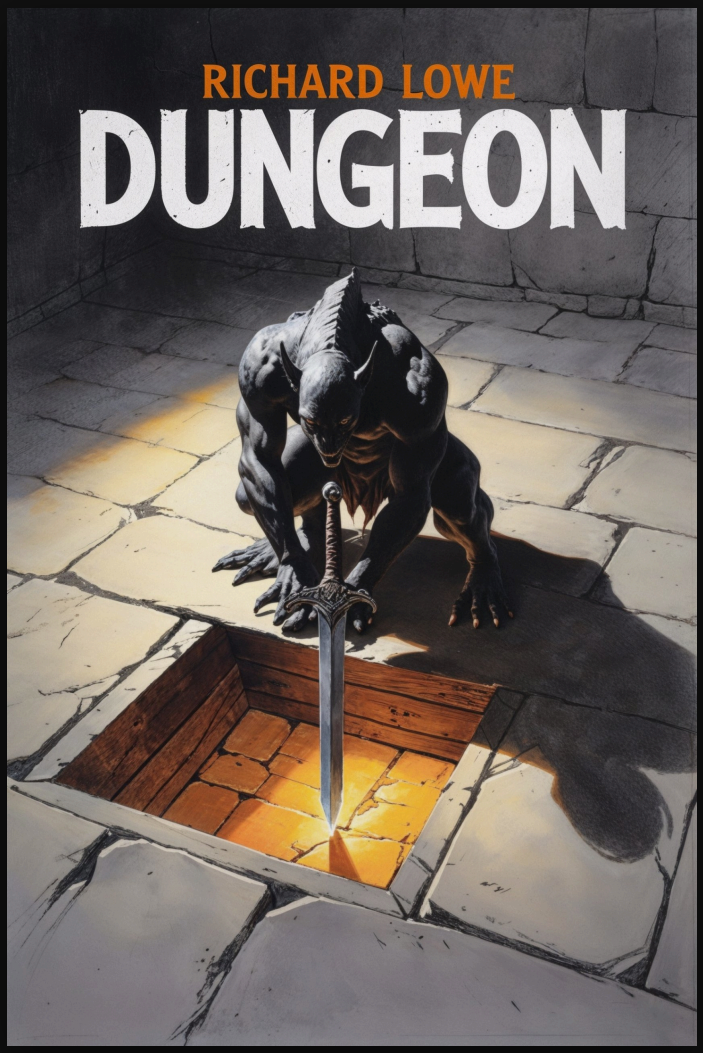
A FREE COMPANION TO DUNGEON

The Dead End

Late summer, a storm, and a door in the hillside behind the old house that is not a door anymore once Troi is through it.



RICHARD LOWE

The Dead End

The rain came off the ridge as a gray wall, and Troi had less than a minute before it reached her. She spent the minute on the pack. The oilskin went over the top and down the sides, and she knotted the cords underneath with her back to the weather, the way she'd wrap a bolt of good wool for a cart ride.

Then it hit, and she was wet to the skin before she'd straightened up.

She had been walking since dawn. The forester's lodge was two days behind her, and so was the green wedding coat she'd spent most of the summer on, the one with forty-one buttons down the front because the forester's daughter had counted the buttons on a coat in a painting once and wanted more. The fee was in a purse sewn inside her shirt, where no hand could get at it without her knowing.

The carter who'd brought her east had told her about the path behind the old house. It cut half a day off the walk back to the road, he said, if you didn't mind going past the place. She'd seen the house an hour ago from the edge of its clearing, boarded and gray, with a mailbox at the foot of the front path that somebody had kept painted.

She had looked at the mailbox for a moment and thought it was a strange thing to keep up on a house nobody lived in. Then she'd gone around the back and found the path. The leaves over it were still summer green, heavy and dark, and now the rain was coming through them in fat cold drops that hit like thrown gravel.

The hillside rose on her left. A ledge of rock stuck out from it twenty paces up the path, and she went for the ledge with her head down and her boots sliding in the mud.

Under the ledge there was a door.

She stopped with the rain running off her hair into her eyes. It was a plain door of dark wood, set into the stone of the hill on iron hinges, with an iron ring for a handle. She'd looked straight at this slope coming up the path and seen rock and ferns and nothing else.

It was a root cellar, she decided, a store for the house. She took the ring in her wet hand and pulled, and the door came open on hinges that didn't make a sound.

