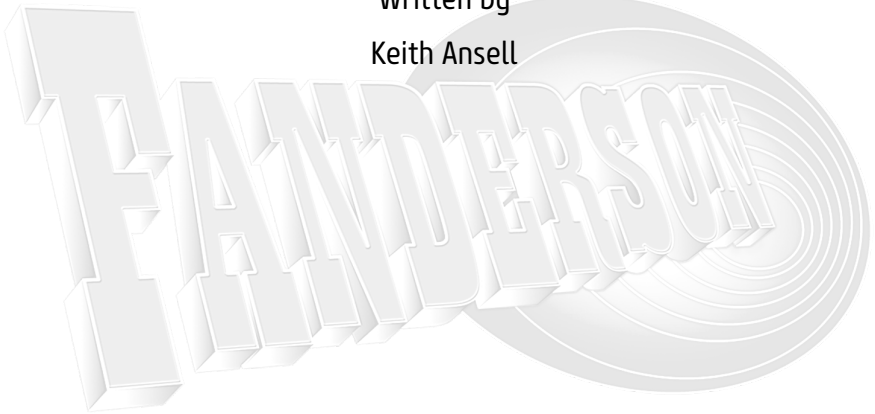


CRISIS TIME

A Space:1999 Story

Written by

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PROLOGUE

"Moonbase Alpha Status Report, 2550 days after leaving Earth orbit...Chief Medical Officer Doctor Helena Russell reporting.

"It is now almost seven years since that fateful day in 1999 when the nuclear waste dumps on the far side of the lunar surface erupted in the largest explosion ever experienced by mankind and launched us on this never-ending journey into the unknown."

Once again Helena realised, as she spoke these words into the Alpha Log Recorder in the Medical Centre, just how lucky every one of the 311 men and women manning Moonbase Alpha, situated on the nearside in Crater Copernicus close to the Ocean of Storms, had been to survive that day. The base's artificial gravity had only just been able to compensate for the crushing G forces they were all subjected to as the Moon was hurled out of the Solar System, at 90 degrees to the plane of the ecliptic. This saved a collision with any other body orbiting the Sun, but made escape to the research stations in orbit around the nearer planets impossible.

"We are now many light years away from Earth having encountered at least three space warps on our unguided voyage through the galaxy. These have enabled us to leap the vast interstellar distances in less time than anyone could have imagined.

"Our search for a new home continues whenever the Moon's path carries us within reach of a star system but so far everyone has proved fruitless.

"The resulting deadly alien encounters and the disappointment of planet after planet, which appear ideal for human habitation, proving unsuitable has left many of our personnel feeling depressed and suicidal. Only this morning I dealt with three more cases of severe space melancholia and fear the consequences if this disturbing trend continues to grow.

"We have almost given up hope of ever finding a new home and have resigned ourselves to living out our days on this sterile pock marked rock we call the Moon. Even though Moonbase Alpha is virtually self-sustaining we have been lucky to survive this long in the hazardous environment of deep space.

"I hope we can survive the next seven years."



CHAPTER ONE

"The Moon's relative velocity appears to be increasing Commander" called Sahn from her work station in the Command Centre deep below the old Main Mission, now long since abandoned as a precaution against alien attack.

Commander John Koenig looked over at his attractive Eurasian data analyst and communications expert. He still found it hard to call her Sahn and not Sandra Benes - but he had respected her decision to change her name when she turned to Buddhism after the death of her lover Controller Paul Morrow.

"Gravity compensation confirms we are definitely accelerating" added Sahn as Koenig walked over to check her computer readings.

"It's as if we are being pulled into a gravity well of some kind - but there's nothing large enough in this region of space to have that much effect upon us" said Koenig, puzzled.

"Our visual scanners are detecting nothing Commander" added Alibe Parsons, another operative sitting at a station near Sahn's.

Alibe's cool exterior hid the feeling of dread that had suddenly descended upon her - she wondered if her colleagues felt it too.

Koenig turned to his Chief Pilot Captain Alan Carter "Alan, get an Eagle out there fast. I want some answers to this mystery."

He wondered how long the gravity compensators would be able to cope under the ever-increasing acceleration. It was at times like this that Koenig wished his old friend and scientific advisor Professor Victor Bergman was still alive. Victor's clear thinking in moments of stress was an asset sorely missed.

