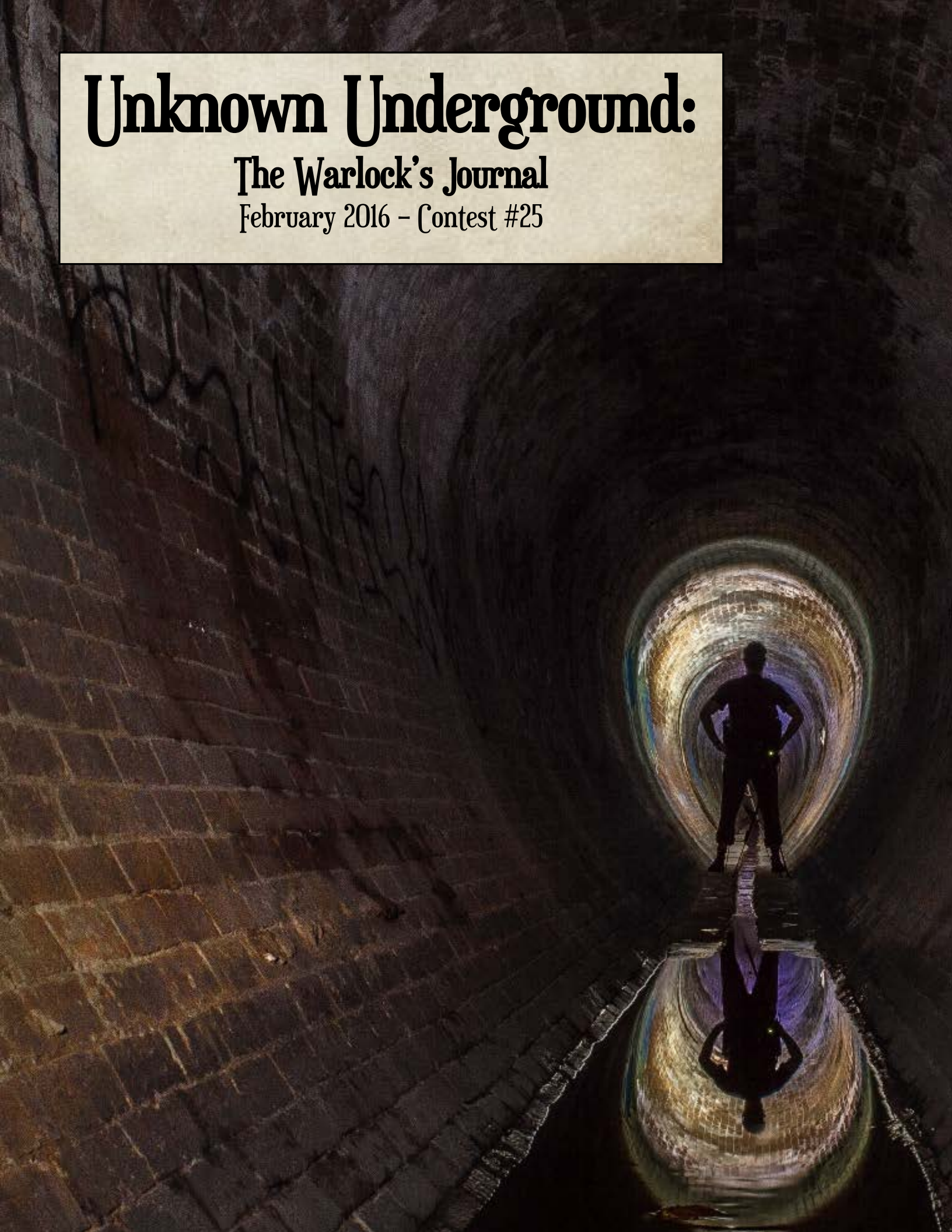


Unknown Underground:

The Warlock's Journal

February 2016 - Contest #25



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The Warlock's Journal - Contest #25

Introduction

Welcome to *The Warlock's Journal* Contest!

The Warlock's Journal is a roving contest, at a different blog or website each month. The host picks the topic and then solicits entries from the RPG community at large. When all the entries are in, they are shared with the community and a fan vote is taken for the most popular entry. In February 2016, the contest was hosted by Tabletop Adventures.

This month's topic was "Unknown Underground." The challenge given was to describe a mysterious underground place, in any genre, in less than 500 words. The locations described range from various caverns, to areas beneath modern buildings, to futuristic locations. Writers were allowed to submit more than one piece, and a few people chose to do so. The public was invited to vote on the entries (which were presented anonymously) and select the favorite.

The winner of the Warlock's Journal Contest #25 was Ben Moats for his entry, "Uncle Morty's Mole Racing and Underground Funland." Congratulations, Ben, on having the favorite selection!