The air inside was dry and cool and smelled of stone. Behind her the rain was loud enough to hurt. She stepped in out of it and stood on a stone floor with water running off her into a dark she couldn't see the end of.

The door swung shut behind her.

It shut softly, the way a well-hung door shuts on a draft. She turned around to push it open again and put both hands flat where it had been, and her palms met stone.

She felt along it. It was cold dressed stone, smooth, the joints between the blocks fine enough that her fingernail barely caught in them. She worked left and right and up as high as she could reach and down to the floor, and there was no frame and no hinge and no ring, and the rain on the other side of it had stopped making any sound at all.

"No," she said. She said it to the stone, reasonably, the way she'd say it to a customer who wanted silk lined with wool.

The stone stayed where it was.

* * *

The tinderbox was in an oiled tin in the bottom of the pack, and it was dry. She knew it would be dry because she had packed it, and she packed things properly, but her hands still shook while she got the lid off.

She had three candles. Two were whole, and one had burned down a finger's width at the lodge the night the forester's wife sat up with her to finish the last of the buttonholes. She lit that one.

The light showed her a short passage with steps going down at the end of it. It showed her the wall where the door had been, and in the candlelight the wall looked like what her hands had already told her. It was a wall, and it had always been a wall.

She sat down on the bottom step with the candle in her fist and went through the pack by feel and by sight together, laying it all out on the stone. There was a loaf two days old, half a wheel of the forester's cheese wrapped in cloth, a twist of dried apples and a tin cup.

There was her sewing roll, with the needles in their felt and the spools of thread and the brass thimble and the good shears. There was the folding knife she used for canvas and harness leather, short in the blade and thick in the spine.

Under them were her spare shirt and the wet oilskin, and the candles, one of them burning.

She looked at the bread while the candle burned. Then she cut it into eight pieces with the folding knife and wrapped seven of them back up and ate the eighth slowly. She was going to be here a while, and slowly was the only kind of eating she could afford.

She pinched the candle out. She sat in the dark and listened, and there was no rain and no wind and no birds, and somewhere a long way off and below her water was moving through stone.

* * *

There were thirteen rooms. Or there were fourteen.

She spent the first three days on that question, and it made her angrier than it should have. Two of the rooms on the north side of the circuit were the same size and the same shape, with the same low arch on the west wall and the same crack running across the ceiling. She could never settle whether she'd walked through one of them twice or through each of them once.

The rooms ran in a loop. Every passage she followed bent around and brought her back to the room at the foot of the steps, which she had started calling the hall because it was the biggest.

She went around the loop clockwise and then counterclockwise. She went around it with the candle and without it, and the loop held.

She mapped it on the floor of the hall. The floor there was packed earth over stone, and she drew with the point of the knife: boxes for rooms, lines for passages, a cross for the steps. The map was fourteen boxes on the first day and thirteen on the second and fourteen again on the third, and on the fourth day she drew both versions side by side and left them.

The rooms weren't empty. They were furnished the way a house is furnished when the family has gone visiting.

There was a shelf in one with clay jars on it, all of them sealed and all of them full of a gray dust that smelled of nothing. There was a bench in another, stone, cut into the wall at sitting height, with the seat worn into two shallow dips by somebody who had sat there a great deal.

The ceiling of the fifth room dripped into a basin. Somebody had cut the basin to catch the drip, a hollow in a stone block the size of a washtub, and the water in it was cold and clean and tasted of iron.

She drank until her stomach hurt and then sat on the edge of the basin and cried for a short while, hard, with her hands over her face. Then she washed her face in the basin and went back to work.

On the wall beside the basin was a plate of brass, and on the plate in neat lettering:

THIS PASSAGE HAS BEEN INSPECTED BY THE FROBOZZ MAGIC PASSAGE INSPECTION BUREAU AND FOUND TO BE IN COMPLIANCE. PASSAGES NOT FOUND TO BE IN COMPLIANCE ARE NOT INSPECTED. GOOD LUCK!

She read it three times by the candle. Then she laughed, once, loud, and the laugh came back to her off the stone and sounded like a stranger's.

There was a passage on the south side that ran forty paces straight and ended. It didn't narrow or bend first. It ran, and then a flat face of stone stood across it from wall to wall and floor to ceiling, and that was the end of it.