Ironically it was probably his immunity to panic that had killed him all those years ago. If he had responded to that damned space suit malfunction sooner... Oh well, one couldn't change the past so no use dwelling upon it.

Eagle Three was soon lifting off and flying at full power towards whatever had the Moon in its grip. Discovering the cause of the mysterious acceleration was one thing - stopping it was another matter entirely.

Carter had chosen Bill Fraser and Yasko Nugami to be the craft's two-man crew as a result of Koenig always telling him he should delegate more often - not as a result of the terrible hangover he was experiencing after drinking one too many of Tony Verdeschi's home brew the night before. A nagging thought at the back of his mind kept telling him he should have despatched an unmanned probe but it was too late for that now.

"All sensors operative" came Fraser's voice over the Command Centre commlink. "Can't detect anything unusual yet"

A magnified image of the space directly ahead of the Eagle was being shown on the main view screen so all the Command Centre staff could see.

"Just empty space..." muttered Carter.

"The nearest star system on this heading is over three light years away" added Maya "Nothing could influence us from that distance."

Maya was a native of the planet Psychon who Koenig had invited to join his staff, and fill the vacant post of science officer, after her world was destroyed - her amazing mind and metamorphic powers had saved the day on many occasions since she had accepted his offer. Victor would have approved of his replacement.

"They are now 10 million miles out and still nothing Commander" stated Carter, four hours later.

"Okay Alan, call them back. We'll just have to ride this crazy rollercoaster and see where it takes us," said Koenig.

"Eagle Three. Return to Moonbase Alpha" instructed Carter over the commlink.

On board Eagle Three Fraser and Yasko tried to slow their space craft's forward motion and return to base with no effect.

"I've cut all motors Yasko - but we're still accelerating. I can't turn her." said Fraser, forcing himself to stay calm.

"I'll tell Carter," said Yasko.

A few seconds later she looked up at Fraser.

"The radio's dead. All systems are failing."

"Look out of the view screen. There are no stars..." gasped Fraser now having given up trying to slow the Eagle's forward motion.

Yasko Nugami looked out of her view port and suddenly realised what it was they were seeing...

Seconds later Eagle Three seemed to fold and distort - and then it was gone as if it had never existed.

In the Moonbase Alpha Command Centre everyone had watched the dark area of space on the view screen grow larger as Eagle Three approached it. Then contact was lost...

Koenig knew the Eagle had been destroyed and that two more of his loyal team had lost their lives - but their sacrifice had not been in vain. He now knew what was pulling the Moon towards the same fate.

They were being drawn towards a black hole!

The reason they had not detected it earlier was its size and lack of any discernible accretion disc. The sensor readings from Eagle Three showed it to be relatively small - maybe no larger than a golf ball, but the tremendous gravitational pull it was exerting had them in an unbreakable grip from which there was no escape.

So this was it.

Moonbase Alpha's luck had finally run out...



CHAPTER TWO

Anybody that hadn't felt suicidal before certainly had a damn good excuse to now, thought John Koenig.

There were no star systems within range of the Eagles even if it was still possible for them to escape from the gravity well of the black hole.

Maya had estimated they had three days at the present rate of acceleration before they were sucked into oblivion. Alpha's artificial gravity might give out before then of course.

The last time the Moon had been drawn into a similar phenomenon Victor Bergman had developed a force field that had miraculously protected the Alphans but this time they did not have Victor's genius at hand - nor the resources left to reconstruct the field generator.

Koenig intended to go and tell his Chief Medical Officer Doctor Helena Russell that he loved her when a blinding white light appeared before him. He reached for his stun gun only to find that he could not move a muscle - no one in the Command Centre could.

Slowly the light took on humanoid form.

"I am a Time Guardian - a temporal engineer if you prefer a more scientific title."

The deep voice was heard not only in the Command Centre but every office, laboratory, rest room and corridor. Everyone on the base heard the words.

"He's communicating telepathically, John" said Maya as she realised she could still speak.

Suddenly everyone could move again.

"You must listen to what I have to say" ordered the self-proclaimed Time Guardian.

"You have our attention" said Koenig staring in bewilderment at the figure before him.

The alien wore no clothes but his skin appeared covered with a thin layer of flexible silver - any light that struck his body was reflected back with an unbearable intensity making it difficult to focus upon him.