This is the final version of "Unknown Underground," which gives the name of the author of each piece as well as acknowledging the winner and adding inspirational illustrations. Visit the Tabletop Adventures website for the entire list of Warlock's Journal Contests.

We hope you enjoy each entry, and wish you good gaming.

The good people of Tabletop Adventures,

And the Overlord.

Unknown Underground

Bunker

Author: Dean Keith

Underneath a small suburb lies a bunker. Not large, it is only around three thousand square feet, but built completely in secret. The entrance lies in a shed in a resident's backyard. A section of the floor slides back to reveal a gently sloping tunnel. This tunnel curves as it descends making the depth and distance from the shed deceptive. There are small, led lights giving off just enough light to make your way along.

Eventually a large, thick, metal door comes into view. Opening the door reveals the bunker. There is about fifteen feet of space twenty feet wide between the door and a wall. This space contains several small spots of piled dirt and several water tanks used for growing desired food stuffs. There are grow lights suspended above each dirt pile and water tank. The wall rises eight feet toward the ceiling ten feet above and contains two small window openings and a door. The ceiling is painted blue with white spots for clouds.

Through the door lies the living space, two thousand square feet of it. There are five bedrooms, three bathrooms with composting toilets, a kitchen, a laundry room, and a recreation room. Each room has all the amenities you would expect in a nice, above ground house. Through a door in the back of the house lies another seven hundred square feet of space containing power generators, air scrubbers, and the water system for the bunker which provides clean, running water.

In the two feet of space above the house are the pipes and wires supplying the house, and garden space out front, with power and water. It also serves as an air tunnel to keep the air circulating.



Caverns of the Yeti

Author: Terry Bryner

Yetis, the humanoid inhabitants of the Himalayas, seem to vanish when pursued. Their hairy feet leave few tracks, and at certain places they simply drop into the snow. Burrowing swiftly a short distance, they squeeze into a small tunnel and are gone. Adventurers finding such a tunnel can enter the Caverns of the Yeti. They are dug into the solid rock of the mountains and honeycomb some areas of the Himalayas. Tight entrances lead to more comfortable avenues, which meet at large communal areas where the Yetis gather to share food and sleep. They are totally dark. The Yetis can stand light, but have little need of it. Their hearing is excellent, so much so that they can detect each other by the noises made by casual movement. They are fiercely protective of the secret of their Caverns.



Caves of Steel

Author: Terry Bryner

The junkyard had been at the edge of town for decades. Automobiles, appliances, and discards of any kind rusted or rotted for acres. Recent refuse included electronics, even reasonably complete computers. At the back was a dilapidated office for the minimal business conducted, with a workshop in the basement left from the days when some attempt to repair the junk was made. Forgotten at the back was an entrance to the city sewer. The basement was rarely entered during the day, mostly just to deposit more junk. But strangely, at night tools powered up, lights and welders flashed, it became a hub of activity. For somehow, robots had been assembled from the junk, and were manufacturing more robots. The junk machines, built of washers and refrigerators and lawn tractors, roved the sewers during the day, and came back to the basement workshop to improve their fragile mechanisms and create more robots.

Comet of the Wyrms

Author: Terry Bryner

The comet is approaching. A rocky core covered with ice, it speeds in from deepest space. Its path is calculated to take it a few thousand miles from the Earth, safely distant to avoid a collision. But there is still danger. A dozen holes, a score of feet in diameter, lead into the interior, which is honeycombed with passages made by the inhabitants. Ice dragons dwell there. They sleep when the comet is outside the solar system, but awake as it nears the sun. Flyby satellites indicate strange technology on the surface, as if the dragons have captured aliens from a distant place or time. The tunnels twisted down, containing whatever ice dragons value, and of course an unknown number of their sleeping selves. But the behemoths can leap vast distances across space when awake, and guide themselves with jets of gas. And they are coming close to the Earth and Moon colony.

Cryo-vault 4747

Author: Simon King

When the Lightstorm hit, governments had to scramble quickly to protect their populations. For many this involved evacuation to abandoned mines where mutation, starvation and disease took their tolls. For those lucky enough, rich enough or with skills deemed essential enough to resurrecting society, the governments with sufficient resources hurriedly built protected mountain citadels deep within the earth where the burning Light could not reach, to sleep long and await the time of rebuilding.

But many things can go wrong with such an undertaking. Even if there is only a small chance of an accident, over time that small chance grows in probability until it is a near certainty. So it goes with Cryo-vault 4747. Here, the sleepers did not awaken as they had planned.

Locked behind massive blast doors, now covered with debris from a centuries-old avalanche, the vault is like a skyscraper pinned deep into the earth. At the base is The Mechanism, a geothermal reactor now dead after shifts in the local tectonic plates withered its thermal power supply. With its death, The Guardian, the vault's governing AI, also expired, leaving the building's defenses and wandering wargolem protectors operating in low-power mode and according to their own, far more limited, logic routines.