She held the candle close. The stone across the end was the same gray as the walls, and the joints were as fine, and she put her free hand on it and pushed and it was a wall.

With the point of the knife she scratched a mark at shoulder height, a line with a bar across it, which on her floor map meant dead end. She went back to the hall and put the same mark at the end of the line on the map.

* * *

The painted passage ran between the hall and the room with the bench. Its walls had figures on them, people in long robes walking in a line, carrying things above their heads. The paint had faded until the figures were the color of weak tea, and when she brought the candle close their faces were gone.

She liked them anyway. She walked that passage more than she needed to.

East of the painted passage, on the sixth day, she found the door. Nobody would have called it a door. It was a stretch of wall where the stones were laid in a pattern a little different from the stones around them, and when she held the candle low and to the side, a line of shadow ran up from the floor and across and down again, thin as a hair, in the shape of a doorway.

She looked at that line until the candle ran wax down over her knuckles.

She went over it inch by inch. At hip height, on the right side, one stone stood out from its neighbors by the thickness of a fingernail. She pressed it and it gave, a little, and she felt it give, a tiny settling under her thumb, and then it pushed back against her and nothing else happened.

She pressed it again. She pressed it a hundred times that day and tried it with the heel of her hand and with both thumbs and with her shoulder, and every time it gave and pushed back. Every time the wall stayed a wall.

“There's another one,” she said aloud. Her voice was hoarse already. “There's another one and I'm not seeing it.”

She didn't see it that day or the next. On the third day of looking she sat down with her back against the shape of the door and blew out the candle to save it, and sat in the dark with the stone cool against her spine. The thing inside the wall that the stone had settled against was right there behind her, a hand's width away, waiting for the rest of a sentence she didn't know how to say.

* * *

The second candle went faster than the first. She'd known it would. She'd been burning it in pieces, a little at a time, lighting it to look and pinching it out to think, and every time she lit it she used a strike of the tinder and every strike was one she wouldn't get back.

The bread ran out on the ninth day. She'd made eight pieces last nine days, and she was proud of it in a way that made no sense, the way she was proud of a seam nobody would ever see.

The cheese went next. The apples went last, one ring at a time, and she sucked each one until it was soft before she chewed it.

On the tenth day her thimble was gone.

She'd taken it out of the sewing roll to look at it in the candlelight. It was the brass one her mother had used, worn thin on the crown, with a dent in the side where a customer had stepped on it in her mother's shop when Troi was nine. She'd set it on the bench beside her and slept, and when she woke and lit the candle the bench was bare.

She searched the room on her hands and knees. She searched the passage outside it. She went through the sewing roll twice, and found that a spool of red silk was gone too, the good red she'd brought in case the forester's daughter changed her mind about the lining.

She sat back on her heels with the candle in her hand and looked at the dark beyond its reach.

Nothing moved out there. Nothing made a sound. She stayed still and listened past the drip in the fifth room and the far water below, and there was nobody, and in the end she put the candle out because there was nothing it could show her.

She didn't sleep on the bench again. She slept in the hall with her back in the corner and the sewing roll inside her shirt, against the purse.

* * *

She found the second door in the dark, in her second week, while she was saving the candle.

It was in a passage off the north side, where the air smelled of standing water. Somewhere beyond the wall there was a lot of water lying still, she was sure of that. The smell came through the stone, cold and green.

She was walking the wall with her left hand when her fingers caught on two stones, one above the other, that sat proud of their neighbors by the thickness of a fingernail. She had walked past them with a candle a dozen times.

She stood with a hand on each of them and pressed. They gave a little and pushed back. She pressed them together and apart, hard and gently, in every order she could think of, and they pushed back every time.

This one had words carved over it. She ran her fingers across them, letter by letter, the way a blind woman who came into the shop on Mill Street used to read the stamped sizes on the bottoms of the dress forms.

She got as far as D and A and N and lost the rest under a crust of grit, and she stood with her fingers on the letters until they went cold. Then she went on.

* * *

There was one room on the circuit she didn't go into.

It lay on the far side, past the two rooms she couldn't tell apart. She had walked into it once, early, with the first candle, and the flame had leaned.

There was no draft she could feel on her face. The flame leaned anyway, toward the back of the room, toward the corner where the light gave out, as if the dark there had weight and the fire was falling toward it.

