

A definitive collection of six short stories including an asteroid destruction, top-secret document theft, nuclear detonation, activities of a rogue AI computer, theft of a drug cache, individual stricken with a personality transformation.

Malice in Wonderland

By Alvin Wander

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An abstract painting featuring two stylized, back-to-back human figures. The figures are composed of thick, expressive brushstrokes in a variety of colors including yellow, red, white, blue, pink, and purple. They are set against a dark, textured background. The lower portion of the image transitions into a series of vertical, colorful brushstrokes in red, orange, yellow, and blue.

MALICE

IN WONDERLAND

short stories collection

ALVIN WANDER

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ALSO BY ALVIN WANDER

The Silent Lion

Deadly Ambitions

The Lizard With Golden Feathers

Reflections in Red

The Killing File

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The Survival Parallax

What is a parallax? It represents the effect whereby the position of an object appears to differ when viewed from different points of observations.

So, can the end of civilization be seen as a survival or a catastrophe...or perhaps both. See for yourself.

Chapter 1

The moon orbits a planet, and a planet orbits the sun. Asteroids are a little more complicated. Like planets, they orbit the sun, but they are not the same. There are thousands of asteroids and a few of them were initially mistaken for planets.

Asteroids are essentially chunks of rocks that range in size from just a few feet to hundreds of miles in diameter. Most of them are found between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, in an area known as the asteroid belt. It is now believed asteroids to be the rubble left over from the formation of the solar system, more than four billion years ago. At that time, the sun and planets formed a cloud of gas and dust. As the cloud rotated, the cloud particles collided and came together to form larger objects.

An international scientific group called the Goldstone Deep Space Communication Complex, founded in 1973 and headquartered in Geneva, was organized to study the heavens, and prepare for any special event that might affect the atmosphere on Earth. It is headquartered in an area that housed many of the largest international organizations including the European headquarters of the United Nations. Goldstone was located in an area of Geneva called St. Gervais and was founded by a consortium of international scientific companies. Its Board of Directors is composed of scientists and the world's wealthiest men and women who are determined to study and prepare for any global catastrophe that might occur.

One of their regular outputs is the annual publication of a document informing the public about asteroids that potentially might affect Earth at some time in the future. With the latest technological tools, they continually study millions of astronomic events.

Goldstone's prominent historical report that was issued in 1988 concluded that in the distant past, there had been near destruction of the Earth by a direct asteroid impact that came close to wiping out all of life including dinosaurs. The largest asteroid ever to hit Earth, included in their study, occurred sixty-six million years ago. To understand the impact it had, Goldstone estimated it to be six miles in diameter. It hit the Earth along the coast of Mexico causing worldwide destruction extinguishing all large mammals. The conclusion of their report noted that there were two ongoing goals in their research. One was to name a dangerous asteroid early enough to act and the other was to do something about it once found.

Chapter 2

It was in the spring of 2045 when Goldstone published a new document that had potentially dire warnings. They discovered that two asteroids, which they termed “twin meteors” might pass close by the Earth or collide with Earth sometime in the future. In their release, they were termed “potentially hazardous asteroids” with possible close approach to Earth. To soften the warning, they pointed out that millions of asteroids dotted the solar system, bumping and crashing into each other as they orbited the sun. Further, it was noted that these objects lacked a spherical shape and were littered with craters from impacts with other asteroids. New small asteroids had often collided with larger ones and were propelled into open space far from the Earth. As expected, there was little public interest in their report principally because Goldstone estimated that these giant objects were 20-25 years away from reaching anywhere near Earth and had only a minimal possibility of collision. Because most governments around the world did not believe a collision was even remotely possible, there was little public attention and interest.

Goldstone periodically reported on the progressive path of these twin asteroids. At that time, the media did not see this as worthy of any kind of public danger warning.

