The World of Tom Stafford

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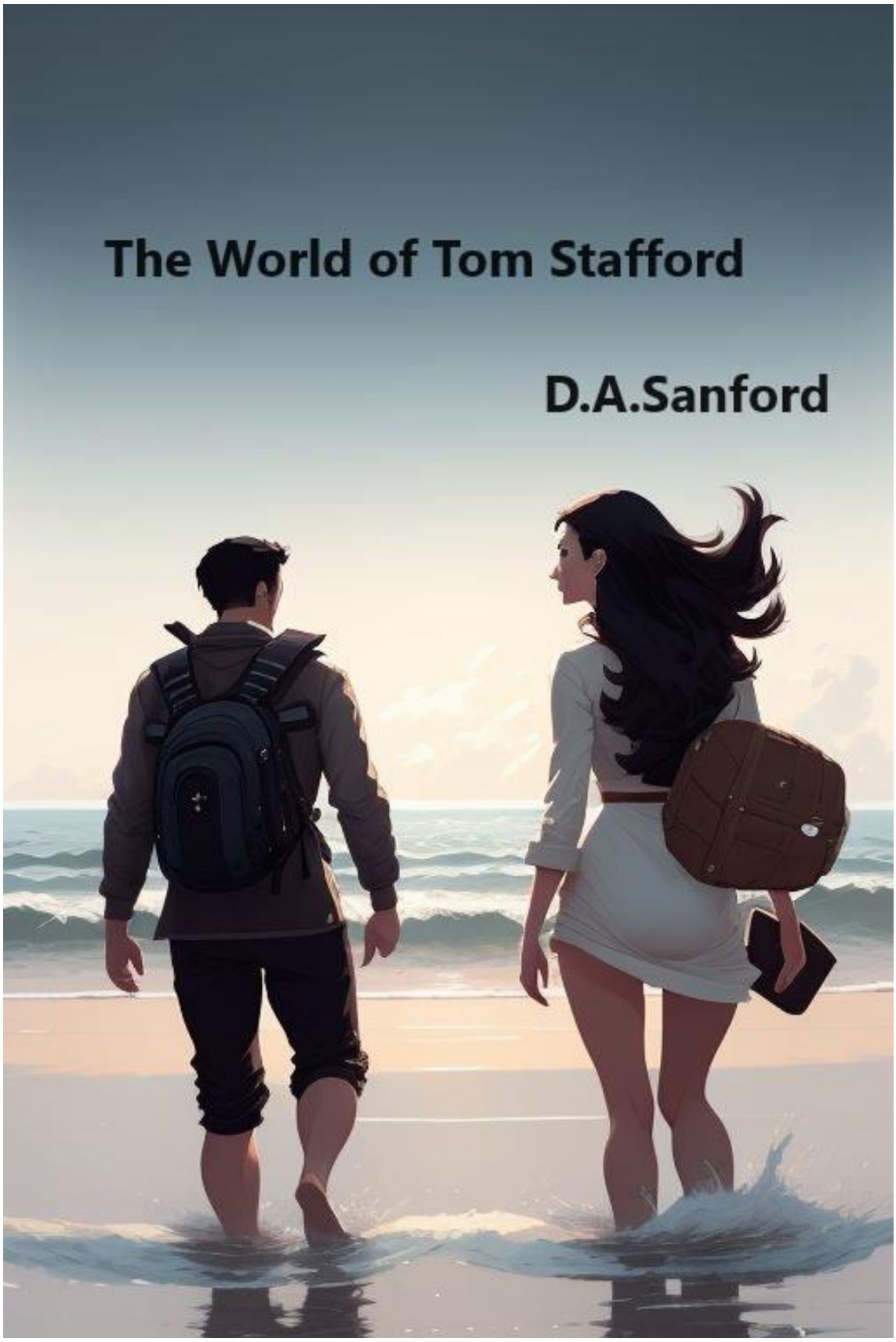

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Readers be advised

Warning: Contains adult content due to graphic descriptions of any or all of the following:

Battles, Language, Sexual

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Chapter 1: Circumstances beyond our control

No one knows exactly what each satellite in orbit does. I should say that no one will tell you what certain satellites do in orbit.

Bartholomew was a straight A senior high student, he had to be due to his name. Regardless of how or why his parents chose to name him, all his life he was under the cloud of that famous cartoon character. Bart was a loner, he always was, Bart the geek. Grammer, middle, and still high school he had only one true friend, his computer.

Everyone knew he was a gamer but what they did not know that he was a famous or should I say infamous dark web hacker. Today he was in the library at one of their computers. Between this one and the school computer he has been the one to break in and steal data on all sites. He has released the juiciest information to the public. Even took down a corrupt fat cat government official for influence peddling and bribery.