The back of her neck had gone cold and tight. She'd stood in the doorway and felt the room look at her.

That was the only way she could ever put it to herself afterward. It looked at her with no eyes and no sound, the way a big dog in a yard looks at you over a low fence while it decides. She had backed

out with the candle held in front of her and gone the long way around the circuit to the hall, and she had not gone back.

After that she walked the circuit by a count. It was thirty-one steps from the two rooms to the doorway of the room she didn't go into, and then she stopped and turned and went back the way she'd come. She counted it every time, out loud under her breath, and her neck went cold every time at twenty-eight.

* * *

The last candle burned out on what she thought was the fifteenth day.

She wasn't certain of the count anymore. She'd been sleeping when she was tired and waking when she woke, and the days had stopped lining up with the sleeps. She'd been using the candle to look at the door east of the painted passage, one more time, and she had pinched it out and lit it again too many times, and the wick drowned in its own fat with a small wet sound and went dark in her hand.

She struck the tinder. The spark showed her the stub of tallow, a flat puddle with the wick lying in it like a drowned thread.

She sat there in the dark until her legs went numb. She was not going to see anything again unless somebody brought her a light, and nobody knew she was here.

The forester's family thought she'd gone home. Her neighbors in Miren thought she was still at the forester's.

There was a note on the shop door. She had written it herself in her best hand: Back in twelve days. Twelve days had looked generous when she wrote it.

* * *

She learned the dark with her hands because she had nothing else to learn it with.

At first she walked with her arms out in front of her like a child playing a game, and she hit her head on the low arch in the west wall of the hall so hard she sat down. After that she walked with her left hand on the wall and her right hand out ahead, and she slid her feet along the floor instead of lifting them, so that every lip and every loose stone found her toes before it found her weight.

It was slow. It made a sound, a scuff and drag, scuff and drag, that she came to hate and then came not to hear. Her nails broke on the stone one after another, and she bit the ragged ones short and kept going.

The wall under her left hand changed as she went. She had walked these walls for two weeks with a candle and seen stone, and stone was all she'd seen. In the dark, under her palm, the stone had a grain.

The blocks were not all the same. Some sat tight and some sat loose, and where a big block bore down on two smaller ones she could feel the strain of it in the joint, a tiny hardness, the way a seam feels under your fingers when the cloth on one side has been cut on the bias and pulls.

She stopped walking the first time she felt it and stood with her hand on that joint until her arm ached.

When she was eleven her mother had blindfolded her with a scarf and handed her two pieces of wool and told her to find the one that had been cut wrong. Troi had cried and said it wasn't fair, that you couldn't see the grain with your eyes shut. Her mother had said you don't see the grain, you feel which way it wants to go, and if you have to look you're already too late.

“All right,” Troi said to the wall, in a voice gone rough. “All right.”

She went back to the door east of the painted passage, scuff and drag, and put both hands flat on it.

The stone at hip height was right where it had always been. She pressed it and felt it settle, and this time she kept her other hand moving across the wall while she held it. She felt the strain run out from the pressed stone the way a pull runs out from a pin, across and down, and she followed it with her fingertips down and to the left until it stopped and went soft.

The strain stopped at a point near her knee. She couldn't find a stone there that stood proud. She couldn't find anything there but a place where the pull went out of the wall, and she pushed it with her knuckles and with her thumb and with the heel of her hand, and when she let go of the hip stone to try harder at the knee, the first stone pushed back and the whole thing went dead under her hands.

She tried it until her thumbs went numb. Then she sat down against it as she had before. The other half of the sentence was there, a hand's width behind her back, and now she knew roughly where it lived, and that was worse.

* * *

Hunger changed shape after the food ran out. For the first two days it was a pain. Then it went quiet and became a lightness in her head and a slowness in her hands, and that frightened her more than the pain had.

The crickets lived in the fifth room, around the basin. She'd heard them from the first day, a thin dry chirp when the room was still. They were pale things, the color of tallow, with legs longer than their bodies, and when she put her hand down flat on the damp floor beside the basin and waited, they walked onto it.

The first one she ate whole and fast, without thinking about it, and it tasted of nothing and then of dirt and then, at the last, bitter, like the white pith of an orange. She kept it down. She ate four more.

