix it up the summer they were ten. They went out looking for supplies: strong pieces of wood to brace their treehouse and boards to make rungs for a ladder, but they soon got distracted and instead wound up exploring the foot of the Appalachians.

The Appalachian Mountain chain is a system of mountains that run along the eastern region of North America, stretching from Alabama all the way up through Maine. They are roughly 480 million years old and some of the oldest mountains in America. The Longfellow Mountains form the Maine portion of the Appalachians.

The Appalachian Mountains are full of their own urban legends and myths. From wampus cats to Bigfoot, ghost hikers to mountain

witches, there are plenty of strange stories. That being said, there are relatively few stories of what lies *beneath* these mountains.

The way Alex told the story, as the boys approached the foothills, Darren began talking about an article he had read about spelunking in *Ranger Rick* magazine. Spelunking, or exploring caves recreationally, has become something of a popular hobby, though Maine often doesn't have the appropriate type of cave systems to make this viable.

LUCAS: Alex told me that eventually the two boys abandoned their collected wood and instead began searching the mountainside for a cave. It was almost dark by the time they found a rock face that had a good sized crevice in it. From the outside it didn't seem like it would be a deep cave but they were desperate for anything at that point so they went to look at it.

The crevice opened up after a few feet into a decently sized chamber, at least it seemed that way to the two kids. It was about a six foot by six foot chamber. And at the back, mostly hidden in shadow, it looked like there was another crack or crevice like the one they had just squeezed through.

At that moment their half-finished treehouse was completely forgotten. Instead a plan blossomed to turn this new cave into a new clubhouse. The boys were unable to return until the next weekend, however. They had a final week of school to get through, but all they could think about was going back to the cave. Alex said he wanted to invite some other kids from their class, but Darren insisted they keep it a secret between the two of them.

The next Saturday, they made the trek back to the cave, hauling behind them things they could use to turn it into a hideout. Alex brought an old rug. Darren brought some camp chairs and a stack of comic books. It took awhile to carry everything up to

the cave and arrange it, but once everything was perfect, Alex said Darren wanted to go further into the cave.

So they went through the crevice at the back of their cave which led to a smaller room and that room had a small tunnel carved into the back just large enough for them to crawl through if they got down on their hands and knees. After several feet the tunnel started to slant down. Alex said the decline got steep very quickly. He was nervous about sliding down and not being able to climb back up, but Darren urged him to continue on.

LUCAS: Alex told me he tried to get Darren to leave with him but he refused. Alex actually stopped and started to wiggle his way back up but that made him even more scared. That's when he told me he heard Darren yell from somewhere up ahead that he saw a light. Alex kept crawling forward. After a short time he emerged from the cramped tunnel. Darren was standing in front of him and that was the first time they saw the Deepwoods.

They were in a huge stone chamber that was dimly lit with greenish-blue light. They figured out later that it was the moss on the ceiling that gave off the glow. They found themselves in some sort of underground forest. There were trees with black bark, and when they brushed by them they felt rubbery and almost slimy to the touch. There were thick brambly bushes around the stone walls of the chamber, and the grass that covered the floor was extremely pale, almost white.

The side walls of this strange forest chamber were about twenty feet apart, but Alex told us, the two boys were unable to determine how far back the chamber actually went. He said the glow from the ceiling moss only went about fifteen feet from the crawlspace from which they entered. That first time in the cavern, Alex said Darren wanted to explore further, but he made him turn back around.

They returned to the cavern they dubbed the Deepwoods several more times. Each trip, they attempted to explore further and

further. One time they brought flashlights but after exploring back into the strange subterranean forest about fifty feet, the batteries died. Another time they brought Alex's father's Coleman lantern. Alex said that time they made it back maybe a hundred feet but then the lantern began to sputter and die.

Alex began to dread their trips into the Deepwoods, but Darren grew more and more frantic to find the back of the cave. "It became almost a game to him," Alex said. "We could never reach the back - to this day I have no idea how far back that chamber went - but Darren wanted to go further and further in."

Finally, Alex and Darren took their last trip together down into the Deepwoods. This was towards the end of the summer, and by then Alex said he hardly ever wanted to go out to their cave clubhouse. He said he found reasons to avoid going out there and felt like his friendship with Darren was growing apart. He tried, but he couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong with the Deepwoods. Still, he couldn't put Darren off forever, so eventually he agreed to go down one last time. This time, Darren told him they were going to bring back some souvenirs.

Alex brought along his pocket knife and Darren brought his father's hatchet, and together they made their way up the side of the mountain and into the cave that would lead them down for what would be their last time.

They made their way through the caves like normal, but once they got to the Deepwoods, things felt different. It was warmer than normal; normally the Deepwood was cool, like an autumn evening, but this time they were sweating by the time they crawled through the tunnel. The fungal lights were a lot dimmer, a dull blue throughout the forested chamber instead of the almost electric green. Darren paid it no mind, however, and immediately headed towards the back of the woods. He was saying over and over how "he'd find the back this time".

