



LIVING IN THE NUT

Story One

What this is about

There is life at the end of the world. Trying to survive will take everyone and I won't be easy.
Starting something new never is even when its humanity starting over

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Let's see there's a crack running along the top about one centimeter wide and about three centimeters deep. It runs from junction CW15 to CW16, but it doesn't cross the rim. Every three days I walk the support tunnels looking for structural problems as well as other issues such as electrical shorts. The main problem I look for are cracks such as this one showing there might be the possibility of a breach. Before I go into the tunnels, I check the Giger counter then I send in a probe looking for radiation because you never know what could leak in from the end of the world.

It's hard to believe it's been two years since the world came to an end. Everyone predicted this great war, famine or civil unrest but no one was watching as a chunk of something they called dark matter struck somewhere in Europe. They called it dark matter because they didn't know what else to call it. The big thing was about the size of a mountain and completely black. Some said it absorbed light and emitted radiation. That radiation killed everything within one-thousand miles instantly. By the end of the week, the radiation spread across the globe taking all life. That is all but those of us not protected. At W25 there are a series of small holes about three feet away from the junction. They appear to be man-made but by what or for what reason I don't know. I mark the place on the tablet then using a spray-on sealant I cover the holes. When I took this job, I thought about how I could spend my day alone with my thoughts while I wrote the next great American novel or one that people would actually read.

Three years ago, I was in what could be considered a dead-end job. Considering what happened I assume it was a dead-end job just like almost every other job. I was a sort of janitor/security guard for an office building. Most of the offices were empty with a few floors closed, but I still had to vacuum them. I worked from 6pm to 6am every other day. By 6pm almost everyone is gone. On the top floor in some sort of irony was a company that sells space in their arc. Now when I say arc, I don't mean a boat I mean a place where they could wait out a disaster. A bomb shelter they decided to call an arc. They worked all night long. Part of my job was to be available for cleanups and to escort them to and from the front door past the security doors. From 8pm to 6 am the doors are locked with an alarm, so I had to open the door or wait for the police to come and let me tell you they don't like false calls.

My last day with the company was just like every other day when I got a call. My boss told me they were hiring a service that would do the same thing as me for less. I was fired and with no benefits and today was my last day. I needed the money, so I worked the night cleaning the floors while listening for calls. About 1am the guys with Ground Arc called saying they were having a pizza delivered and he was at the main door. I met the pizza guy with a cart, and he loaded five pizzas on. They had paid for the pizza but not the tip, so I gave the kid a twenty and he left. I brought them the cart, and they thanked me when someone said, “*we didn’t tip the driver.*” I told them I did, and they offered to pay me back. I jokingly said, “*how about a job.*” They looked at me then each other and just like that I had a job working in a large empty motel buried deep in the ground.

My new job was more of a caretaker watching for problems while a mostly robotic cleaning system took care of the rest. The arc is made up like a large almond in the ground with tunnels running from tip to root with W on the west and E on the east. The C stands for Center. When I took the job, they told me I would have to live there twenty-four seven. At first, I almost said no then they offered me forty-five thousand dollars a year. Free food, free rent, access to a network with almost every movie and television show ever made and double what I earned in my last job? You bet I took the job. They showed me what to do, and my job took about four hours a day leaving me with too much time on my hands. After a solid month of being alone, I decided to write a novel. I wrote several short stories as well as a few long ones, but only those people who stumbled onto my website read them. After getting permission, I turned an office next to mine into my continuity office where I could write while keeping track on my timeline.