The lowest levels of the vault (above the lifeless reactor) are the engineering levels, where the operating systems are situated. Above this are located dozens of storage rooms, where vehicles, equipment, weapons and seed stocks are kept in volume; a virtual treasure trove for any survivors who could get to it. The mid-levels are filled with cryo-tubes, rank upon rank of them. With the death of mains power, so too died the bulk of the inhabitants; most in the embrace of their long sleep, but some awoken by emergency resuscitation routines only to find themselves locked within their tubes, to die lingering, miserable deaths, screaming in the darkness. A few, very few, cryo-tubes are still working with emergency battery power, their occupants still in their dreamless sleep. If they were to be awoken, they would be at best disorientated, at worst insane, but perhaps bearers of important lost knowledge. A few sand ghouls managed to infiltrate through cracks in the vault's outer shell and avoid security patrols

long enough to find a cannibal feast awaited them in the mid-levels. This area is a haunted place, both literally and figuratively.

The upper levels are basic, home to disused administration areas as well as the foyer leading to the gate mechanism. It is in this area that defensive traps are most highly concentrated, though who can say how many are still working. At the very top of the structure is a platform that extends outside of the protection of the mountain- The Panopticon. Here sensor arrays and viewing galleries monitor the surrounding area covertly, awaiting changes in the environment that signal the time has come for re-emergence and rebuilding, though for this vault that time will never come.

Deep Water

Author: Christopher Allen

An underground corridor of featureless, industrial grey concrete slab reaches a set of double doors. One has been jarred from its hinges by some ancient impact. There is a humidity unfamiliar to the sterile under corridors; it seeps through the ajar door in a wet mist. The padlock and chain looped through the handles has rusted nearly through from exposure to the seeping damp; it is easily shattered, to move beyond.

The chamber drops precipitously away once inside, but a dim glow, radiating greenish from luminated strips set into the ceiling prevents a fall. The light is unsettling, and closer examination reveals a weird, brackish mottling all over the strips. The chamber is large--but the palpable moisture fills it, a swimming mist in the dim light.

There are steps down inside the door. The chamber is bowl-shaped, of the same reinforced concrete. It is slick--not just from the sheen of humidity, but from clots of grey-green, algaic mold, growing loosely across the stairs.

An unexpected gleam of metal reflects the wan light: to either side, benches are set on the descending tiers of concrete. Aluminum, likely, to resist corroding even in this miasma.

At the bottom of the bowl, there is a slosh, muffled by the mist but still audible. A great rectangular basin resolves from the darkness, flaking white paint rimming its edge, tiles below suggesting they were once blue, but now mostly blackened with mold.

There is still water, in the bottom depths of the ancient pool. Brackish, sludgy, coated with a foulness that ebbs and coils across the surface.

And then, disquietingly...something beneath the surface *moves*....



Doom Garage

Author: Terry Bryner

The parking garage on 8th street had been closed for decades. An entrepreneur with more vision than expertise had built it three stories high, but dug many levels down into the ground. The lower levels had storage rooms and passages tunneled out under the city. Next to the car ramps leading down were stairs (elevators were not common in those days.) Expensive cars filled the spaces, and the rooms were fitted with strong doors, rented to keep rumored valuables and mysteries. Then the ramp leading down collapsed, taking the adjacent stairs with it into a mass of rubble. The city condemned it, and forbade recovery attempts. Now, gangs frequented the upper levels, but rumors continued of what lay unclaimed in the dark, crumbling spaces below...and made the strange noises heard in the dead of night.

Down South

Author: Margaret Ernsberger

The tall man stood in the front doorway, a catch of fish held in one hand. "I got six today," he said, "and Johnny caught a couple of cooters himself." The little boy standing next to him beamed with pride.

"That's more than enough for two meals," said his wife. "Why don't we ask the Gerald's over tonight? I can make a mushroom dish and you know Kate will insist on making one of her pies."

"Sounds good to me," Thomas replied. "Joshua, give me your catch and go to the Gerald's and give 'em an invite."

Joshua took off at once, holding his cap on his head. His father watched him, then looked up at what was for this community a sky--a roof of rock with roots coming out of it here and there. It would have been a place of eternal night except for countless bright glowworms whose own light reflected of the thousands of gemstones that twinkled in the rocky sky in every color.

The rest of their community lived in this land of quiet repose. Underground river with cool, clean water, all sorts of animal life to eat. Their homes weren't built but were small natural caves inside the tremendous single cave itself. The north bound road had been closed off for years; no one knew if it was a natural occurrence; some claimed it was an ancient battle. But they all agreed they were safer this way from whatever had driven them south in the first place. They used a barter system for their needs and it served them well.