As soon as they emerged into the Deepwoods, Alex said his pocket knife never left his hand. Darren immediately began jogging towards the back of the chamber but Alex stayed towards the entrance. At first Alex said he could hear Darren moving through the strange black trees and dark shrubbery. Then his footsteps faded to a whisper, and soon Alex couldn't hear anything at all. He started to wander around the entrance debating whether he should muster up the courage to follow him or if he should just leave without him. By accident, forgetting where he was, Alex leaned up against one of the black trees and his whole arm was covered with sticky sap that looked black in the dim light. They had never seen any sap on any of the trees before, and his revulsion at the thick tar-like substance only heightened his growing terror. As he was trying to get the sap off his arm he heard Darren's voice in the distance, yelling to him: "Hey come look at this".

LUCAS: That day we were sitting in the coffee shop, I asked Alex if he was sure the voice was Darren's. He said he couldn't be one hundred percent certain, but he thought it was. So he walked up to a line of trees that was his point of no return - he never went beyond that line - and he waited to hear if Darren would yell again. He said he couldn't bring himself to go any further. Then the blue glow started to flicker and dim even more. He said with every flicker of the lights, the crawlspace became less and less distinct. He knew it was there, he said, but as the cavern grew darker he became convinced the tunnel entrance was shrinking or moving. He was almost convinced it had disappeared altogether, when he heard Darren's voice again. It wasn't a yell like before. This time it was oddly calm: "hey look at this". It was closer than before, he said, like Darren was slowly walking towards him.

Many people would have run towards the exit, but Alex says his knees betrayed him and he fell backwards into a sitting position. His breath came in ragged gasps, but for the life of him he couldn't call out to his friend. Only a dry rattle

escaped his lungs. Slowly, he started crab-walking backward towards the tunnel.

As he was backing up Alex heard Darren's voice one more time - "look at this" - but it was almost a whisper. The lights flickered again and he saw a shadow moving towards him. Even in the dim light, Alex said, he was usually able to make out parts of Darren's clothes among the black trees, but this time he only saw a Darren-shaped shadow, all black, complete with the hatchet dangling at his side.

Something inside Alex snapped, and he finally regained his footings. He turned and ran back to the tunnel, scrambling up it, and through the crevice into their hideout. But he didn't stop there; Alex Wilcox ran all the way home.

LUCAS: He told me he didn't know if Darren had been pranking him or if something in the Deepwoods had changed him, but in that moment he didn't care; he needed to get out of there. It never even entered his mind to wait for his friend. Even thirty years later it was clear to see the fear on his face as he remembered that day in the cave.

Alex said once he got out of the cave and into the sunshine he noticed the sap on his arm that he had at first thought was black, was instead blood red. That only scared him more. He said when he got home, he threw all of his clothes in the trash, turned the water up as hot as he could get it, and jumped in the shower. He said it was five minutes later that he realized his pocket knife was still clutched in his hand.

That night, hours after his frantic run through the woods, Alex heard from Darren. He didn't come over but he called Alex's house. He chided Alex for leaving him down there. He told Alex he was almost to the end of the woods, he could feel it, when he called to Alex. He said he got nervous when Alex didn't answer so he decided to head back. Alex told him about the shadow that he now realized couldn't have been Darren but he blew it off, saying Alex was just scared and being a baby.

Alex said after that they were never as close as they were before the Deepwoods. They talked some in middle school and even less in high school, but never about what happened that day in the cave. Alex said he never went back to the Deepwoods or even their hideout, and though he says he's not certain, he's pretty sure Darren never went back either.

We attempted to contact Darren Gentry for his side of the story. Our calls went unanswered and the emails and direct messages we sent were unopened.

LUCAS: Alex told me it was Darren who contacted him recently, ready to reminisce about their adventure after listening to one of our episodes. He told Alex he was thinking they should go back to the Deepwoods and explore it fully. Alex told him he didn't think it was a good idea. Darren Gentry was last heard from right before Christmas. He was single and had no family, and Alex told me he isn't even certain Darren didn't just move or go on a long vacation somewhere. But he couldn't shake the feeling that Darren had gone back into the caves, back to the Deepwoods one last time.

Alex Wilcox says he's never going back to that cave, whether or not Darren did. Before he ended our interview he gave us one last thing: a map to the Deepwoods.

Before we go any farther, we should point out several things. The first is that, according to biologists, an underground forest of twisted black trees and white grass is impossible. One expert we talked about said that it is possible for trees to grow underground, but that it doesn't mean what you might think. Trees, especially in rain forest conditions, that have been continually cut down, can begin growing underground, developing thick woody root-like substances. These aren't tree caves, but a root system that looks vaguely tree-like that grows in the soil.