The beetles under the loose stones on the south side were worse. They were hard and they crunched, and their insides tasted of burnt hair and pennies. The slugs on the north wall were worst of all, and she ate one, once, and lay on the floor afterward with her cheek on the stone and promised herself she would starve first, and she was wrong about that too.

She ate them on a schedule. She ate a set number at each waking and no more, even when there were more on her hand, because a room full of crickets was a room full of crickets only until she'd eaten them.

* * *

It came on what she thought of afterward as the twentieth night, though there were no nights.

She was asleep in the corner of the hall. She woke all at once with her heart already going, and she didn't know what had woken her, and she lay still with her eyes open on nothing and listened.

There was no sound. The water in the fifth room dripped. The far water below moved through its stone.

The back of her neck was cold.

It was the cold she got at twenty-eight steps, the cold from the room she didn't go into, and it was here, in the hall, where it had never been. The dark in the hall had changed. It had been empty dark, the dark of a closed room, and now it was the other kind, and the other kind was in the room with her, low down, near the floor, between her and the passage to the painted walls.

She had the knife in her hand. She didn't remember getting it out. She heard the click of the blade locking open and felt her thumb settle on the spine of it as it settled when she cut harness leather, and she drew her knees up under her and pushed her back hard into the corner.

It came along the floor. It came fast and it made a sound like cloth dragged over stone, and she swung the knife low across in front of her at the sound, with everything she had in her arm.

The blade hit. It went into the thing and through a little way and caught, and the feeling of it came up the knife into her wrist: wet felt, heavy and wrong, cut against the grain. There was a sound with no voice in it, a hiss of air with no throat behind it.

Then the corner of the room was empty again, and the back of her neck was warm, and she was sitting in the hall with a knife in her hand that was wet and smelled of nothing at all.

She didn't sleep again that waking. She sat in the corner with the knife open until her arm shook, and then she held it with the other hand.

* * *

Nobody was going to teach her how to stand. There was nobody down here but her, knees drawn up in the corner of the hall, the knife wet in her fist.

She had taught herself to make a bound buttonhole at fourteen, in the back room of her mother's shop, by making a hundred bad ones on scraps. Her mother had looked at the first fifty and said nothing at all, which was worse than anything she could have said. The fifty-first was not bad.

So she made a hundred bad ones.

She stood in the middle of the hall in the dark and put her feet apart, and they were too close, and she widened them until she could feel the floor push up through both heels at once. She held the knife low with the blade forward and her thumb on the spine, and she turned her body so that her left shoulder pointed at the passage where the thing had come from, so there was less of her to reach.

She swung at nothing. She swung low, because it had come low. She swung and stepped back and swung again, and her arm got heavy, and the knife slipped in her sweaty hand and she caught it by the blade and cut her palm and wrapped it with a strip off her spare shirt and started again.

She did it every waking after that, before she ate. She ran it in the same order each time, feet and shoulder and blade and swing. After a while her feet went where they were supposed to go before she told them, and her thumb found the spine of the knife on its own, and that was the fifty-first buttonhole.

The thing didn't come back. She did it anyway.

* * *

Somewhere around the twenty-fifth sleep she went to the dead end and sat down.

She hadn't meant to. She had been walking the south side, scuff and drag, and the passage ran out under her hand as it always did, forty steps and then the flat stone across the end. She put her palm on it and her knees folded, and she was sitting with her back against the side wall and her hand still up on the stone.

It didn't sit like the walls. She'd known that for days, since her hands learned to read the joints.

The walls on either side of the passage bore down into the floor, heavy and settled. The stone across the end sat in its place like a patch, set into a hole that had been cut for it, and the pull around its edges was wrong.

She'd pushed it. She'd pushed it with her shoulder and her back and her feet, braced against the side wall, until the cut on her palm opened again. It didn't move any more than the mountain did.

She sat with her hand on it now and thought about the shop.

The bell over the door would be green with damp by now, because nobody was oiling it. Mistress Annet would have come by on the third day for the blue skirt she wanted taken up a finger shorter than

was decent, and found the note, and come back on the twelfth day and found the note again. She would have gone to the woman by the bridge, who did quick work and bad hems.

Eight years of customers would all go to the woman by the bridge eventually. That was what customers did. They loved you and they were loyal to you, and then their daughters got married and the coat couldn't wait.

“My name is Troi,” she said to the patch of stone. Her voice cracked in the middle like an old board.

