



# Living in the Nut

Story Four

Strange Skies

A strange cloud moves in as the residents of the Nut fight for control of the end of the world

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A ghostly image slowly moved across the open ground about three hundred miles away from the Nut. While the satellites could show images, their usefulness was slowly coming to an end with no one able to do the routine maintenance. Most of the modern satellites were autonomous drones piloting themselves while doing routine maintenance, but long-term care was still the work of an astronaut, and they were all dead. The looming unknown was much like the future of the Nut with changes happening daily. In the last two months, we had six governments with the first one lasting about twenty hours. The verbal sparring turned to fighting and riots on several levels. President Janice Heron stepped down to help settle the fighting, but after a rumor surfaced about her and one of her young students came to light, it was clear why she wanted out of the public eye. She was found a day later with her wrists slit lying next to the body of the thirteen-year-old boy she was having an affair with. She had stabbed her victim to death before killing herself. From there the next two governments never got past the election phase with recall votes happening before the newly elected could take office.

The image was like a large shifting cloud low to the ground and moving with than against the wind. As it shifted the colors of the cloud changed in an almost pearl like gleam. The current government was able to take office and has been governing for about a week, but that might not last. The new form was more akin to a parliament with a prime minister voted in by a majority of the elected officials rather than the will of the people. Their first act was to ban executions. Killing when there are so few people left just didn't seem right. Their next action is still happening. The voted to take a census, counting how many people there are but with greater detail than the old American census. A focus on DNA with everyone being required to give a sample. In a secure room attached to the control room, a computer tech named Darla developed a program to catalog the results but no one outside her, and the new government knows why. They should remember that it was secrets that ended every other government before them.

A dark cloud slowly moved in from the east in a zig-zagging movement leaving a serpentine pattern in the sand. The new cloud was black with a shifting pattern but without the glimmer of the first cloud. The dark cloud shifted heading in a straight line to the first cloud as it circled a pool of water. The two clouds met at the pool of water on opposite sides. They started

to almost chase each other around the pond with no clear idea of who was chasing who and no understanding of what was coming next. As they went around, they elongated until they were connected on both ends with their edges blending into a sparkling gray. As the clouds sped up, the image broke up. The satellite was no longer able to maintain a geosynchronous orbit. It would be eighty-eight minutes until the satellite would be back overhead. There were a few other satellites including one that could remain locked on the Nut, but none of them have as good of a sensor or imaging package. The strange happening outside went unnoticed as the internal battle for power caused a shift in leadership again with the first prime minister James Johnson resigning after it was made known he was having an affair with the lead of the minority party Clive Hanks. The new prime minister, a Janice Sherley, is pushing for an acceleration of the census.

The count would start from the second level and go down not only counting everyone but cataloging every aspect of the individual right down to their DNA. The most contentious part of the census was the search. The men and women put in charge of the census were given the authority to enter people's rooms and catalog everything they see while confiscating contraband. Yes, they are going into people's stuff and taking anything that might be against the rules. To many, those small rooms are all that was left of their old lives when they had rights when they were Americans. So yeah, there were riots and a few deaths. The search found three hundred guns twenty explosives and seven hundred pounds of cocaine and heroin. They also confiscated every book they found. It's unclear why.

In one room they found a short in the wall connected to the long-dead artificial intelligence. It's unclear if the people living in the room did the damage or it was done when people moved into the Nut. For the first year, I lived and worked with an AI named Gail. She was going to run the day-to-day operations when the Nut was first developed but when the Austin thing happened, and the AI movement was put on hold until the Government could investigate then regulate how much or how far an AI could go. The Austin Massacre enforced the fear of an AI apocalypse such as the old Terminator franchise. The short was fixed, but Gail has yet to reemerge and may be long dead. I miss her voice, even though she didn't say much.

The current government seems to be stable with a prime minister named Helena Carter who was once an airline pilot for Southwest back when people could still fly or go outside. Her first act was to take all the confiscated books and offer to return them. Any book not returned would be used to make a library. While a few people did take their books back, most donated their books to a once long dead form of lending. Of course, this started a new rumor that the government will end the social networks along with the network access to the book, movie and television show library. The word was that the Nuttery cause the fall of the last six governments as well as the deaths in the riots, but it is also the last bastion of free speech. PM Carter is trying to talk her way out of a problem that was invented on the Nuttery and not in real life. If she keeps fighting with the rumor, we may end up with another new government before long.

After a week we finally were able to regain access to the satellite and image the ground around the Nut, but the clouds were gone. Around the pool of water were streaks of black and shimmery white forming a circle. The water in the pool changed color from a dark black to a dark gray almost like paint. The satellite its self was losing focus and could be on its way out of service. While it was overhead, we connected it to a relay of smaller satellites hoping to map what was left of the world and just maybe see if any of the strange black rock that ended everything we knew was still intact in Europe. But for now, we are alone and facing strange skies with no way of knowing what will be coming next.