***THE TEMPTING DARKNESS OF THE UNEXPLORED***

In the 18th century not a single European monarch could feel safe without having strong borders. The kings and the queens were ever busy planning where to build castles, fortresses and fortifications. The expanding Russian Empire was no exception. Tzaress Catherine II (the Great) was very much concerned about the southern borders of her empire being wide open to the invaders from the Turkish Crimea. The threat growing, in 1778, she ordered to build a fortification not far from the mouth of the Dnieper River. The fortress called ‘Alexander-Schanz’ was not large: it consisted of a rampart, a moat, two gates on the opposite sides of it opening into the steppe. Beautiful St. Catherine’s Cathedral was built on its grounds where Russian Orthodox holy services still take place every day. There is an unusual door cut in the floor of the Cathedral. ‘Where does it lead?’ a tourist may rightfully wonder.

The answer to the question exists.

The fortification was meant for unfailing defence. However, the architects were also to think about the possibility of bad luck. In case of emergency, the soldiers needed to leave the territory of the fortress as fast as only possible. For this reason an extensive system of tunnels was made under the ground, the numerous secret corridors all connected and reaching much farther than any foreign intruder could imagine. The deep and dangerous dry Well on the territory of the former fortress also invites us to explore the catacombs, since these abandoned arteries still pass under the grounds of the modern city of Kherson which developed from the ‘Alexander-Schanz’ fortification. Moreover, the underground passages served their original purpose once more when during World War II the local people found their refuge in them from the Nazi’s bombs and persecution.

The city above has changed much since. But the catacombs still keep their secrets. According to one of the legends, Tzaress Catherine’s golden coach is hidden in one of the passages. It is also rumoured that Catherine’s favourite Prince Potyomkin hid his enormous treasures there.

It is dark and dangerous down in the catacombs, which is why unauthorized exploration is strictly prohibited. Still, there are enthusiasts who would like to get the permission from the government to explore the tempting darkness. And, who knows, we may find ourselves astounded at their findings!