

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



The Bunker by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | October 2017

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by Mike Bozart

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Epic Prepperazzi (EP) was an upstart dry-food supplier for preppers (people who believe that a catastrophic disaster or apocalyptic emergency is likely to occur in the near future, and therefore stockpile food, water and goods accordingly). Being a latecomer to the mushrooming hoard-for-survival milieu, the Canadian-American company decided the best way to increase sales and carve out market share was to have a unique, attention-arresting contest. The nondescript online text ad read:

How long could you live alone in a 70° Fahrenheit (21° Celsius) underground bunker in central Colorado with a surfeit of food, drink (including beer/wine) and marijuana, but with NO Internet, NO e-mail, NO phone, NO texts, NO TV, NO radio, and NO clock/watch? We'll pay a special someone \$100 a day. Do you have what it takes? Text YES to EP999 for more info.

Doug, a widowed, childless, retired, healthy, 61-year-old Caucasian Manitoban, had to read it again on his laptop. And then, another four times. He smiled and thought: *This is me! I could do this. I'll finally write that novel before I croak. My experience down there could figure into the plot. I bet that I can go at least a month in that underground flat with no problem. Probably two. An easy \$6K. Or more! For sure. They may have to extract me from that bunker.*

He received the digital prospectus on his smartphone two minutes after texting. Doug mused over the details. *Nice logo. Oh, so the bunker is deep inside a Rocky Mountain. Hmmm ... 700 square feet [65 square meters] of living space. Not bad; bigger than my studio apartment in Toronto. Nice bedroom and bathroom. Decent kitchen. Laundry facilities. A small home theater with over 15,000 film titles, including adult selections. Ah, porno is included. Definitely a male behind this crazy idea. Over 40,000 video-projected e-books are available, including steamy romance novels. Maybe a female is involved, too. Over 80,000 song titles in every genre. Wow! Better have some Ravel and Mussorgsky. Over 2,000 video games. I'd have to be really bored. Though, computer chess might be ok. Or, maybe Go. Wow! That's a nice rowing machine. It even has a 400-foot-long [122 meters] circular track in an old tunnel for walking, running or cycling. Final decision on winning candidate to be made by EP on September 30, 2014. Deadline for entrant forms is September 15th. That's just three days away. If chosen, notification will be made on October 3rd. Must be*

able to begin bunker habitation on Friday, October 10th at noon. There will be media coverage and fanfare. And, last but not least, the hold-harmless agreement – the waiver of the right to sue. Ah, the lawyers probably spent months crafting the language for this bizarre, potentially dangerous, publicity stunt. Should I really sign up for this? Ah, why not? There's no application fee; it's totally free. Anyway, I'm sure that I won't get picked. My age will disqualify me; I bet that they think I'm too old – too much of a health risk – a liability. They're probably looking for an ultra-fit, manic, 30-something survivalist type. Oh well, here goes. One never knows.

It was a chilly, cloudy, forlorn first October (the 3rd) Friday in Winnipeg. Doug was sipping on some tomato-basil soup in his seniors-only apartment when he heard the text alert on his smartphone. He clicked on the message icon. The new text was from EP. *I guess that's the 'thanks for entering, but we chose someone else' text. Oh, well. It was a longshot after all.*

Doug, completely stunned, read the first line aloud:

"We have chosen YOU, Douglas Henry Martinvale!"

He laid the phone down on the table and looked out the window. An American crow zipped by as his breathing stopped for nine seconds. *Wow! I won. I actually got chosen. They picked me. I wonder why. Doesn't matter now. Guess I need to book a flight to Denver. Who should I tell? Only Steven. [his younger brother in Edmonton] No one else. Don't want to be talked out of this.*

Doug arrived at Denver International Airport with just one duffel bag at 2:02 PM on a cool and rainy Thursday, October 9th. He took a hotel shuttle bus to a nearby 3-star 12-story. Once settled in the sixth-floor room, he looked at the gray clouds hovering over the Rockies and thought: *Well, this will be my last night above ground for a while. For how long? Wonder how long I can go. Wonder what the record is for a human living underground. Didn't some woman live in a cavern for four months? Who was she? Where was that?*

The white-haired Canadian then did some research on his smartphone and saw that an Italian lady, Stefania Follini, stayed in a cave in Carlsbad, New Mexico for 130 days in 1989 as part of a circadian rhythm experiment. She fell into a routine of 48-hour wake-sleep cycles. Once back on the

Earth's surface, she thought that she had only been underground for two months. *Gosh, will I lose track of time to that extent? At least the time underground was going by faster than it felt. The reverse would be agonizing.*

After calling room service, Doug's sliced roasted turkey, mashed potatoes and string bean meal arrived 26 minutes later. He ate while watching the evening world news. *My last normal dinner for a long, long time. Savor every bite. It won't taste like this in the bunker. Get ready for powder-and-water gruel. Oh, the culinary joys that await. Not! Ah, maybe it won't be so bad. Might even get used to it. Maybe.*

The middle-aged Caucasian American news anchor then said that Thomas Eric Duncan, the first person diagnosed with Ebola in the United States, had died the day before. *Well, no Ebola down in the bunker. A great place to avoid viruses altogether and remain disease-free. What if a deadly plague swept across North America while I was down there. Yikes! What a terrifying thought! The effects of reading way too much science fiction.*

Doug soon felt drowsy. He lay down on the bed and fell asleep within ten minutes. The air travel, even though not a very long flight, had taken it out of him; he was spent.