At the end of the tunnel, I come to the main hub or what would be the root of the nut. All eight tunnels meet up here with access to the services as well as the main controls. I check all the levels. The air quality in section five level six was low. The nut is made up of twenty levels with the top being the penthouse and the bottom level containing the water reclamation service. In the center of the nut going from level five up to level fifteen, there was an open area with a park-like

setting. I say it was because that is all gone but more on that later. All together the facility was built to house around ten-thousand people and not what we have today. After the fall and we gained so many people that we needed some to help with operations. Today I have Skip and Frank. Skip isn't her real name, but she refuses to tell us what it was, and I just don't really care. She does her job and doesn't bitch about trivial things. Frank is a good pairing with her because he is a lady's man and she isn't into guys. After a few times of him hitting on her, he gave up and somehow, they became friends. I say somehow because Frank lives up to his name and is frank with everyone. I gave Skip my pad and went to the main door on level eight.

There was a time I left this door open with just myself to worry about. Today we have to punch in a code to get in or out. The first thing that hits you is the smell. Over forty-thousand people stuck in a place built for a max of maybe ten-thousand can build up a smell that's hard to describe. Parts of this place smell like a port-a-potty while others just smell like body odor and used diapers. Today was clean the halls day and the smell of the day was a disinfectant mixed with mint, body odor, and this urine smell that never leaves. I checked in with security and picked up the access code so I could listen to the reports back in my room. To make room I gave up my apartment for a ten-foot by ten-foot room. I share bathroom facilities with the other five-hundred people on my floor in my section. My mess hall is in the middle of the section. I sat down and entered the code. The reports were the usual fighting and more fighting. At the end were the reports of people trying to get out and those that killed themselves. Everyday humanity slowly slips into extinction.

Two years ago, I was doing my usual walk around when a call came in on the mainline. I had never got a call on this line. Only George and Gregg Fine the owners of the facility should have the number. They told me to turn on the news any news. Video of a flash of light in Germany then nothing. The video went to France as it also vanished then London. NBC was showing the effects in New York City. Gregg told me to hit the big button and wait for guests. There are two ways into the complex. The small door I entered in and the main door. That main door is closed with only one way to open it. The door is at the root just above the control room with a metal walkway. You can see the extreme hydraulics needed to open this door on the

inside. The door opens on an underground parking lot where people could be screened and assigned places to stay. I hit the button, and the hydraulics whirled to life pushing the doors open. Ten feet of steel and concrete slowly moved. Within an hour the prep team arrived and set up both a place to tag people as well as security because they knew they didn't have enough room for everyone that comes. I made sure all secure areas were secure including the main hub and all the tunnels. Two hours later I found Gregg as they tried to find a way to get everyone in. For my part, I moved from my two-bedroom apartment to a small room that was once my writing office. George was an engineer, and he had planned on the idea that they might have to make room. Part of this was the death of the centralized park which took a few days to do. It only took a few days because there was no need for an inspection.

The Fine brothers made their money the old fashion way, they inherited it. That's not fair. The brothers took a medium-size electronic company devoted to supplying subcomponents to large companies and turned it into the company for automated cleaning services as well as all those ball drones the kids just love. When the end came, they were under investigation for massive tax fraud. Let's just say I wasn't that surprised they were ready to move in before they had to. They spend their days up in the penthouse. Just a few of us see them anymore. I guess it's one thing to prepare for the end it's another thing to have it happen.

On day five the radiation moved in, and the doors to the outside of the garage were closed. From there we rushed to get people settled while trying to expand our services including larger growing areas. People would need to eat and much to most peoples dismay they would have to learn to live a vegetarian lifestyle. Some of the veggies were bioengineered to produce proteins that can take the place of meat. Mixed with other ingredients they can make a sort of meat that almost tastes like ground beef. As we sorted people, we found jobs for them, but with the radiation growing, we had to put that on hold and close the door. The big door. When closed it couldn't be opened until the radiation clears. We could be trapped in there for many years.

After I finished listening to the reports, I went to the cafeteria. No one outside of the brothers can cook in their rooms. All your food comes from an assigned cafeteria and only your cafeteria. Each one is supplied with enough food for everyone to have two meals a day along with a snack. To do this, we are all branded with a barcode on the back of one hand or on a body part they don't mind showing such as a forearm or leg. People are assigned bathrooms, and for showering, you had to use your own shower, but you can use any facilities for anything else. I ate a bean pasta with a tall glass of water. From there I went and took a shower.