She waited until it would hold. “I'm a seamstress. I have a shop on Mill Street in Miren.”

The words sounded thin to her. They sounded like the words on the note on the door, true when they were written and less true every day since.

She didn't say anything else. She sat until her legs went to pins, and then she sat longer.

What got her up in the end was a cricket. She heard it chirp in the fifth room, all the way across the circuit, a tiny dry sound carried through the stone, and her stomach turned over at the sound of it like a dog's at the rattle of a bowl.

She was disgusted with her stomach. She got up anyway, because it was time to eat, and you ate when it was time, and you didn't eat more than your count.

She went scuff and drag back along the south side, with her left hand on the wall.

* * *

The sound came on a waking she didn't number.

She was at the basin with her hand flat on the wet floor, waiting for the crickets, and the floor moved under her palm. It wasn't the far water.

The far water had a voice she knew as well as her own now, and this was different, a low grinding that came up through the stone into the bones of her hand and her knees. It sounded like a millstone turning, or a great weight dragged along a floor a long way off.

It went on for the space of a few breaths. Then it stopped.

She knelt there with her heart going, listening so hard her ears rang. She couldn't tell where it had come from.

Stone carried sound strangely, and it came from everywhere at once, from below, from the south, from inside the wall beside her. She waited for it to come again and it didn't.

She ate her crickets. She did her stance in the hall. She slept in her corner with the knife in her hand, and she dreamed about the shop for the first time since the candles ran out: the cutting table, the light from the window, Mistress Annet's skirt laid out flat, a finger shorter than was decent.

* * *

When she woke, there was light.

It was so faint she didn't believe it. Her eyes had made lights before, in the dark, pale swimming colors that came and went and meant nothing. She shut her eyes and opened them again, and it was still there: a smear of yellow on the stone of the passage mouth, low down, the color of old butter.

It moved.

She sat up slowly. It moved again, swinging a little, as a lamp swings when a man walks with it, and somewhere out past the painted passage there were footsteps. They were a man's boots, heavy, set down evenly, the walk of someone who carried a load and knew how much it weighed.

Behind the boots there was another sound, small and quick. It was a scratch and a scratch, like claws on stone.

The back of her neck went cold.

She had the knife open before she was on her feet. Her feet went apart without her telling them. Her left shoulder came round toward the passage mouth and her thumb found the spine of the blade, and she stood in the hall in the dark with her heart in her throat and listened to the claws.

The claws didn't sound like the other thing. The other thing had dragged.

These clicked, light and dry, like a cat crossing a kitchen floor. And the cold on her neck stayed only a moment and went away, and the light on the passage wall swung and steadied.

She could stay in the hall. She knew the hall. She could stand in her corner with the knife and let whoever it was find her or not find her, and she could count her crickets, and she could go on being the woman who had a shop on Mill Street until there was no woman left to say it.

The light had stopped coming. It sat on the stone at the far end of the passage, steady, and she thought of a man standing out of sight with his lamp, deciding which way to go.

She folded the knife. She heard the lock click shut and put it in the pocket of her skirt with her hand still around it.

Then she went after the light, with her left hand on the wall and her feet sliding on the stone, scuff and drag, scuff and drag. She went faster than she had gone in weeks, and her legs were weak and her hand burned on the wall and she was breathing like a woman twice her age. The sound of her own walking filled the passage.

The light went out.

It didn't fade. It went out all at once, the way a lamp goes out when a man who knows what he's doing turns it down to nothing and stands still. Ahead of her the passage was dark, the old dark, her dark.

She stopped.

She stood with her hand on the wall and her lungs aching and listened. The water dripped in the fifth room behind her.

The far water ran in its stone below. Ahead of her in the passage, close, no more than a few lengths of cloth away, a man was standing still in the dark and trying not to make any sound at all.

He was good at it. But he had been walking with a load for a long time, and he was breathing through his nose, slow and careful, and she had spent a month learning what the dark sounded like when it was empty.

It was not empty now.

She stood with her shoulder to the wall. Her hand was still around the knife in her pocket, and she left it there.

“I can hear you breathing,” she said.

The World of Dungeon

Who's Who

The people and creatures of the novel, as you first meet them. Nothing here gives away how anything ends.

