

The Ravine

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

As winter gave away with to spring with a major snow melt over Trench Megacity and Providence Island, Darryl prepares to leave 'The Oasis' to begin a day's trek to Getz Ravine.

"You can always come back to visit, Darryl! Once a Skeltopper, always a Skeltopper according to the likes of us!" His friend Cindy says around the bonfire in the communal warming cavity.

"So I really have to backtrack north passing by that god-forsaken correctional facility to get to Getz?" Darryl asks.

"Yes. Once you're off the ferry, follow the winding riverbed trail north which will take you 50 metres or so from the tall silver Skeltopp perimeter fences and continue to follow the watershed until you get to Westsmythe Tributary..."

"So, when I find the creek bed, I take the woodland rock trail east that goes uphill to the hidden Split Rock encampment..."

"You've got it. Once you reach the encampment, ask for Jimbo. He'll take you to the underground entrance to the Getz colony."

"Perfect. I'm going to have to get over my fear of being re-incarcerated and put back in A.I. research... I think colony life will be well worth it in the long run."

"So, have you got all your things packed? Angie also left you a bit of a care package for your travels."

"Yes, I thanked her personally when I saw her two days ago. The care package will prove useful once I get off the ferry."

"After warming up his chilly fingers by putting his chapped hands close to the lower embers of the fire pit, Darryl stands and hoists his rucksack over his left shoulder, bidding his 'Oasis' friends adieu. Walking to the familiar culvert, he stoops down and gets on all fours to exit the crawl space where the familiar Juniper bushes usher him into the exterior world of Providence Island and its old water treatment plant. After trudging through the puddles by the old lighthouse, Darryl sets his course due east to the familiar ferry docks. After a short wait for the Onigawara to arrive from the hazy metropolis, Darryl soon boards the ferry via the ramp and gangway along with a small crowd of residents from the island, hoping his beard and goatee would disguise him well enough from the authorities searching for ex-Skeltoppers and escapees. After the short northbound commute along the same chilly passage, the Onigawara docks at the terminal and Darryl exits the stout barrel-shaped vessel, eager to begin his journey north toward the riverbed trail. After passing under the same highway underpasses, he follows an old cycling trail to get to the mouth of the river. Happy to see the estuary, he

soon follows the rushing waters to the north riverbed trail. Heading north toward Skeltopp, Darryl feels a rush of anxiety as he retraces his steps from the fateful winter night of his escape. Recalling some of his route by the the large willow where he hid from the pursuing guards on ATVs, Darryl heads east, passing the same imposing fences which seemed menacing even in the light of the clear spring morning. After trekking for about an hour at a quickened pace, due to the anxiety of seeing Skeltopp all over again, Darryl finally reaches the Westsmythe Tributary. Heading into the uphill section of the old mountain bike trail with a view of the creek below, Darryl trusts his friend Cindy's directions and continues his commute toward the Split Rock Encampment. After cutting through a slender gap between two slightly connected boulders, Darryl finally sees human activity for the first time in over an hour. Heading into the encampment with its different coloured tents and make-shift shelters, Darryl heads to the largest of the shelters which appears to be shaped a little bit like a teepee.

"Hello. I'm looking for Jimbo!" Darryl shouts just outside the conical tent.

"Jimbo is just two minutes more down encampment lane!" A female voice shouts from within.

"Oh, you mean in that patch of small wooden shelters just east of here?" Darryl asks.

"Yes. Are you being tracked, by the way?" The same voice asks.

"Nope. I'm from 'The Oasis' and I'm not on neuro-tracers..." Darryl says walking toward Jimbo's hut.

"Great. Tell Jimbo that Wilma sent you." She says faintly in the distance.

"Thank you." Darryl says from afar.

Upon his approach to the tiny wooden shelters, a man exits through a slender wooden door. The man looks out and sees Darryl in the distance.

"I'm Jimbo. Who are you stranger?"

"I'm Darryl. Talked to Wilma just now. I actually am a friend of Cindy's. She told me to find you in this encampment for directions to the Getz Ravine colony."

"Cindy! You're a friend of hers? How is she doing? You're welcome here if you're a friend of hers. So she's still in 'The Oasis' these days?" Jimbo asks in a more upbeat tone of voice.

"Yes, we shared stories and she told me how to get here from the ferry terminal. Can you show me the rest of the way?"

"Sure thing, Darryl. You're almost there! Just a bit further on the Split Rock Trail and I'll show you the hidden entrance. First things first... We have to take a blood sample to check if you're trackable. It's just procedure for the Getz colony. Everyone gets screened first then we send you onward, got it?"

“No problem. Used to be a Skeltopp cognito-offender but that was months ago. Back then, ‘correctives’ in the facility weren’t laced with tracers. They just focused on keeping us permanently locked down.”

“Excellent! I’ll show you the way to ‘The Lab’.”

Following the stooping encampment dweller to a small red tent with a white medical aid logo on its fly, Darryl is introduced to the encampment medic.

“Hey, Harvey! This fellow over here is Darryl. He came from ‘The Oasis’ and became friends with Cindy while he was there. We need a quick blood test for chemical tracers and we can usher him in.”

“No prob! Darryl, roll up your sleeve and I’ll just take a small blood sample from your forearm.”

“Sure thing doc!” Darryl answers.

After taking a small vial of Darryl’s blood, the medic quickly bandages the patient’s arm and places a few drops of his blood onto a small lab tile containing Reagent “Q”. After waiting thirty seconds, the lab sample does not change to a dark purple colour but instead stays pretty much the same.

“We’re clear here Darryl! You’re good to go!”

After thanking Harvey and leaving his tent, Darryl follows Jimbo uphill to below a stand of Spruce trees where a series of birch logs are tied together side to side.

“This is where you have to enter to get to the colony.” Jimbo says lifting up the logs to reveal a small hidden entrance leading slightly underground.

“Thanks Jimbo! How long does it take to get there?”

“We found these tunnels about fifty years back. They date back to the Civil War which occurred here some two hundred years ago before the name Getz Ravine even existed. It should take you at least 50 or so minutes to get to the colony and the abandoned underground fort.”

“I heard stories Getz was further off. Will I be able to find my way in the dark?”

“It’s dark at first, but you’ll find that there are a few holes along the way that let in a bit of daylight. Just follow the walls. It’s no maze down there. There are no forks anywhere to make things confusing. Safe travels!”

“Thanks Jimbo!” Darryl says descending into the cavity below.

The End...