Another thing that seems to defy logic is that according to geologists there aren't many cave systems in the Appalachians, and none that would match the description of what Alex and Darren saw.

From a scientific perspective, the Deepwoods are simply unthinkable. And yet, we believe Alex's story. So with the map in hand, Lucas and Tom decided to head up to Eustis and explore the cave Alex had marked off.

TOM: It wasn't difficult to find the area where Alex and Darren used to play. It wasn't far from either of their homes and that gave us a definite starting spot. As we started walking through the woods, it didn't take us very long to find the old treehouse the two had built years ago. It looked like it was barely clinging to the tree where they had built it and there were large patches that had rotted away. From there things got a little more difficult.

One of the possibilities we had to deal with was the fact that they wouldn't be able to find the cave entrance. It could have collapsed over the years or become blocked somehow. Even more realistic, Lucas and Tom might not even be able to find it. Still, the two of them were prepared to spend a few days in the area and our hopes were high.

The woods had grown a little thicker over the years, a little more overgrown, but it didn't take long for Lucas and Tom to find the base of the mountain. Another half hour of searching and they spotted the sheer stone surface Alex had described. Sure enough there was a crevice in it that led into the mountain itself.

LUCAS: It looked a lot smaller than Alex made it sound in his story, but I suppose that was because he was just a kid at the time. Still, Tom and I thought it was just big enough for us to fit inside.

Inside the first chamber, the cave looked much like Alex had described it. There was a tattered rug on the stone floor. It had seen better days but the woven pattern was still visible. Two camp chairs, with rusty aluminum frames were arranged around the rug. There was a stack of moldy comic books in one corner and a milk crate of empty soda cans along another wall.

LUCAS: The place looked relatively well-maintained for being abandoned for thirty years. There was no sign animals had been in the cave at all, which is odd. Another thing I noticed is that typically caves like this are made of limestone, the water gets in and makes the caves. This one is mostly granite or at least seemed like it.

The crevice that led to the second room was easy to spot, though looked much narrower. The boys had brought along high-powered flashlights, rope, and some recording devices, as well as their phones in hopes of documenting the Deepwoods. After a few tests, they determined they could fit through the crack in the wall into the second chamber.

Beyond the second chamber, they eventually found the small tunnel that led down to the large cavern with the black trees. The opening was a little over a foot high and narrow. It didn't take much more than a cursory glance for Lucas and Tom to realize there was no way they were going to fit through.

TOM: It was just too small. I could see how kids could crawl down there, but Lucas and I didn't think we could do it.

They started recording as soon as they got into that second chamber. There wasn't much to hear, but the two wanted an account of what happened as they investigated the tunnel. They shined their flashlights down the tunnel, hoping to catch a glimpse of the cavern below.

LUCAS: No, no. Shine it down there. No. Right there.

TOM: Yeah. Got it.

LUCAS: Hey. What is that?

TOM: Holy shit! Is that... is that..."

About three feet down the tunnel Lucas and Tom saw something. After some effort, they were able to pull it out and confirm what it was.

LUCAS [in the cave]: Okay, so I'm holding a boot that we found in the small tunnel. It's a size 12 work boot. It looks well worn, but relatively new. This isn't something that's been down here for long. It's something that -

TOM: Didn't Alex say that Darren worked in construction?

LUCAS: Oh shit. You don't think...

TOM [yelling down the cave]: Darren? Darren?

The two quickly found a long branch outside the cave and attached Tom's phone to it with the rope they had brought. Tom turned his camera on and they slid the branch down the tunnel, giving them another eight feet or so.

Here's Tom talking about what they saw.

TOM: So the footage didn't show much. The tunnel was pretty cramped and I have no way of knowing how Darren would even get in there. At one point we saw what looked like scratches on the stone walls, and something that I'm pretty sure was a thumbnail wedged into a crack in the stone. We tried to angle the camera down the tunnel to see if we could see the bottom, but attached to the stick, we just couldn't get the angle right. I'm pretty sure at one point we can see the glow of a faint light source, but... I don't know.

To be clear, at no point, whether with their flashlights or with their improvised camera extension were Lucas and Tom able to see beyond the crawlspace tunnel that led to the forested chamber. Neither one of them was able to conclusively confirm that the Deepwoods exist.

After their grisly discovery both Tom and Lucas were a little freaked out and contacted the police. Both the footage they shot and the boot they recovered have been turned over to the Maine State Police. They have requested that while the investigation is ongoing we keep the footage private. When we are able to, we'll do our best to share the video with you on our website.

It doesn't seem possible that Darren Gentry would be able to fit down that tunnel. He stood well over six feet tall and had the muscled body a life of construction will give you. He was by no means a small man. And yet, is it possible he found a way to wedge himself into the tunnel? Contortionists have been known to transform their bodies into all kinds of shapes that seemingly defy explanation. And we know that desperation can lead to all sorts of superhuman responses.

