

Artist's Statement: My entry relates to the theme “unearth” by uncovering what really lies under the lively streets of Paris. It shows what desperate measures people had to take in the past, by burying millions of people underground in the Paris Catacombs. It uncovers how life was really back then—an unsettling reminder of what happens under the outside.

The Dark Tunnels of Death and Despair

The explorer feels a bitter presence follow him from afar; it's not mortal but more of an ominous ghost of the dead. He overlooks it and keeps trekking down the winding and dimly lit corridor. Not only that, but he turns a corner and sees rows and rows upon human skulls. He's in the Paris Catacombs. Under the lively, bright streets of Paris lay the long and sprawling Paris catacombs. Throughout the late 18th century, Paris had a problem with overflowing cemeteries; because of that, the catacombs were built. Over 6 million people were piled into the catacombs, and throughout the time they have sat there, they have been building up rage and becoming more and more vengeful. There are millions of spirits down in the catacombs, but there are a few important ones. Throughout them there are 3 influential spirits that will be mentioned and covered, which are Philibert Aspairet, The Woman in White: La Dame Blanche, and “The Watcher in the Darkness.”

First, among all the catacomb legends, one name stands out—Philibert Aspairet. Philibert Aspairet was a French doorman who had become lost in restricted and unmapped catacombs in 1793. He had entered from a staircase from Val-de-Grâce hospital. When in the catacombs, he likely dropped his light source, which probably caused his death. He had lain there undiscovered for over 10 years, till his body was found in 1804 in a tunnel near the current rue Henry Barbusse. Many people believe he went down there to look for either a brewery or just to explore, but no one knows for sure. Now in the present he has a commemorative tomb down in the restricted parts of the catacombs. He wanders as a lost spirit down there looking for way out of the tunnels

Additionally, we have The Woman in White: La Dame Blanche. No one knows for sure who this woman in white really is, but it makes her way more mysterious. People have thought that she was a noblewoman who was fleeing the guillotine during the revolution. Others tell of a grieving widow who descended to find her lover's remains and never saw the light again. She is described as a pale, translucent woman in flowing white; she drifts silently through the bone-lined corridors. Witnesses report sudden chills and a wave of sorrow when she passes, as though her grief hangs on to the living. She is often “seen” near the more ornate bone arrangements, as if searching for a familiar skull or weeping over the artistry of death itself. Unlike the other spirits that roam the corridors, she is not malicious or is an evil spirit. She is sorrow and grief—a forever mourner wandering infinitely in the afterlife.

Lastly, we have the Watcher in the Darkness. Not every spirit in the catacombs takes a human form. Some are a presence—a thing that is felt rather than being seen. The Watcher in the Darkness is less a spirit than the embodiment of the catacombs themselves. Explorers explain the sensation of eyes following them through the bone-lined corridors. It's a shadow that lingers in corners but vanishes when you turn. A footstep echoes behind you, even though you are alone. The Watcher is the most well known legend. There's a belief that the corridors themselves are “alive”, feeding on fear, waiting for someone to fall into the other side. For others, the Watcher is just the consequence of sensory deprivation, the weight of silence, and the psychology of walking along the skulls of millions of spirits. For most, it is the realest and truelest ghost of them all.

All throughout the elaborate catacombs, there are millions upon thousands of supernatural beings down there, but there are 3 significant ones. They are Philibert Aspairet, The Woman in White: La

Dame Blanche, and “The Watcher in the Darkness.” These spirits are what really built up the long, eerie catacombs under Paris, making the catacombs what they are today, an unsettling reminder of the past.