"I have made it my responsibility to ensure that Mankind fulfils its destiny - a destiny in which the Moon and the inhabitants of this base still have a part to play" said the Guardian solemnly.

"In case it had escaped your notice we are only three days away from being pulled into a black hole" snapped Koenig, unable to believe the words he had heard in his mind. "I don't think we'll play a role in anyone's destiny after that."

"The black hole is your salvation" boomed the Guardian. "I created it to be your gateway back to Earth!"

"...but that's impossible" gasped Maya, her scientific mind finding it hard to accept the concept of creating a black hole at whim, even though this was not the first God-like being she had met since joining the Alphans.

"The evidence is before you, Psychon."

The Guardian turned back to John Koenig.

"I see from your mind that you understand the principles of a so called 'black hole'. You realise that the singularity which exists at its centre can warp both space and time. I will grant you safe passage through that warp and manipulate it so that you reappear in normal space on a course that will take you back into Earth's orbit on the very day that you left it."

There were shouts for joy all over Moonbase Alpha.

One minute everyone was preparing for an agonising death and the next minute being told they were going home. The Alphans did not know whether to laugh or cry. Could they believe the silver skinned alien?

Surely no one was powerful enough to manipulate time - and yet if he had created the black hole?

"So, you still doubt me" declared the Time Guardian reading everyone's thoughts. "Let me show you what happened on the day your Moon was torn from its orbit."

The Command Centre dissolved around them and suddenly Koenig and his staff could somehow see the Moon orbiting the Earth back on the 13th September 1999. He saw the first Nuclear Waste Dump erupt and the frenzied activity to disperse the radioactive waste from the second larger dump site before it also reached critical temperature.

It was too late of course and he saw the second site annihilated in the unbelievably powerful explosion that followed - driving the Moon out of Earth's orbit and away into the depths of space.

Koenig realised just how miraculous the Alphans survival had been as he watched history replayed before his eyes - reliving every second and yet feeling strangely detached from it all.

Now the vision focused on the Earth and they witnessed violent storms sweeping across the planet. Terrible earthquakes and coastal flooding affected every continent.

Just as suddenly as it had begun the scene faded and the Command Centre reappeared around the Alphans.

"Millions of people died in the aftermath of the events I have just shown you." declared the Time Guardian. "Climatic conditions changed causing wide spread famine and disease. The earthquakes continued for centuries destroying all major cities. Mankind was virtually extinct in less than two hundred years. I am going to stop this tragedy happening."

"How can you change history?" questioned Maya. "What has happened by definition has happened."

"I am a master of time." responded the alien imperiously. "I am able to guide events and ensure the pattern of history follows its most beneficial course. Any erroneous time lines can be corrected."

"So you return us into the Earth's orbit on the same day that we left and the time line is changed." deduced Koenig.

"Precisely!" said the Guardian grandly. "Climatic conditions will soon stabilise and return to normal - therefore no famine and no disease. Mankind will be back on its feet within ten years. The knowledge that you have gained from many alien encounters will help revolutionise Earth's exploration of space for a hundred years after your return. Do you still doubt me or your role in mankind's destiny?"

"I'll believe it when we set foot on Earth again" said Koenig. "Okay Guardian, assuming I accept what you say is true, what happens next? Do we just sit back and enjoy the ride through the black hole and get ready to phone home?"

"Yes Commander. I will safeguard your passage through the warped space around the singularity. Do not disturb me - I need all my concentration to direct your transition through time and space."

The Time Guardian stood unmoving in the middle of the Command Centre.

"I don't know about disturb him" muttered Carter. "He sure disturbs me."

CHAPTER THREE

Koenig moved everyone out of the Command Centre and up to the old Main Mission control room. Well if they were going to pass through a black hole it didn't really matter whether they were a hundred feet below the ground or on the lunar surface - besides they would have a much better view from up here thought Koenig, allowing himself a grim smile.

There was now only two days left and they could see the dark patch before them getting larger by the minute. Koenig had completely briefed all members of staff that had not been present in the Command Centre the previous day.

Helena Russell was calmly expectant at the thought of returning home but Tony Verdeschi could not accept the Time Guardian at face value. Maybe it was his training as a security officer that made him doubt the alien's good intentions - but the whole situation seemed too good to be true. It just did not feel right. One burning question that came to his mind was how could the Guardian's story be reconciled with the events of five years ago when the Earth of 2120 had managed to contact them and almost succeed in teleporting the Alphans home. How could Mankind have developed a revolutionary matter transporter if they were near to extinction?