NAME	WHO THEY ARE
Corvin Cray	Ten years a Legion infantryman. On the fourteenth day of the siege of Halvenmark he read an order, did not sign it, and walked north. Now he is a deserter with a warrant on every post between Halvenmark and the sea, twelve silver pennies and a notebook. He counts things.
Troi	A seamstress with a shop she has kept for eight years in Miren, three days west of the house. She walked into the dungeon by accident in late summer, through a door in the hillside behind the house. She reads walls with her hands, the way she reads a seam.
Spot	A pewter-gray lizard about the size of a medium dog, longer and lower, with amber eyes and scales that stay dry when everything else is wet. It turns up in Corvin's boat on the river. It is not sleeping on his pack.
The thief	Young, twenty or twenty-two, in dark clothes that drink the lamplight, with a bag at his hip. The leaflet warns that he steals for pleasure rather than profit and has never been seen by the light of day.
The troll	Head at the ceiling, shoulders wider than the passage, an axe at its side. It holds the room east of the trophy case below the cellar.
The cyclops	A man's proportions at a larger setting, a club across its knees, and a single eye that is not dull. It sits against the wall of its den and thinks.
The robot	Roughly man-shaped and slightly larger, it stands against the west wall of the machine room with well-kept joints. It knows the panel better than anyone. It describes itself as only a stupid robot.
The volcano gnome	Old, small, and seated on a stool at the foot of a volcano. He speaks one word at a time and drives a hard bargain.
The Unknown Implementer	Who, in his infinite wisdom, built this dungeon. His sarcophagus answers questions, after a fashion. Please do not disturb his bones.
The Flatheads	The ruling family of the Great Underground Empire, six generations in oil on the walls of the Bank of Zork. They include Lord Dimwit Flathead the Excessive and J. Pierpont Flathead, Chairman, author of *I'm Rich and You Aren't. So There!*
Prof. TAA	Of MIT Tech, Department of Dungeon Navigation. He signed the brass plate in the Carousel Room warning that compasses do not work there.

In this story only: Troi's mother, who taught her to feel the grain of cloth; the forester's family east of the house; and Mistress Annet of Miren, who likes her hems a finger shorter than is decent.

Timeline

From the Empire's dam to the third week underground. Day numbers count from Corvin's first morning at the house.

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENS
Year 783 of the Great Underground Empire	Flood Control Dam Number Three is built across the Frigid River in 112 days, with a grant of 37 million zorkmids and a great many rubber stampers.
18 January '79	The date on the Late Dungeon Edition of the US News & Dungeon Report, still in the rack at the Bank of Zork. The endgame is here! (Somewhere)
Unknown	Someone maps a list of rooms and later comes back to add a warning in a shakier hand: the water comes in the third month of autumn. don't be here.
Six months before	The fourteenth day of the siege of Halvenmark. Corvin refuses the order and walks north. It takes the Legion six hours to notice.
That summer	Field work, a lame carthorse, towns whose names he never learns. Corvin sees the first copy of his warrant on a post in Oriel.
Late summer	The leaves on the path behind the house have not turned. Troi takes shelter from a storm in a door in the hillside. *The Dead End* covers her month inside.
Autumn	A drunk in a tavern shows Corvin a gold coin and tells him about a house three days east of Miren. Corvin finds the house and the leaflet in its mailbox.
Day 1	The kitchen door, the sword, the rug, the trapdoor, the troll.
Day 2	The Frigid River, the Frobozz Magic Boat, and a lizard with a rock.
Day 3	Garlic, the bat, and an underground forest that smells of outside.
Day 10	Sky through the dome, and the cyclops.
Day 11	In a dark passage, a woman's voice: “I can hear you breathing.”
Day 16	The barrow, and a door that takes two people to open.
Day 19	The water comes into the flood room, ankle-deep.
Day 21	Knee-deep, and above every old mark on the wall.

Places

- **The white house.** At the edge of a clearing in the eastern forest, three days east of Miren and north off the main road. The front door is boarded; the kitchen door has rotted at the base. The only kept thing on the property is the mailbox.
- **The living room.** Furniture in place, a faded Persian rug, a sword leaning by the fireplace, and an empty, locked trophy case against the west wall.
- **The cellar.** Stained in layers by old floods, with a second trapdoor leading down.