The shower rooms are coed with three stalls assigned to everyone. You take the first of the three stalls available. The stall consists of two rooms with the outer room a changing room and the inner room the shower. All showers work on a timer allowing a six-minute timed shower, and you can take one every other day. This is based on your job with people such as those unlucky people working in water processing aka sewage can take one to two showers a day and believe me, they need it. After the shower, I went back to my room and went to sleep thinking about the last couple of years.

The first month we had people living everywhere we could put them. Many lived in the hallways. I gave up my apartment and was moving into a small room I was using as an office when I saw a couple with a small child in the hallway on the floor. I gave them the room, and they stayed there for about a month until something was made available. I slept on a hammock in the control room. This was partly so they could have the room and partly so I could guard the control room. Almost from day one, we had people fighting over every space in the nut. In a report, I listen to that night the security talked about a riot over the last two levels with people not understanding there needed to be a place to grow their food. Back then many thought we would be down there for maybe a week or two and not forever. A short time later we found the first of the bodies.

In the beginning, people were calling the facility the nut. The brothers never gave the place a name they would just refer to it as the facility or the arc. The map, as well as a model out

in the lobby of their offices, had that almond shape. On that first day when everyone was just arriving a young girl saw the arc and asked, “*what’s with the big nut?*” No one knew what she said would catch on but it’s hard to argue. it does look like an almond. According to the brothers, the shape works well underground, and it allowed them a way to build the facility in secret. That shape didn’t last long with the need to expand. The very tip of the nut is a storage area for food and other items necessary to keep the facility going. It also was the place of the first riot and near revolution. Many people came to the nut with just what they could carry thinking we could return to our homes in a few weeks. This left many people with just the clothes on their back. The tip had basic sweatpants and sweatshirts with the arc logo. What it didn’t have was enough for everyone, and at the time we didn’t have any way to replace clothing.

The sweatpants riot started with a man wanting a pair of sweatpants only to be told he had to have permission from One of the Fine brothers to take anything from storage. Jyson Great didn’t take being told no very well. He pushed his way into the storage facility and took what he wanted. Five pair of sweatpants and a bag of sugar. He made it about ten feet out of the tip when the attendant who was saying stop shot him in the back. Jyson’s brother saw the shooting and he fired back with a gun he somehow snuck into the nut. The two exchanged fire until they were both out of bullets. A false report went around saying people were being gunned down for asking for help and by the end of the day, the facility was under assault by angry people. When they couldn’t get past the steel doors, the protestors turned on each other. After two days of widespread fighting, the riot was over with over twenty-five people dead and another fifteen people eventually dying of injuries. After the riot, a search of the nut turned up seventy-nine guns from basic plastic 22s to a couple of AR15s and somehow a Barrett 50 caliber rifle. All the doors except for one to the storage facility were welded shut and the hallway to the remaining door has enough security to keep people out. Down that hall are the names of those who died in the riot including Jyson Great.

The next big riot was over food or the lack of food. People are used to a level of food in their lives along with a particular type. As a onetime meat eater, I had a hard time getting used to the reality of no meat. The brothers were both vegan, and they had no plans to ever supply any

kind of meat. Now, this riot was much like the sweatpants riot and was more about the reality of our circumstances and not food or clothing. It was about the loss of freedom and the loss of the world we knew. About a month in the anger on the nut's version of Twitter turned into a call to action. People believed the brothers were hoarding frozen meat up in the penthouse. There was also a theory we would run out of food by the end of the year.....and that one was right. We were running out of space. We had enough seed and growing supplies but just not enough room to grow the food. The facility was built around the idea of ten-thousand and not over forty-thousand people. In a cafeteria, on the ninth-level, a riot broke out with the rioters killing the entire cafeteria staff and eating all their food for the week. This became widespread and only came to an end when the brothers gave an on-air tour of the penthouse as well as the storage area explaining how we were working hard to grow what we needed including space.