Sarah, his wife, joined him at the doorway, a natural opening in the rock that led to their home. She never got tired of looking at the sky (something as natural as the sky up north, but not as lovely--since they had it all the time. No bad weather down south. And looking around the community, they could see their neighbors' homes, shining inside and out just like their own.

His wife said quietly "If we ever had the opportunity to go back aboveground, would you want to?"

"I'm not sure, Mama," he said. "We have a starry sky of our own and no one trying to mind our business. And anyway, as long as them dang Yankees are up there taking whatever they want, we'll be better off here."

Glacier Gash

Author: Terry Bryner

Glaciers move slowly downhill, and calve off icebergs when they reach the ocean. A large iceberg fell from the Grande Glacier, and revealed an opening near the top. An adventurous party could climb down and into this gash, because birds have been bringing out bits of gold and using it in their nests. Everything inside has been frozen there for centuries, at least. Inside the winding passages of ice will actually be found vast treasure, because this was the home of three ice dragons, a mother and two young. Rather than claw their way out (lacking fiery breath) they simply slept the time away, but they will awaken soon, rather hungry.

Hall of the Vampire Kings

Author: Chris Olson

A circular chamber, roughly fifty feet across and twenty tall in the center, but only ten-foot at the walls. Close examination of the walls and floors shows them to be made of tightly fitted, highly worked stones fit together apparently without the aid of any mortar. No breeze or sound disturbs the silence of this chamber. A very faint odor of rot lingers. Dust dances in what little light brought into this place. Each step raises a puff of dust that quickly disperses, but muffles footfalls.

The walls of the chamber are worked into fine images showing fanged men and women in royal garb feasting on victims, leading battles, being driven underground by the sun, whipping human and humanoid slaves, making blood sacrifices at altars, and the like.

A shallow dome caps the chamber. It is also covered in images of the same style as the walls, although these images appear to show the vampires defeating the sun and spreading across the land again.

The arched doorways leaving the chamber at each of the four cardinal points have no doors in them. They each resemble the gaping mouth of a vampire, with long fangs framing the arch and a stone tongue forms the sill.

Small, dust covered bones litter the floor in the center of the room. Faintly, under all of the dust and dirt, inset, pale blue stones can barely be seen. They seem to be laid out in some pattern of lines, but not an actual picture. The lines are no more than a finger width wide. They cover all but the outer most five feet of the floor.

Horror under Dome Hill

Author: Ülo Leppik

It was 1896 when I first visited the town of Tartu, entrenched deep between ancient Baltic woodlands and endless swamps. As I walked the quiet streets of Tartu under the ever watchful eyes of the hundreds of ravens perched atop gnarled trees I felt an irresistible pull towards Dom Hill and its impressive cathedral ruins looming menacingly over the gloomy town.

The hill was once a Russian fort, locals still tell tales of hidden passages running under the hill. These stories had peaked my interest and I could not help myself but imagine secret entrances in basements and concealed between the trees, right where I wandered on the hill.

An observatory at the top of the hill was home to Dr. Franhoffer, outwardly calm yet his gaze hinted at some form of manic obsession. He laughed when I asked about the tunnels below the hill, only later would I find out how he had rid himself of his predecessor, who was still right below us.

An anatomical theatre is on the east side of the hill, dogs from nearby houses barked furiously as I approached. I was met by Prof. Zurichter an enigmatic and passionate figure. He claimed no knowledge of the underground tunnels. Little did I know that I would soon meet his hideous collection of misfits stashed deep below the ground.

The corpse hauler Ivan Gregorovich was the only honest person on that abominable hill. With his stumbling and slimy voice he would tell me about his craft. The tunnels are cold, perfect for storing bodies meant for dissection, he did not tell me what further horrors lay beyond the entry way to his grim store rooms.



Everyone I met had access to the hidden tunnels below, every one of them used the passages for their own nefarious needs yet none was as wicked as the King of Beggars. I met that disreputable being in the medieval ruins of the cathedral. He offered what I sought and at that time I did not have the wisdom to refuse him. Within the ruins was hidden an entrance to ancient pagan burial chambers and tunnels beyond. The King of Beggars laughed when I descended the narrow stairs to the plutonian realms below. I heard him slide the enormous stone block back, my only chance of egress lay before me, only by navigating the labyrinthine passages had I any hope to see daylight again. There was no choice but to face the many horrors under Dome Hill.

Kingdoms of Mist

Author: Terry Bryner

Some large clouds seem to have a permanence. Indeed, though they seem temporary, there is a core that always remains, a Mist Kingdom. Those flying (or falling) past the outer layers of vapor find more solid mixtures of ice and mist that support walking, and can be formed into structures by the Mist Men, who long ago forsook the ground. Their airy labyrinths are multi-level flights of fancy, stretching for miles within the clouds, lit by translucent light during the day or the moon at night. A few plants grow in the mist, some birds can be caught, and the people lead a simple, happy life. They would be angered if large objects flew through their kingdom, destroying the work of centuries. Their height would also make them a strategic weapon if they were above an enemy.