Bart

Today he has some very high level information on a secret government satellite. He figures that this will be his crowning glory. In and out before anyone can catch him. The data will be priceless. Bart establishes a link enters the access code.

Unbeknownst to him it turns out that the access code he is using was supplied by another government. That government wanted to trigger the hidden program but clandestinely.

A soon as Bart hits enter, the code activates the ultimate defense program. The program is supposed to fry the computer and render anyone in a five mile radius, unconscious.

The modified program starts by frying every circuit board in the world. It also was able to take control of almost every one's mind. Giving a single command, Walk into the water. It did not differentiate what water as long as it eventually connected to the oceans. Commanded just to walk into the water, people walked into the water and disappeared below the surface.

The satellite was programmed to complete one orbit around the northern hemisphere then fire its thrusters and complete one orbit of the southern hemisphere. Once those orbits were complete it again used its thrusters to maneuver into a congested orbit. Once there it self-destructed causing its debris to crash into the other satellites.

In a matter of hours, there was no longer any satellites just wreckage orbiting the earth. That group knew what it was doing when they changed the programming without the government knowing it.

As the library's computers started to smoke and spark, Bart had a completely blank look on his face. He started to walk. In no time flat the entire east and west coasts were almost completely devoid of human life. The animal life was not affected.

Tom Stafford woke up. He was sideways strapped into the driver's seat of his rig that was now on its side. His normal runs are the long haul types but sometimes the money is too great to pass up difficult short runs. He was on a short run with a fifty foot container box load bound for a small no nothing town called Thornton. The items were all for single customer.

The road was one of those that were barely wide enough to be called a double lane road. Winding its way through the mountains there was no real straight lengths. Mostly twists and turns. If he met a car or truck coming the other way, one of the two would have to stop. There was no traffic so he was not bothered.

Suddenly he felt light headed. In the truck everything electronic started to smoke. Biggest things are no steering and no brakes. Last thing he remembers is saying "Oh shit!" as the truck went off the side and down a thirty foot embankment. He was knocked out.

When he woke up, after realizing that he should have needed to change his boxers, he started to take inventory of his body. Hands, fingers flex open, fingers flex close, no swelling and no pain. Going through the rest of his body, he found cuts, bruises, a head that hurt, but for now, he felt like there were no internal injuries, he hoped. Now to get himself out of the seat. Grabbing a hold of the steering wheel, he released the seat belt and swung down.

The front windshield was gone so he was able to get out that way. He looks up to see how far he was below the road.

"I should be dead now."

The shipping container rolled off the wheel carriage but rolled enough the it was up right with the container floor touching the ground.

"That, at least, will make recovery a lot easier. I need to call the police to report this."

His cell phone is dead,

"It must have broken in the accident. There has to be some sort of recall on the truck to have a major melt down like that."

He cringes at the thought of all the paperwork and the interviews with the National Transportation and Safety Board.

I guess that I need to climb up to the road. Thornton is only a few miles more. I'll hoof it and maybe flag down someone for a ride. I know that I will be sore in the morning.

He finishes the long climb up the gravel and reaches the road. Stopping to admire the view, he realizes that on a clear day this would be a nice Sunday drive. Viewing the horizon, he figures that Thornton should be over that next hill except that hill is almost five miles away.

"I hope a car comes by"

Tom

But one doesn't. Trudging on the barely paved road, he has wooded areas on both sides. Lower down in the valley there are open fields with cows grazing.

"Maybe I could ride...no not worth it."

I kept on walking but could not resist mooing at the cows. The cows starting to move away, all gave me the same look as if they thought,

"Another idiot. Let’s move along, it might be catching."

I finally crest the hill and there I can see Thornton. From this prospective I can see a gas station, a few stores, a church and what must be the town hall. Something is strange. Here it is almost noon and there is no sign of anyone outside.

Walking into Thornton, the first thing I encounter it that gas station. No one around, must be closed for lunch. I turn the door handle and find that it is open so I go inside.

"Hello, anyone here? I had an accident and need to use your phone." I get no answer so I pick up the phone. No dial tone. What the heck is going on? No phone, no lights, no electronics at all.

Most of all

"Where are all the people?"

After checking the few remaining businesses, I find them in the same condition, no people. The first house is your typical white two story. Being in town, it is a little fancier. There is a small picket fence with the gate at the walkway to the house. As I walk up to the front door, it appears that behind the wooden screen door, the main door is ajar. It's as if the owner forgot to close it.