It was ten years later when Goldstone reported a change in the classification of this object from potential hazard to a “hazardous threat.” In their release, they indicated that the twin

asteroids they studied had become spherical and were tumbling erratically. The average temperature on the surface was minus two hundred degrees Fahrenheit. They were reported to be gray in color and consisted of clay and stony rocks. In their report, they said that there was a high degree of probability that these monsters would either hit the earth directly or come dangerously close. Governments around the world began to meet to assess the likelihood of a calamity and this became a front-page media report. Despite the urgency of action, there was little alarm publicized from so-called news agencies. The media in major countries declared this was either far-fetched designed to panic or a hoax perpetrated by political organizations or radical groups who would use this as an attempt to cause mass hysteria. There were no world-wide meetings held to review the findings. It was if the publication disappeared onto the back pages of the major newspapers and the internet.

However, the gravity of the situation began to change when another report was issued later by a consortium of the world's leading scientists. This document, published in newspapers and on the internet in all major countries, predicted that when these asteroids affected Earth, they could raise enough dust to totally wipe out agriculture, cause world-wide tsunamis and create a massive shock wave that could destroy the entire population of the Earth. The publication created a shockwave around the world. In certain countries, below-ground shelters began to appear. The public wanted action.

By 2050, 15-20 years before the now certain collision of the twin asteroids on some part of Earth, news and government

agencies said that the asteroids would certainly penetrate the gravitational pull and crash into Earth. Within a short period of time, a group in London called the Planetary Defense Coordination Agency reported that were two methods available for avoiding this now certain catastrophe. The United States, along with Russian and Chinese agencies, began to prepare to launch space vehicles that would collide into both objects, hoping to change its trajectory. Although all evidence showed that there was no spacecraft powerful enough to have any effect at all, the most powerful satellites built by the United States equipped with nuclear bombs were launched and were detonated close to the asteroids. However, after detonation, it was clear that the path of the meteors was unchanged.

The only other method under consideration was based on a theory that if the asteroids were detected early enough, it could be possible to divert their path using what was termed a “gravity tractor.” The theory was that a spacecraft would be launched and put in a path alongside the asteroids for a period of years and gently pull it out of Earth’s path. This theory had never been tried and after examination, it was decided that to execute such a complex and untried mission would take years to build, launch, and conduct and was never seriously considered. A rash of other untried, “off-the-wall” methods became popular conversation on various internet apps. One crackpot idea involved moving enough of the rocks on the asteroids to be able to maneuver them. It became vast misinformation to assume there was a method that would change the trajectory of the objects. Science

was adamant that the crisis was approaching and nothing could be done to avoid total disaster.

On collision-day minus approximately twelve years, a group of international scientists along with world leaders and a group of billionaire entrepreneurs met privately in Geneva to consider workable alternative solutions. Scientists reviewed reports now showing the certainty of the asteroids' path and naming the probable collision site. The incontrovertible conclusion was that there was no way to save the entire world's population. Discussion of alternative scenarios convinced them that a solution had to be devised at once, so they formed an organization called B26. Its mission was dedicated to saving just a part of humankind. They recognized that thousands of small nuclear power plants and other nuclear devices that now dotted the planet would be blown away after the collision, and deadly levels of radioactivity would encircle the planet. Scientists acknowledged that after the crash, it would be impossible to know how long the Earth would remain lifeless before man could re-emerge. It could be generations, they espoused, fifty years or more. The result would be the same as when the pre-historic asteroid millions of years ago destroyed all living things. The group quickly agreed that any plan to either destroy the asteroids before they reached Earth or divert their path was either fantasy or "too-little, too-late."

Chapter 3

A more drastic practicality assumed that since there was no method available to avoid a calamity of this size, a new world order would be needed that could survive in a unique way. The entire group discussed options, and a smaller group of leading scientists was formed to devise a method for a part of the population to survive and live in a protected world until it would be safe to reinhabit the planet.