As of the time of this episode's release, Maine State Police are still investigating the cave and determining how or even if they can properly widen the tunnel to explore what lies below.

One last update on this story. While we were preparing this episode we found something buried in the audio from Lucas and Tom's time in the cave. When they put the camera on the long stick and ran it down the length of the tunnel, the phone captured some audio. Most of it is the muffled scrapes and bumps as the camera slid down the shaft. You can also make out the muffled conversation the two of them are having.

Around the four minute mark of the video, just before they began to pull the camera back up, we heard something. It was faint, soft enough to go almost completely unnoticed, almost like a small puff of wind or a sigh. When we had our producer Megan enhance the audio, however, we found something startling.

First we're going to play the unedited audio. If you listen carefully, just after Tom says, "I don't know," and before his next sentence, you should hear the sound.

LUCAS [in the distance]: Hold it steady.

TOM [in the distance]: I'm trying.

LUCAS [in the distance]: Do you think it's him? I mean could he really get down there?

TOM [in the distance]: I don't know. I don't see how it could be.

It was so soft it missed our first few viewings of the video, but once we discovered it, we couldn't stop hearing it.

Now here is the enhanced audio:

STRANGE VOICE: "...look...at...this"

It is the same thing Alex believed the shadow Darren said to him while in the underground forest. We actually played this for Alex, and he said while he couldn't be positive because so much time had passed, he said he thought it sounded like the voice he had heard thirty years ago.

If there is some sort of shadow creature living in the Deepwoods, we have several questions. First, what is it? Legends have spoken about shadow people for centuries. The Inuit, the indigenous people of Canada and Alaska have stories of beings they call the Tariaksuq, an entire race of shadow people that exist alongside us. There are relatively few examples of shadow people in Maine historically, but it is possible the creature Alex encountered is something similar.

Then there's the question of what it was becoming. Alex said the shape looked like Darren, complete with his father's hatchet.

That seems to imply the shadow creature was able to change its shape or evolve into something. That coupled with the repeated phrase, the only English it seemingly learned, leads us to believe that the creature was in a transition process becoming something else. Becoming Darren.

So why didn't it crawl out of the tunnel? If it was Darren-sized, it should have been able to crawl up the tunnel and out of the cave just like the boys did. Did it not want to leave its underground forest or was something else holding it back?

It is hard to say whether or not the Deepwoods also emit some sort of hypnotic compulsion. Darren seemed entranced with the Deepwoods, urging Alex to go deeper and deeper into the caves. Despite the boys growing up and moving on, once he was reminded of the Deepwoods, Darren seemed to be drawn to it once again. Then again, Alex seemed to display none of that urgency. He felt quite the opposite, in fact. Neither Lucas nor Tom felt any sort of pull to enter that narrow tunnel, and in the days and weeks since have felt no desire to go back. If there is some sort of addictive quality to the place, it seems to only impact a select few people. Could it be connected to the fact that the shadow being seemed to bond to or mimic Darren instead of Alex?

We simply don't know.

We should know more in the coming weeks. As authorities ramp up their investigation of the cave system, they should reach the forested cavern, whether by widening the cave or sending in some sort of drone system. What will they think when they encounter the subterranean world Alex and Darren discovered? And more importantly, what...or who will they encounter? We hope to bring you updates to this story as more information becomes available, so stay tuned.

A last bit of warning. We were tempted to post the map Alex had marked for us, but upon further consideration, only some of which is because the cave is now part of an active

investigation, we've decided to hold back. Nothing in the Deepwoods was inherently dangerous. Neither Alex nor Darren were ever harmed on their trips down there. It's entirely possible that the shadow creature was just as scared of them, as Alex was of it. However... Lucas and Tom couldn't help but feel uneasy in the back cave, a sense of dread that seemed to grow as they neared the crawlspace to the black forest. We have no way of knowing if the Deepwoods is dangerous, but after everything we've been through, we like to err on the side of caution. We have intentionally been vague on the cave's whereabouts not just to protect the ongoing investigation, but also you, our listeners.

If you ever find yourself crawling through caves and end up in a strange underground forest of black trees and pale, white grass, we suggest you don't stray too far from the exit, and keep your eyes on the deep shadows.

VOICE: Look at this...

Stay safe out there, Maine.

Malevolent Maine is Lucas Knight, Tom Wilson, and myself, Chris Estes.

If you'd like to read more about our investigations check out our website at malevolentmaine.blogspot.com/

While there, don't forget to check our merch store. And, if you're so inclined, support us on Patreon at patreon.com/malevolentmaine

Thank you for listening to Malevolent Maine.

And as always, stay safe out there, Maine.