Well, this is a small town. Probably the type where you can leave the keys in the car and the front door open without the worry of intruders. Today, they're wrong. If no one answers me yelling, I'm going to go in to see if I can get an answer.

I stand at the door and yell, "Is any one there? Please answer or I'm coming in." No answer so I let myself in.

Looking around, nothing seems out of order with the exception of the breakfast was still on the kitchen table. half-eaten, I touched it and found it cold. The coffee was also cold.

Now Tom remembered the stories about the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown. How the people had to evacuate without being allowed to take anything with them. Could this be something like that? I ran back to the hardware store. They had prospecting items there in the forefront, was a display of 1950's equipment. There was an old Geiger counter.

Taking it, I turned it on but no lights, so I do the easiest thing, I replaced the batteries. This time when I turned it back on, the light came on. Pressing the sensor button, the meter needle moved but it only showed normal background readings. No fall out.

If radiation is not in play, there is no odd smells, even with power out, people would not just leave.

After checking a few more houses finding no one, Tom found a bicycle. A fancy mountain bike so he decided it peddle to the next town. I had tried a few cars but none worked so I guess peddling beats walking. Not by much. Those seats are not meant for sitting.

When I was in the hardware store, I equip myself with a few things I would need. Something to carry water and food. Camp stove and such. I left a note saying that I would return to pay. I also left the same note at the grocery store. No need to starve but it wouldn't take more than a day, on a bike, to get to the next town but it was midafternoon, so I would need to camp somewhere.

As Tom was peddling, he was lost in thought. Trying to figure out what is happening. Even for back roads, there should be some traffic. He found, as the day wore on that his thoughts were shifting to the seat.

"I'd be more comfortable with a board or just sitting on the pole. My ass is sore."

As his crotch is starting to protest, Tom spots a farm house. He stops to check it out, yup no one but he does see an old sixties pickup parked next to the house. It looks like it is still a daily driver. The pickup was dull and faded but you could tell that it originally was blue. The interior was rough but semi clean. Sure enough, country life, the keys were in the ashtray. After a few slow cranks, the engine started. There appears to be almost a full tank of gas. Tom throws the bike in the bed. Might as well, for safety's sake. He pushes in the clutch, throws it into first and drives away. I think I just heard my ass thank me.

I'm driving just below the speed limit because I do not want to be surprised around a corner. I've been off road enough today. I came around the corner and found my first person walking down the middle of the road.

All I see is long messy brown hair belonging to a female in her bathrobe. Looking at her I notice that she is barefoot. Could she be from the farm or Thornton itself? I stop the truck. The woman gave me the impression that she was not even aware of my approach.
I get out and call to her. She just kept walking. I caught up to her. Her eyes were vacant while set into what looked like a fairly attractive face. The bathrobe was not tightly tied so it showed that she was still wearing her nightgown.

Nadean

"Excuse me"

I say but get no reaction. I stepped in front of her, no reaction. She still kept on walking.

"I'm sorry for this" I say out loud.

I grab her arm and slap her face. I know it is a cliche used in all the shows when a woman if hysterical but it was the only thing I could think of, so sue me. It seems to have worked. She stopped, looked at me. Putting her hand up to the area that I just slapped, she screams at me,

"What are you doing breaking into my house? Is this a rape? Help someone!"

"Lady, look around you. You are in the great outdoors, not in your house. I found you walking in the middle of the road. As far as someone helping you, you are the first person I have seen all day."

She looks around and sees that she indeed was in the middle of nowhere.

"How did I get here? I'm not dressed and I'm barefoot."

She remarks as she tightens up the bathrobe.

"You must be thirsty."

I hand her my water bottle. Then I explain to her what happened to me. I told her about what I found back in Thornton. How there is nobody there. Then I ask her,

"For the sake of conversation, what is your name?"

"Nadean, Nadean Hosier"

"Nadean, nice name. Where are you from?"

"Thornton"

"That means that you had to be walking for at least six or seven hours"

"That can't be true, I was just having breakfast."

Chapter 2: Home base Thornton

"That can't be true, I was just having breakfast."

"It's true. I peddled for quite a few hours until I came across this pickup. I have been driving for an hour. " I lowered the tailgate.

"Please sit for a while. then we can figure out what happened and what we are going to do."

"I want to return home. Would you please drive me there."

"First I need to see the next town. Gentry, according to the map. it should be only a few more miles. I want to see if it is the same. I hope it is full of people but I don't have a good feeling about it."

"Then will you take me home?"

"Yes, but I think that, even if there are people there, why don't we get you some new clothes and shoes? Does that sound good?"

"You are right. I do need to get dressed but I don't even have my cards on me"

"Don't worry I have mine. I got you covered but if Gentry is anything like Thornton, you won't need to worry about money. I have to ask, do you have any family?"