It was a short time, more than ten years until the expected impact, and the top echelon of B26 leaders recommended a multi-billion-dollar plan for consideration. They put forth for consideration what they termed the Doomsday Stratagem. After weeks of soul-wrenching debates, they finally came to an agreement and accepted this strategy. The estimated cost would exceed ten trillion dollars, financed primarily by the group of the richest men and women in the world. They estimated it would take 10-15 years to complete the construction and since there was only approximately ten years until collision, they began implementing the plan post-haste.

First, the leaders organized a management team. In the first phase, they purchased a fleet of giant, empty cargo vessels and tankers. If they acquired one that still contained cargo, it was dumped. Depending on the ships' locations at that time, most were moved across the Mediterranean and docked along a coastal region in the Adriatic Sea with the first group landing near the city of Durres in Albania. Subsequently, vessels were

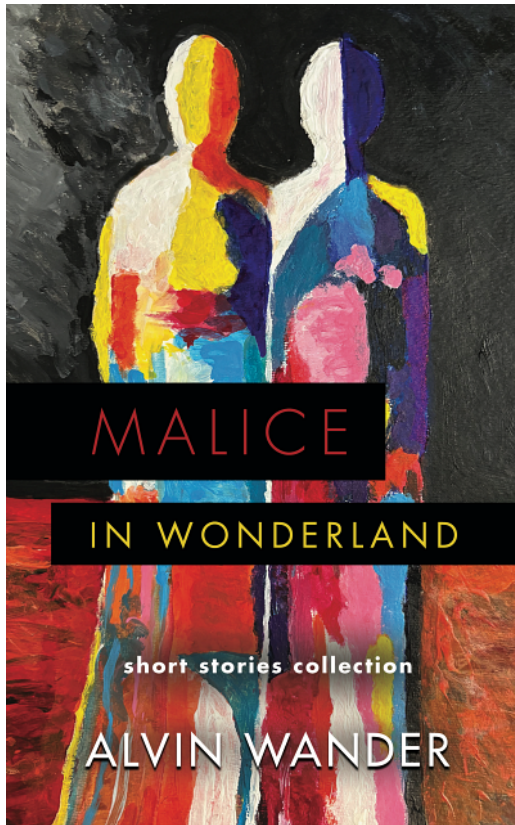
docked near Montenegro, then Bosnia, then Croatia, and the last ships docked near Slovenia. Hundreds of empty freighters dry-docked along the shore formed a connected line for miles. It was now three years after the project started, and there was an unconnected line of over five hundred of them.

While the empty freighters were being assembled, thousands of employees were hired and moved to locations near the freighters. They spent five years working on a singular task. They welded the ships together and created openings between them creating an interconnected passageway. All the ships were then forced well below the water's surface. Hundreds of miles long, the interior of each vessel was separated into three separate floors called Levels 13, 14 and 15, joined together by what were called levelcases, or staircases that connected. Once they completed their task, it was possible to walk inside the entire the length of hundreds of the freighters, miles from one end to another along the shore or below the surface of the sea.

While the construction was taking place, another team began the construction of the interiors. Ceilings, walls, hallway floors, then private individually numbered living quarters called compartments were erected on both sides of a central hall in each freighter with a continuous hallway running the entire length. There were one bedroom, and two-bedroom apartments complete with basic furniture, a bathroom facility and a sitting area. Television monitors were fastened to living room walls though there was no connectivity to any source. At specified intervals, giant kitchens were strategically constructed where all the food was to be prepared. Cafeterias were set up on each

individual freighter where meals would be served. Medical facilities, to be staffed with health personnel, were strategically launched in each freighter complete with fully stocked pharmacies. At one end of each freighter, self-service laundries were built to accommodate the requirements of the population. There were also lounges prepared in each freighter where small groups could socialize.

But before construction even began, dietary professionals and food scientists were brought in to design the menus. Since all the food was to be both plant-based and of microalgae of fermented proteins grown in labs inside each freighter, gardens were built adjoining the cafeterias under artificial sunlight where plant-based meat, chicken, and fish substitutes as well as fruits and vegetables would be grown. Part of their responsibility was also to develop potable water and sanitary waste disposal techniques.



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