

The Colony

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

After planting his feet down on solid ground, Darryl trudges forward, noticing the latched makeshift doorway shutting just over-top of him. After about ten paces or so in the dimming darkness, he feels a strange fluttering presence along both sides of his body. Looking into a small darkened chamber's walls right next to him, he spots a myriad of light brown coloured bats awakened from their winter hibernation and flying about near a narrow hole in the adjacent chamber's walls. Reassured that they can blindly sense his presence with their ears, Darryl walks onward, ignoring the eccentric winged masses carpeting the rocky ceiling overhead.

After about twenty minutes of walking through the earthen tunnel-scape, the underground pathway arcs slightly with Darryl feeling the walls around him with his bare hands to stay on course. After about another twenty or so minutes, another small hole in the rocky ceiling pops up allowing more late afternoon light from the overhead ravine to creep into the darkened pathway. Noticing a slight drop in the height of the tunnel, Darryl ducks away from the low cave ceiling which has even more of the same Little Brown Bats maneuvering around, ready to emerge and forage for nightly insects in the upcoming twilight. Walking bent over for the next twenty metres or so to avoid bumping his head, Darryl notices the presence of some ancient artifacts in a small cavity by his feet from the Civil War of yesteryears ago. After about another ten minutes of walking alongside more darkened flying masses of cave dwelling bats with old muskets, bayonets and army regalia at his feet, Darryl notices the presence of fiery cave light ahead. As the tunnel ceiling suddenly grew higher, he hears the light din of voices and notices two large torches on each side, by a large opening. Gazing upward, Darryl sees an old wooden sign which reads: "Fort Getzmana". Continuing on through the underground entrance to the abandoned and reclaimed fort, Darryl's eyes adjust to the brighter lights and enters a large common area where Getz colony members are seated at large rectangular tables, chatting and drinking warm beverages communally.

"Hey there stranger! What brings you all this way? You look tired... Come sit down and introduce yerself!" A burly and bearded man says at the head of one of the closer tables.

"My name is Darryl. Jimbo sent me this way after my blood was cleared for tracers in the medic tent about an hour ago. My guess is this is the fabled place they call Getz Ravine... Am I right?"

"Yessir! You're in the right place. Who referred you here, Bro?"

"Well... I was stuck in Skeltopp for a long while and later met Cindy after I fled and found my way out. She once relocated from here, preferring to test out 'The Oasis' instead of ravine colony life. I'm just the opposite you see..."

“Cindy! Bless her soul! We knew her well in this place. That’s good enough as a referral. Welcome to Getz, Darryl!”

“Is there room here to stow my things away and sleep here at night? I’m here to help out as well should you need me to run errands on the outside...”

“Sure thing, Darryl! Wendy will show you to the men’s barracks. And she’ll give you the royal tour and tell you some of the rules o’ this place.”

“Hi Darryl! I’m Wendy... Cindy and I were bunkmates when she was here. Glad you found this place the way you did... The worst is having to turn people away at Split Rock because their ‘correctives’ can be charted out with GPS coordinates... Above all, we just can’t risk giving away our beloved colony’s secret location. Glad you were a Skeltopper and not a Catchment escapee like the more unfortunate sort...”

“Feels great to finally be here... I know that ‘The Oasis’ has always had a special alliance with this place through the years with some of the ties existing through the hidden slave corridor and internet kinship they call ‘The Network’... While I was in ‘The Oasis’, some of my friends there used to have hidden lines of communication with this place through phone and the internet.”

“That’s right. I still chat with Cindy from time to time that way... Follow me and I’ll show you around!”

“Thanks Wendy! Didn’t realize at first that this place was so close-by. Some source at ‘The Oasis’ said it was three hundred clicks away. In reality it was roughly the same distance north that it took me to get to Providence Island from Skeltopp...”

“That’s true Darryl... Good thing you listened to Cindy! Lots of myths exist about how to get to this place. It’s all very secretive with all the spies out and about these days.”

After leaving the main gathering area referred by colony members as ‘The Commons’, Darryl follows his new friend Wendy through a set of tunnels to get to the men’s barracks.

“Here is your new bunk, Darryl! You’ll be at the top just above Timmy. You can leave your things right in that small cavity there by the entrance. There’s just enough room...”

“Thanks Wendy!”

After putting away his belongings and getting a warm extra sleeping bag and pillow to set down over the hard mattress, Darryl is toured some more around the underground Getz colony.

“This is the area they call the ‘power bunker’. There are a few electrical outlets to power up a phone or computer device through a cable that connects to a large battery powered generator. The solar generator is linked to a set of solar panels well dissimulated up above on the outer ravine. Every day, a new colony member is enlisted

to head out to maintain the hidden panels and make sure they remain out of sight from ravine intruders and path users.”

“That’s great! What about the internet? Will a connection work from the ‘power bunker’?”

“Good question! There’s actually a mobile hotspot that allows for a slightly slow connection that we now have through an IT ally that works in the area. You can tap into the hotspot from ‘The Commons’ and the ‘power bunker’.”

“Nice! Looking forward to chatting with my folks at ‘The Oasis’ to tell them I finally found the place.”

After being shown around other parts of the large reclaimed fortress which was once equipped with a dungeon for military prisoners in times of old, Darryl heads back to ‘The Commons’ to mingle and meet with some new friends. As night fell in Getz colony with the local tunnel bats emerging out of the hibernaculum to forage and set their sights on relocating to a more fitting summer roost to raise their young, Darryl dozes off to sleep in the top bunk of the men’s barracks. After sleeping soundly into the morning, he is awakened by a large rumbling from overhead.

“Hey buddy! Everything ok? What’s that loud sound?” He asks his bunkmate Timmy.

“No worries, Bro! That’s just mountain bikers... You’ll get used to them, they have no idea we’re down below their trailhead...”

“Thanks, Jimmy.” Darryl says, shutting his eyes again to get more sleep.

Settling into Getz Ravine through spring and into the summer, Darryl soon takes on duties like foraging for provisions in town and community errands such as ‘panel duty’. Taking the same familiar tunnel to Split Rock Encampment and back throughout the week, Darryl would soon become attached to the resident bats that would return to the old fortress tunnels every year in the late summer and early fall to collectively prepare for hibernation during the colder winter temperatures. Many seasons would soon pass with Darryl forging important ties with distant allies in ‘The Network’ all engaged in trying to free and relocate slaves from all parts of the Megacity’s watershed and beyond.

The End...