- **The Gallery and the Studio.** Twelve empty hooks with the shadows of frames below them, and next door a catalog of sixty-nine painted color swatches. Or sixty-seven, depending on the count.
- **The coal mine.** Old workings, a wall labeled GRANITE WALL, and a gas room where no lamp may go and the dark has opinions.
- **The Frigid River.** Twenty feet wide, black and fast and cold enough to ache.
- **The forest.** Trees underground under a light with no source, and a great tree with a nest forty feet up.
- **The maze.** Dressed stone and passages with no relationship to one another.
- **The Carousel Room.** Eight exits and a compass needle that will not stop turning, as designed.
- **Flood Control Dam Number Three.** Two stories of concrete across an underground channel, with a control panel, a guidebook and a souvenir matchbook. Below it, an ancient altar and Commandment #12592.
- **The glacier.** Wall to wall and floor to ceiling, with drainage grooves cut by someone who knew it would melt.
- **The machine room.** Forty or fifty switches, a diagram, a robot, and a slot in the wall that takes coal.
- **Aragain Falls.** About four hundred and fifty feet. This is not a very smart thing to do.
- **The Bank of Zork.** Marble, brass, portraits, a teller's window, and a sticker on the doorframe that says HELLO, FOOTPAD!
- **The crypt and the Tomb of the Unknown Implementer.** Behind an arch that reads ABANDON EVERY HOPE, ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE.
- **The dome room.** A round worn room with a circle of real sky at the top.
- **The sand rooms.** Carved lintels, sand on the floors, and doors you find by feel.
- **The volcano.** A gnome on a stool, a spiral path, and a balloon at the top.
- **Miren.** A market town on a river, three days west of the house. The Legion runs most of its paperwork from the garrison there.
- **Halvenmark and Oriel.** The siege Corvin walked away from, and the town where he first saw his own warrant.

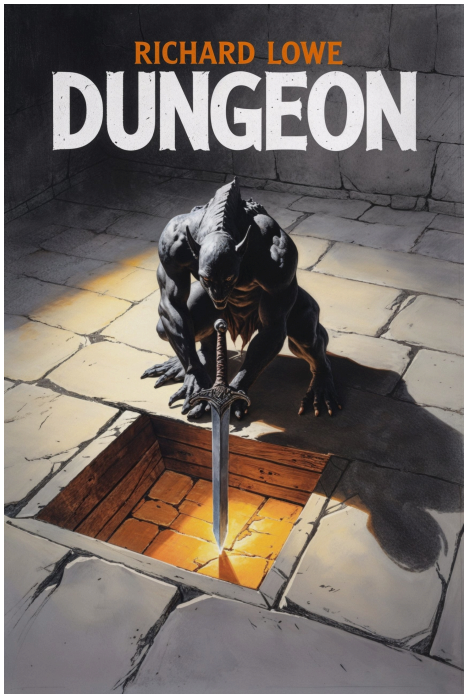
Glossary

- **The Great Underground Empire.** What the dungeon's inhabitants call the place. Its people have a bank, a currency, a newspaper and a ruling family.
- **Zork.** The name on the leaflet and over the bank. The dungeon is indifferent to what you call it.
- **The leaflet.** Found in the mailbox, in careful copperplate. You receive points for depositing valuables in the trophy case. The only penalty is for getting yourself killed, which you may do only twice.
- **The trophy case.** Glass front, dark wood, taller than a man, locked. Twenty categories of treasure belong in it.
- **The FROBOZZ Magic Company.** Maker, installer or warrantor of most things down here: the boat (warranted for 76 milliseconds), the potion, the glacier, the balloon, water safety, and in this story the Passage Inspection Bureau. Its notices end with Good luck!
- **Zorkmid.** The Empire's currency, with Flathead in profile on the bills.

- **Grue.** Never seen. Grues are the dark's active quality, and they prefer rooms without a lamp.
- **Hello, Sailor.** A greeting the gods take seriously, according to Commandment #12592.
- **The Legion.** The army Corvin served for ten years. It sends men through doors and expects them not to think too carefully about what the doors mean.
- **The warrant.** CORVIN CRAY, DESERTER. Height, build, the scar on his left forearm, the way he holds his shoulders. No likeness, and a modest reward.

Read the Novel

The Dead End is Troi's month alone in the dark before Corvin Cray found her. Dungeon tells the rest: a deserter with twelve silver pennies, a leaflet in a mailbox, a lizard named Spot, and twenty treasures for a trophy case in a dungeon that means exactly what it says.



Dungeon

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