Mer Grotto

Author: Terry Bryner

When the tide was at its lowest, a darker shadow could just be seen under the waves at the foot of the Cliff of Tears in Sorrow Bay. With the rocky bottom only a fathom down, an adventurer could stand and duck under the rocky lintel and move into the (natural?) cave beyond. The floor sloped up to a wet cavern above the waterline. A strange fungus that glowed an eerie blue covered much of the walls. Three crooked passages led off the back. One was narrow, barely passing one warrior in armor. It only continued a short distance, they end in a small chamber for a half-dozen mermen guarding the cave. Another wound back into a maze of small chambers used for sleeping, living, and food storage. The third was little more than a cleft in a shadowed corner, but it led to the caves of worship, including one with a huge pool containing the dread kraken. It was fed by the mer priests, but there was a gated underwater passage so it could be released to ravage people and boats in the bay.



Monster under the Bed

Author: Terry Bryner

The cottage backed up against the Ancient Forest, but was still a popular place to rest in the middle of journey, or spend a few days away from the frenzy of town. It contained one large common room, and several bedrooms with their own door and a single small bed. One bedroom at the back had an old hex sign above the door, said to prevent monster passing, but most thought it nonsense. Still, that room was only used when the hut was crowded, though no one really knew why. They had forgotten the hapless folk, mostly children, who had simply disappeared from that room. For under the bed was the entrance to a troll's cave. The passage stretched for miles and contained dozens of rooms, filled with trolls and treasure. This entrance was only open on the night of the new moon. The hex over the door prevented the troll from leaving, but anyone in the room would be dragged down into the cave, either enslaved or eaten.

Roc's Rock

Author: Terry Bryner

Legend says that ages ago, the local mountain now called Roc's Rock had a cave opening near the top that was home to the giant birds. The entrance was covered by a landslide when the very top peak was struck by lightning. Now, that landslide has moved further down the side of the mountain, and the cave entrance is partially open, certainly enough to allow exploration. Roc bones supposedly have magical powers, although the legends disagree a bit on just what they are. But someone will assuredly buy them. And the Rocs carried off men and animals, so there should be some treasure. What they will also find is an unhatched Roc egg.

Shaft of the Salamander

Author: Terry Bryner

When Mount Boom spewed out a blast of lava, as it did fairly regularly, the central cone only filled slowly. Until the rising lava covered it again, usually in a few days, a shaft in the south side of the wall was visible. It glowed with its own heat, but was big enough for adventurers (well protected from the heat) to venture inside. Below, the passage led deep into the mountain, splitting off into small pockets and rooms as it wound down around the volcano's core. For this was the realm of the Salamander. Little could survive the intense heat, but rumors of rooms full of gems persisted. And brave treasure hunters dared to thread the needle between the rising lava and fiery Salamander.

Sinkhole

Author: Dean Keith

The rotors whirred to life as the drone lifted off and began its descent into the large sinkhole in the middle of town. The bottom of the hole was not visible as it slowly dropped into the darkness. The walls were smooth and glossy, with charred spots seen occasionally. It was almost as if some kind of energy beam had burned a hole in the ground. For about an hour the drone descended, until the depth gauge read six miles. Faint light was visible as the bottom came into view.



A tunnel could be seen leading away from the bottom of the shaft. Heading down the tunnel, the drone noted the walls had the same look as the walls heading up the sinkhole. The tunnel ran straight for about half a mile before it opened up into a large cavern.

The cavern was a mile across, and half a mile from top to bottom. The walls and ceiling were smooth like the tunnel but didn't have the charred spots. The tunnel was three-quarters of the way up a side wall. Scattered along the walls all the way around the perimeter were other openings similar to this tunnel. The floor was covered in a variety of structures, rocks, and floral growths. The light appeared to be coming from a strange structure in the center of the cavern floor that looked to be part rock and part organic.

Steam began to rise from beyond the lighted structure. Sensing movement to the left, the drone started turning to better see what it was when all its inputs went black.

The Cathedral of Nebarth

Author: Pete Wason

In the small northern town of Nebarth stands the glistening metallic six-sided spire of the Cathedral. Older by far than Nebarth itself, only the outer cloisters and buttresses are used or inhabited. The central portion stands locked and seemingly abandoned. A small order of monks provide healing and succour to the townsfolk and farmers of the surrounding fertile valley, and in their spare time they brew a heady mead known throughout the region.

