

TRAINING

Alan could see the numbers on his dive computer slowly working their way toward zero, but there was nothing he could do about it. He was lost and it was dark. He didn't know how to get back to the opening of the cave entrance toward his dive buddies and safety. And that was when he realized he was going to die.

The Diver

Alan was a certified cave diver with hundreds of dives in the surrounding springs. He regularly took the time to learn more about his sport, continuing to seek additional certifications and training. He was a thorough planner, both in his day job and in his diving activities.

Lessons for Life

The Dives

Alan and three buddies arrived at their chosen dive site early. Their plan for the day included making a dive that morning to set up stage bottles and then making a longer dive that afternoon. Stage bottles are additional scuba cylinders they planned to leave throughout the cave that would allow them to penetrate farther into the system without carrying the additional gear. In many cave systems, there are permanent lines for divers to follow. To prevent other divers from finding the additional cylinders, they decided to leave the cylinders off to the side of the permanent lines. They left nothing to chance in their dive plan.

Dive one went perfectly. They left the cylinders in place and were excited about the next dive. It would mark a personal achievement with regard to time and penetration into the system.

The Accident

While preparing his gear for the second dive, Alan realized he had unclipped his large backup dive light to free a cylinder. He had set the light down and forgot to pick it back up.

He wanted to make sure it had fresh batteries before their long penetration, so he decided he would make a quick dive to grab the light while the others went to fill their tanks. Out of embarrassment, he didn't tell them his plan.

After watching his friends drive off, Alan grabbed a single tank and regulator and entered the water. He planned to be in the water only a few minutes, so he took only a smaller backup dive light with him. Alan turned on his light and headed for where he remembered leaving the primary light. Because they had staged the cylinders away from the main penetration lines, Alan was swimming freely inside the cave system, rather than staying in contact with the line.

After a moment, he noticed his light growing dim and then suddenly, it went dark all together. The light was flooded. He was inside a cave with no light, a small air supply and had lost contact with the guideline that would help him find his way back out.

Alan began a methodical search inside the cave passage in an attempt to find his guideline. He descended to the bottom of the cave and began slowly swimming in what he hoped was the direction he had come from. He would regularly check his air supply on his illuminated dive computer and could see it slowly dropping toward zero.

As a final attempt to get out of the chamber, he shed his gear and took his last breath from his regulator. He hoped the flow of water leaving the spring would bring his body to the surface in time for his friends to revive him.

Analysis

Alan broke several "rules" and paid the ultimate price. You never enter a cave system without a backup light. You string a guideline as you enter so you can find your way out. The mantra of the sport is preparation and redundancy.

Taking shortcuts or violating the basic rules of the dive, even if it's "short," is a sure way to get yourself into trouble. Most of the time you will get away with it, but sometimes too many problems or mistakes compound to catch up with you, and there is no way out.

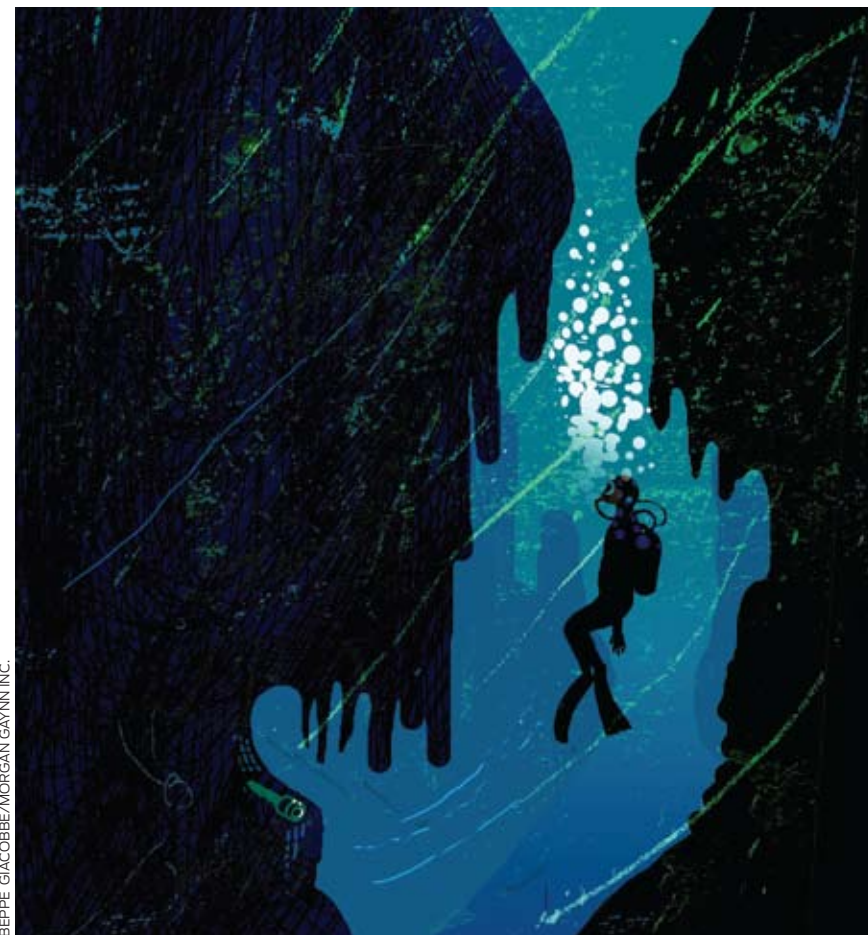
There's a saying within the cave-diving community: Any diver can call any dive for any reason at any time. If Alan had thought about his dive or spoken to his buddies rather than letting ego get in the way, he probably would have lived to make the big dive that afternoon.

Lessons for Life

- 1 Never enter an overhead environment alone and without the proper training or equipment.
- 2 Be prepared for the dives you plan to make. Don't cut corners or try to get by with what you have.
- 3 Don't let confidence or ego cloud your judgment and allow you to do something for which you aren't prepared.
- 4 Always let others know your plan.

Death in the Dark

Alan makes a quick dive in a cave that he wasn't prepared for, and it leads to tragedy. This is a true story, but the names have been changed. ■ ERIC DOUGLAS



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