She tells me, "My husband died a few years ago. I have a son, Bartholomew, he's going to a special high school on the coast. I hope he is alright. By the way, that's his bike you have."

We drive the short way to Gentry. The only life there was animals. The town was totally deserted. Just a little bigger than Thornton. It had a superstore that sold both food and wares. The store was open so we went in. Totally deserted. Nadean went to the women's section.

"Is it okay for me just to take things?" she asks as she looks for her sizes.

"No problem. Take what you want. I suggest that you pick out everything that is in your size because, if this is universal, there will be no more clothes made let alone shipped to stores"

I continue, "To make clothes, we first have to learn how to make metal."

"Make metal?" She looks confused.

" To make cloth you need to know how to weave. To make the thread to make the cloth you need to know how to grow the cotton crops. To grow cotton, you need to know how to farm. To farm you need plows. To make plows, you need to know how."

She finishes my sentence, " know how to make metal. I'm taking all of these. Would you please get me more carts?"

"You have the right idea. The pickup has a tow hitch. While you are doing this, I will go back to that rental place. They have large trailers. They will also have tools that we may need. I'm going to make a safe haven out of Thornton."

“Does that mean that you are going to stay in Thornton?"

"That is my plan. Any objections?"

"I was hoping to convince you to stay because that is my home. I grew up there. My family lived there and I would feel safer if you were there. You seem very capable and smart."

"I have had a lot of ‘on the road savvy.’ If you trust everyone you will get taken. I had learned what to do and who to trust. The little I have talked with you Nadean, I am comfortable with you. Thornton is really out of the way. but we survived what ever happened so others must have also. It will be easier to fortify a small town than it would be to even to try to fortify Gentry."

"The first thing we need to do is get a hand pump for water and one for gas. The cars in the town have gas so we will salvage it. That way we can gut Gentry. Everything that can be taken is going to come with us. If I can find an eighteen wheeler, we can do it fasted but I want everything vital to our survival. I see me doing the running back and forth."

"What am I going to do?" She asks.

"You know Thornton. We need to search every house. You have to know who hunted. We need their weapons. While I run, you will scavenge. It seems that all the electronics are fried. Are there any old car collectors in Thornton?"

Nadean tells me that there are at least four that she knows of. They have cars and trucks that don't even see the cold. All get driven in the summer but only on clear days.

"Which one would you like the best?"

"There is a 57 Chevy two door Nomad that I always drooled over."

"Well, let me get that trailer, you get everything that you want. I also would like my size items. I'm a 36 X 32 pants, two XL in shirts, 12 wide for shoes. Underwear to match my sizes. I'll be back in around twenty minutes. The rental place should have the pumps we need. I'll come back and help with the clothes."

I go down to the rental place. It is the first place that I found the doors locked but a window was not locked so I was able to get in. They had both hand pumps for gas and water, so I took all they had. There were a few generators that worked, took those. There is a lot more but future trips. Now I needed to get back to Nadean.

When I got back, she was out front of the store. She looked relieved when I showed up.

"I'm sorry," she said "I was worried that you just left me."

"Why would I leave you?"

"I'm not attractive. I'm average at best and you are very hansom. I did not figure that I come up to your"

"Stop right there. I judge people by their inward selves. I've seen knock down dead gorgeous women. Most of them were shallow trailer park queens beautiful on the outside but rotten inside. You Nadean are very attractive both inside and outside. Those are my standards. You rate on top. Does that answer why I came back?"

"I'm always down on myself" she says, "My husband used to tell me that I should be happy he chose me otherwise I would have been an old maid."

"What an ass hole! I'm here to tell you that he couldn't have been more wrong. I am going to show you just how wrong he was." I reached for her and gave a long passionate hug. I thought of doing more but held back. It is better to let her make the next move. We only have met. Nadean needs to sort through things but she is hugging me back.

She said after we broke from the hug, " It has been years since I have had a hug from the opposite sex. I really missed it."

"There are more where that came from. You feel free to take one when you feel as if you want one."

She thinks about it before responding, "I may just take you up on that."

. We get things loaded and return to Thornton. For now, the town meeting hall is a good place to start storing our haul.

"This is okay for now but we need to have smaller separate stores of the goods in case of fire,"

"Most of the houses in the area have basements and or garages. I just want to go to my house. Will you come with me? "

"You need your new clothes dropped off there anyways"

We go over to her house. Sure enough it was the one that I got the bike from. The house was a shade of gray with white trim. An older farm house. It had something that is missing from the modern houses, a wraparound porch. The kind that on the warm