An elderly but strangely fit woman, Llombtha the Elder, a herbalist by trade, has hired the party to help her defend the town from a Rothian necromancer, Ghulvane. Ghulvane has entered the valley in search of the tomb of an ancient warrior and a powerful magic ring which, in combination with magical components purported to be sealed within the Cathedral, will help him create a Great Monster servant, breaking a curse which limits his spellcasting. The tomb of the ancient warrior lies in a thick tangle of forest to the northwest of the town, and is almost impossible to reach, due to wards of confusion and teleport. It is even harder to get back from the tomb.

Ghulvane and his familiar are occupying a mausoleum in the flooded section of the old cemetery just south of the town. After successfully reanimating a small force of the dead from the cemetery, the necromancer attacks the town, gaining entrance to the inner reaches of the Cathedral. The party must pursue him deep underground, past a veritable zoo of long dead lifeforms, and halls of ancient bas-reliefs depicting strange crab-like creatures in various gentle pursuits, for the final battle. Here they discover the true history of Nebarth and its original inhabitants, the real function of the Cathedral, and the terrible burden of remorse the townsfolk carry.

Main NPCs:

Llombtha the Elder - L5 LG forest mage/werewolf. She is the direct descendant of Ambtha Bel'atu, child of the ancient warrior Veus Ranorr and another fighter, Skelatha Kel'sayu, who fought side by side in a great battle here over a thousand years ago. Llombtha carries a magical silver dagger which always appears "sunlit", and lowers target's Alignment, but if the dagger is destroyed, Llombtha dies. Her werewolf form, a giant silver wolf, is a "castable ability".

Spirit of Halla - The L1 NG spirit of Llombtha's dead daughter inhabits a cave above the eastern waterfall and lake (which over the centuries has encroached upon the cemetery), guarding her forefather's most valuable magical assets, including the ring Ghulvane seeks, a magic bow, magic armor, another magic ring, and a strange map of a faraway continent called Phenylargyle.

Jack - L2 NN (somewhat annoying) street urchin, beloved by the townsfolk, and a treasure trove of information.

Vora Tobiasson - The Party may rescue this frightened 3+ year old hiding in the woodshed of one of the local farms, which has been attacked by Ghulvane's undead minions.

Ghulvane - L10 NE necromancer/runebinder. A tall, pale, gaunt creature, dressed in greasy black rags, he carries a human femur as a wand. Not a nice person at all. He is bound by a curse which limits his spellcasting to L5.

Black Cat - Ghulvane's L1 NE zombie familiar that likes to spy on his adversaries and steal things from them.

The Sturmgeist - An L2 NN flying water elemental which randomly (5%/10 min) may attack anyone in the valley. Anyone hit by the Sturmgeist is immobilized for 10 minutes, and if the Sturmgeist is defeated, it will reappear a level higher, but will only continue attacking at the same random chance. If the Spirit of Halla is attacked, the Sturmgeist will immediately aid her. Why? Up to you. :)

What happened here:

When the ancestors of the townsfolk reached this valley after fleeing religious persecution in Roth (far to the west), they found the Cathedral and its strange, but harmless, crab-like inhabitants. Generations passed, but fear and suspicion overcame the humanoid townsfolk, and they attacked the crab-things in a genocidal fury. Only when they were finished, and gained access to the Cathedral did they realize their mistake - and the remembrance of this atrocity hangs heavy upon the remaining descendants. The Cathedral is actually an interstellar environmental survey craft. The crab-things were its crew of peace-loving scientists.

The Lair of the Witch-Spider

Author: Kai Pütz

Deep in the woods, there is a large clearing where only pale grass grows. In the middle of it, hidden by the high grass, a hole can be found that leads straight down into the ground. It is not big, and so a man can climb down by putting his hands and feet or elbows and knees firmly against the rough earth forming the walls, using old roots as foot- and handholds. The climb is steep, a dozen meters down into the earth it goes, where the surrounding walls get rocky. At the end, the tunnel opens into a pitch black cavern.



This cavern is only five feet high, but about six yards wide at its narrowest point and nine yards at its widest, the climb ending roughly at the middle of it. The stony ground of the cave is covered in shallow, stagnant water and a moist smell fills the nose. To climb back up without help, one could get back into the cored hole above with a pull-up. Those that brought a light with them will see another tunnel at the far end of the cave, about three steps wide. As impossible as it seems in this depth, worm-like roots hang from the ceiling, halfway down to the floor.

Anybody setting a foot into the cave will hear a hoarse voice, like that of an old hag, asking “...why... did you come?” The voice is not coming from the tunnel but forms inside one’s head, speaking directly into the mind while the worm-like roots start to writhe faintly. Those who came to ask for something, being it a curse cast for them, a spell being broken or a foretelling of any kind, will be told to bring a “gift”. The heart of a stag, the womb of a swine or a newborn... always something alive or taken from a fresh kill no older than two hours. When the “gift” is thrown among the writhing roots, those very roots will grab it and pass it along, further into the darkness. What was asked for will be provided a few moments later, moments during which wet, ugly sounds will be heard from behind the curtain of roots.