At junction CE25 a tunnel was dug into an empty cavern about twenty percent the size of the nut. It was low enough in the ground to be blocked from the radiation and using supplies and anything that could be salvaged they built the annex where we grow most of the food. In time, they came up with a fiber they could grow and weave into cloth for new clothing. Today most of what we wear is from this basic cloth. One of the levels assigned for growing food was turned into housing ending the homeless problem for now. In tunnel 5W25 which is the tunnel just below support tunnel CW another tunnel was started, but about a week into the dig the tunnel collapsed killing everyone inside ending all expansion leaving the nut how it is today.

About six months into the end of the world a technician by the name of Pete something I don't remember his last name tried to open the door. The big door in the root. He was one of many that were put on duty in the control room because of his experience as a cable television installer. There was a convention of independent contractors nearby in a hotel/convention hall, and we ended up with a lot of people that knew a lot of varied jobs but no real scientists and very few medical people. Pete had enough and wanted out. He also wanted to take us with him. He tried the big red button but its tied to radiation censors outside, so he tried to bypass them not knowing there was a failsafe. The first wire he cut set off an alarm and security. He didn't have the approval to work on the system and was arrested. His arrest fed into the conspiracy theories

about the outside and yes, another riot. By month six, people were starting to believe the world was ok and the brothers were keeping them trapped. Eventually, a man named David Drake was able to connect with a satellite dish outside making it possible to connect to a satellite and view the ruins. To do this Drake put on a radiation suit and went out the smaller door. He lived just long enough to connect the dish before he was boiled to death in the unforgiving radiation. Maybe nine minutes. For his part, Pete was put to work in the sewer where he quietly killed himself by slitting his wrists.

The images of the brown and white earth did more damage to the people than any riot or lack of supply. The unknown radiation had wiped out all visible life and brought about an ice age. The heat from the radiation melted cities from New York to Tokyo with the oceans turning a mix of red and brown from the only thing that seemed to survive. This alga feed off the radiation and dead sea life. A day after the images were released on the system people died in large numbers. We lost about a thousand people in the following week. Life lost its meaning to most. Eventually, everything calmed down as people turned to the day-to-day routine of life in the nut, but we were never the same.

The six-month mark was also the time when the first government was formed. On the system, a group on level three started a poll for civilian leadership. Looking back, it wasn't that surprising they wanted to make their level the seat of government making them the lawmakers. They started the poll only allowing their people to enter the race and when it was all done, they had both a leadership and a Coup d'état. They passed three laws changing access to secure areas as well as food rationing. The government ended when no one would listen or enforce their rules. The brothers refused to acknowledge them as anything but an activist group. They did allow for a government to form, with the understanding that all rules and changes had to be made or approved of by them. The new government is virtual with its members meeting online in open forums. This was also the last time most of the people saw the brothers. Neither of them liked being called Hitler or King.

I guess that leads me to who I am. My name is Mark Collins. I'm the guy people run from when they see me coming. I'm the guy that tells you no. If you want something outside of the normal or a job you signed up for, they send me to say no. When it's yes then you get Meredith or Brandon two people with a warm, happy demeanor, but that's just not me. The people that work with me seem to like me, but for some it takes time. I was the first person to live in the nut, and I know as much about all the systems as the brothers. I can take people screaming at me without screaming back. I can also take living alone in a sea of people, so I was the first choice for they "no guy." People see me walking down the hall turn and run the other way. When I eat, my presence empties the cafeteria. No one wants to be seen with the "no guy." The irony is that almost everyone knows my other name, my pen name. From my first short story to my latest book many people love the writings of Collin Mathews. Just no one knows it's me.