The next morning he awoke at 6:36 AM and jumped into the shower. After eating a light breakfast in the lobby, he walked out the door. The black limousine was already there. He got in the back seat with his sole piece of luggage.

"So, are you ready to go down in the hole?" the late-40-ish African American driver asked. *Down in the hole? So, he already knows about it. Who told him? Someone from EP, I guess. They've already started the PR [public relations] machine. They just couldn't wait.*

"I guess so," Doug said. "If not now, when? I'm at the perfect phase of my life to do something like this." *The crazy phase.*

The drive to Silverthorne took 91 minutes. It was largely sans conversation. Doug had grown pensive. He noticed that there was already snow on the upper slopes of the mountains. *Will I ever see these mountains again? Am I going to die down there? Is this where it ends for me? Why such grim thoughts?*

After a 22-minute photo-op, replete with handshakes and a series of short – though quite bombastic – EP speeches, Doug boarded an elevator that went 620 feet (189 meters) down into a mountain. *Well, this is it. Hope I don't crack up.*

Twenty-seven seconds later, a now-not-so-optimistic Doug; a very-much-ebullient Marcus Q. Weizenstien, the 55-and-still-quite-suave president of EP; and an-almost-deadpan Juan Lopez, a 37-year-old, pencil-mustached, Latino security guard, stepped off the elevator into a concrete-walled corridor. Forty-nine feet (15 meters) farther, the sparsely lamped, slab-quiet, curving, industrial-looking hallway was interrupted by a steel door on the inner wall. *This must be the front door to my new apartment for the indefinite future. I bet that it's the only door: one way in – and one way out.*

Juan unlocked the massive metal door with one of a dozen silver keys on his belt-tethered ring. He then pulled the door open to reveal a very ordinary foyer with a 7'-9" (2.36 meter) ceiling. The recessed overhead light was on. It was indeed at room temperature inside, some seven degrees Fahrenheit (four degrees Celsius) warmer than the corridor. *Not bad. I can do this. I can live here.*

The three of them began to tour the furnished bunker. Once in the kitchen, Marcus stopped and pointed at the stove.

"It's an all-electric Medallion Home," the EP president proclaimed with a charitable chuckle. "You are old enough to remember those heavy, little, round, gold-and-black plaques, too, Doug. It's ok; it's safe to admit it down here." He laughed again and then recomposed. "Our safety consultant said – well, he actually screamed, 'No natural gas, no propane – way too dangerous – too much of a fire hazard.' And, I agreed with him. No, we don't want our intrepid Canadian guest to become a charred subterranean marshmallow. By the way, there are fire extinguishers in every room. There's also a hose under this sink that you can connect to the threaded faucet." *Yeah, an out-of-control fire down here would suck ... infernally.*

"So, no candles or matches?" Doug asked, anticipating the likely negatory answer.

"Nope, and no lighters and no smoking," Marcus stated emphatically. "If a smoke detector goes off and we find out

that it was from smoking, you'll get yanked out and forfeit all of your earnings. If you're wondering about the weed, it's under the coffee table with a vaporizer. Vaping is ok. Just pace yourself." *I bet that he's a pothead. [habitual marijuana smoker] He probably moved to Colorado just for the lax marijuana laws.*

"Ok, I'm not really a pot smoker, but after a week I may be taking a puff," Doug said and then laughed bashfully.

No reaction from Marcus. Juan just smiled.

"Are you a drinker, Mr. Martinvale?" Marcus asked with a raised-higher right eyebrow. *Hope this old sod isn't a fish.*

"Light to moderate," Doug answered. "Hope I don't become a full-blown alcoholic down here." *But with not much to do, and all day and night to do it, who knows? Hope that I can commence, continue, and complete that novel. I'll start it off like my situation: an older guy living underground, completely oblivious to the surface world. It may just write itself.*

"We certainly hope not, too," Marcus added. "Once again, just pace yourself." *That must be their mantra: Just pace yourself. Just place yourself. Just replace yourself.*

"I will. So, where's that great-tasting Epic Prepperazzi food stashed?" Doug asked. *Great tasting? He's pulling my leg.*

"Right around this corner, kind sir," Marcus matter-of-factly answered. "Five bins of freeze-dried and millstone-pulverized carbs, sugars, vitamins, minerals, protein, amino acids and some unsaturated fats – just a little. Each one of these powder bins is twenty feet [six meters] tall; one for each taste: salty, sweet, sour, bitter and umami. Dispense and mix as you like. Be creative. Experiment with the proportions and consistency. Find your form factor." *Find your form factor? Too much. Must suppress the urge to guffaw.*

"Well, I'm no chef, Mr. Weizenstien." *Especially with powders.*

"Oh, I'm sure that you'll come up with a winning taste, Doug." *Yeah, right.*

"So, there's even umami," Doug repeated.

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