But those who came “to find and kill the witch” will be met with cruel laughter instead, which rings in the head. “Come...! Come then..! COOOMEEE!” The laughter will continue, causing a headache so strong that the vision blurs. Anybody who enters the tunnel will become entangled in the moving roots while the dweller of the place comes forth: An overgrown spider with the head of an old woman, armed with needle-like teeth, a demon-thing that wields magic powers. The root tunnel that winds on for about five yards, and behind it is the lair of the foul creature, filled with the remains of previous prey and collected “gifts”. The walls and everything in there are covered in thick, sticky webbing under which dozens of tiny black spiders crawl along...

The Prismatic Mine

Author: Phil Nicholls

Summary: Abandoned ice mine, close to the city of Hoarfrost, in upper Niflheim, the Plane of Ice. This abandoned mine, source of many valuable shades of planar ice, is the frequent subject of tavern tales extolling the vast wealth lost in the depths.

Nature: This small complex of caves are connected by twisting, narrow tunnels of ice. Time has not been kind to this abandoned mine.

Entrance: Two leagues clockwise from Hoarfrost, around the shore of the Upper Ocean, a low rock breaks through the sheet of ice. Hidden on the far side of this unusual feature is the narrow entrance tunnel to the Prismatic Mine.

White Cave: A short tunnel leads to the first cave, where an intricate frosted latticework of ice fills the cave. These cables of solid ice require several climbing checks to traverse. Originally, there were multiple cables and pulleys here, to lift up the ice from the depths below. When the Mine was abandoned, an Ice Elemental took up residence, and expanded the lattice network. The Elemental allows visitors to be strung out negotiating the thick ice cables, before conducting a series of hit-and-run attacks designed to beat off intruders.

Black Cave: A shaft in the floor of the White Cave leads down to the roof of Black Cave. A plug of ice seals the bottom of this shaft. In the centre of the plug is a clear circle of ice, which appears black from the fumes sealed within the Black Cave below. Glowing red points can sometimes be seen within the smoke. If the thin circle of ice is broken, noxious fumes are released. The trapped smoke elemental seeks to escape at the first opportunity, but will attack if the route is blocked. Once the smoke clears, the broken remains of a smoke-power cutting machine lay rusting in one corner of the cave.

Green Cave: One door leads to a glowing cave, a variety of lichens on the walls and floor. Careful exploration may find all manner of healing or magical lichens here.

Blue Cave: The second door leads to a downward sloping passage into the Blue Cave. This long cave has an ice floor, beneath which can be seen the nearby ocean. The ice floor is solid, but cannot bear much weight before it begins to crack. Additional weight may cause the floor to break, unleashing a torrent of ice-cold water flooding the mine.

Silver Cave: Visible beyond the Blue Cave, is the smaller Silver Cave, which glitters enticingly. Here is the last of the valuable prismatic blue ice blocks, the Niflheim equivalent of marble. The bodies of two miners can also be seen, wearing valuable furs and perhaps carrying some magical items. The last of the fabled wealth of the Prismatic Mine lies in this chamber.

The Stony Fist

Author: Simon King

In the southwestern reaches of The Marklands, situated amongst an area of scrubby hills, lies a small nondescript plateau. Long since dried up creek beds circle the foundations and have eroded the bedrock so that the plateau has a slightly top-heavy appearance. Striations in the sides of the plateau give the impression, when viewed in the correct light, of a clenched fist.

Known to only a few in this age are the rough-hewn tunnels that permeate the interior of the plateau. Originally excavated by the Dvergar, the workmanship shows none of the usual hallmarks of that people's stone craft, indicating it was only ever intended as a way-station on their voortrek to more distant lands; though in the case of the Dvergar a temporary home could be in use for several centuries. A few pieces of graffiti are roughly etched into the walls, such as "Gurney's gang opened these tunnels" and "Stavrok recovered here for three seasons", for those few archaeologists who can still translate the script.

The corridors are made for the convenience of Dvergar, who are a head shorter than most men, if somewhat broader, so most humans must stoop uncomfortably to traverse these tunnels. The interior rock is of a strange orange hue throughout, with a chalky, almost greasy texture in places. Brushing up against a tunnel wall will doubtless result in an orange smear upon clothes and equipment, and visitors are likely to be sneezing orange dust for several days after they leave.

The bulk of the lower chambers are unremarkable, formerly storage for grain, kindling and other supplies long since turned to dust. A deep well was drilled into the water table, which despite the vagaries of time still fills with dusty water during the rainy season. A few communal barracks rooms fill the middle levels; narrow slanted shafts pierce most of these to allow some light and ventilation. On the upper level is one room of note; once called the map room, it is a circular chamber which features at its centre a low flat circular table, carved directly from the living rock and conjoined with the floor of the chamber. On this table is the one surviving piece of Dvergar artistry, a sculpted relief map of the terrain for many leagues around the holdfast, truly a work of art. This chamber is pierced by several ventilation shafts all cunningly contrived so that light falls upon the map table as the room's central feature.



The main access into the Stony Fist is from a gateway in the eastern side of the plateau, corresponding with the mid-level chambers, which time has made appear more of a fracture in the rock. Formerly a drawbridge could be lowered from here to touch the crest of the nearest hill, but it has long since rotted away. With the surrounding creek beds forming a natural dry moat, only with clever rope work or rock climbing skills can the entrance be attained.

The Well

Author: Kyle Henderseon

Accessed from street level by entering a back door to a shop front in the market district, The Well is a gambling den and tavern. The access is guarded by two bouncer street toughs who require a password to let anyone through.

The Well is 3 levels with the main floor completely circular with a large stone well in the center of it. This well serves as the main bar and has a wooden floor with a trapdoor which allows quick access for the Bartender and Barwenches down to the cellar at the bottom of the well. There are 4 gambling tables called Well Windows on the main floor. Each window specializes in either card games or dice games. There are also multiple booth like tables around the room, set into the wall of the tavern.

The two mezzanine levels each have 4 more Well Window gambling tables. Each table is a different game with different stakes. Some of the private Well Windows host high stakes card games among the richest individuals in town. Here the nobility rubs elbows with affluent merchants and wealthy criminals. Many palms have been greased and deals have been struck at The Well.

Trog City

Author: Terry Bryner

It looked like any other swamp. Brackish water covered the ground, except for the occasional pile of rocks or dying tree. But most of those rock piles concealed holes leading down. And dug into the soft mud, with skins stretched over branches to keep the rooms open. It was not just one level; it was more like skyscrapers turned upside down, with as many as a dozen stories deep into the ground. It was totally without light; troglodites could see in the dark. They ate their food raw, so they had little use for fire, except for a few crude "factories" near the edge of the cities for curing animal skins or hardening bricks of mud. This vast city housed more than ten thousand Trogs.

Uncle Morty's Mole Racing and Underground Funland

****Contest Winner****

Author: Ben Moats

Don't know what to do this weekend. Are the kids getting on your nerves? Well, bring them down, exactly one mile down, to Uncle Morty's Mole Racing and Underground Funland. We have plenty of things to keep your little one entrained. We have giant mole races daily. Watch as the fastest moles this side of Terraforma, run through our 3 miles of unique underground tunnel racetrack. And after every race your kids are welcome to pet the winning mole in our winner circle petting zoo, one child after each race is selected to ride the winning mole back to the stable, and be dinner. Don't feel like petting a giant mole, afraid your child might be selected to ride the giant mole, maybe you're just hungry, then come on over to our café and enjoy our world famous mole burgers made out of the losers of the race. So next time you find yourself with nothing to do and you're underground come to Uncle Morty's Mole Racing and Underground Funland.



Warded Oubliette

Author: Christopher Allen

The ceaseless scratching began first, echoing rhythmlessly through the dungeon complex. It grew neither nearer, nor more distant: it had not been there until suddenly it was, and once heard simply never again faded away. It chafed nerves, like a blunt, rusted bladeedge played up and down one's spine. It set teeth on edge.

At some point, the moaning began. This, once begun, plagued the senses more acutely: it was inconstant, unlike the scrabbling--it would well up, play up and down in pitch as though one experiencing the torment of the damned...and then fade away completely. Only, of course, to begin again just when relief seemed at hand.

Then there was a dip in the roughly-hewn corridor, descending just enough to feel unsettling but not quite so sharply as to imbalance...and at the bottom of the hollow, there was a pit, dropping away into darkness, an opening just large enough for something man-sized covered over with a metal grating of absolutely ancient age: a convex, circular trap door of some undefinably unnatural metal that seemed both timeworn--pitted and glazed over with a verdigrised sheen--yet defiantly resilient. An enormous hasp, bolted into the stone at each compass point, was secured by a padlock of the same unseemly metal.

The scratching suddenly trebled in intensity, and with it a radiance, dim but unmistakable, rose from the pit. When the moan began again, symbols flared in the air above the grate, flashing into existence in the hollow space above the pit before sizzling away in a sulphurous flash.

Drawing closer, to peer more clearly down through the unearthly iron, the scrabbling of nails against stone became manic, the moaning an ululating wail, the sense of something almost-but-not-quite human in dimension perceivably thrashing in the black hole below the cage door inescapable; the radiance pulsed; the weirdly glowing symbols fizzed into and out of reality in the air above the chamber, painful to eyes which attempted to translate any sense of them--

Then the scratching and screaming stopped, the pyrotechnics fell into blackness...and the sudden silence in the dark carried a foreboding more terrible yet....