The Alphans watched the approaching black hole with morbid fascination - only one hour to go now before the Moon would be drawn into it.

The Time Guardian had not moved from his spot in the Command Centre and still stood rigid like a silver statue. His powers were obviously sustaining the base's artificial gravity which would otherwise have long since failed under the tremendous gravitational forces the Moon was being subjected to at such close proximity to the black hole.

It would not be long now. They would soon know whether the Time Guardian was capable of sending them home or whether it was all an elaborate ruse.

Many of Moonbase Alpha's staff had formed emotional bonds with their colleagues over the last seven years and this was now evident all over the base. Sahn stood next to Alan Carter and they held hands. Tony Verdeschi and Maya hugged one another. John Koenig put his arm around Helena - damn protocol for once.

Passage through the black hole was an anti-climax.

There were no cosmic experiences or profound thoughts on the meaning of life, the universe and everything. Just total blackness as they crossed the event horizon accompanied by a feeling of none being - and then suddenly they were in normal space again as if nothing had happened. According to Main Mission's computer the passage had taken no time at all.

"Where are we Sahn?" asked Koenig feeling slightly dazed.

"According to the computer we are - we are within our own Solar System and on a course that will take us back towards Earth!"

Main Mission erupted with cheers and laughter - everyone hugged one another as the momentous news sank in.

"Can we tell what year this is?" asked Koenig.

"Not yet Commander - but there is a Moon in Earth orbit" said Sahn in wonderment.

The moment of merrymaking was cut short as a familiar blinding white light appeared before Koenig and took on humanoid form.

"I have finally achieved my goal" said the Time Guardian in a strangely menacing tone.

"I apologise for doubting you" said Koenig even though he felt a cold shiver run up his spine. There was something wrong - he could sense it.

"You had every right to doubt me Koenig" said the Guardian menacingly. "I have set your Moon on a collision course with the Earth."

"Why?" gasped Koenig.

"In the 34th Century, as you measure time, humanity has become a great source of frustration to my people. Your World Space Empire has united many planets and is always defeating our plans of galactic conquest - but now I have finally changed the course of history by returning you to this point in time. Mankind will no longer exist to oppose us in the future. It is only fitting that I should use the Moon as my instrument of destruction. In case your small minds have not realised - I created the magnetic fields which triggered the detonation of your nuclear waste sites and launched you on your uncontrolled journey through the galaxy. I had always intended the blast to drive the Moon into the Earth and destroy your planet - now finally it shall."

"I wondered why you hadn't returned in time to 1999 and stopped the Breakaway Disaster ever occurring" said Verdeschi.

"You were lucky that time. I had hoped the resultant climatic changes on Earth would still lead to the end of humanity - but you are such an indomitable species that they merely delayed your progress."

"Then what you told us about the future of the Earth people - it was all a lie to allow you free access to this base" realised Maya.

"Precisely, my dear Psychon. I needed to be here at Moonbase Alpha to guide the Moon through the singularity and to enjoy this moment when you realised humanity's fate."

"Sahn, contact - "

"She will not be able to contact Earth, Commander" gloated the Guardian. "Any messages you send will not get through. The journey through the black hole has left the Moon and all of you slightly out of phase with the time stream. Consequently, escape in your space craft may not be possible either- you might cease to exist the moment you land anywhere in your present state. I must leave you now and rest - I grow weary after using so much energy ..."

The Time Guardian dissolved into light and disappeared. Everyone in Main Mission was too shocked to say a word.



CHAPTER FOUR

"How long have we got?" Koenig's question shocked everyone back into action again.

"About seven days, Commander" replied Sahn.

"Maya, what can we do to change the Moon's course?"

"We could rig the base's atomic reactors to go critical, John. When they explode it might deflect the Moon's heading."

"Do it!" ordered Koenig.

Everyone realised he was ordering the destruction of Moonbase Alpha. It had been their home for seven years - but what the hell, they were doomed anyway.

"Get the Eagles ready Alan" said Koenig turning to his chief pilot. "I don't care what that alien said about not being able to land. I'm ordering Operation Exodus. I'd rather try to escape than sit here. Sahn, try contacting Earth - the Guardian may have been bluffing about that too."

"I have been trying but it's no good Sir! Even at full power I'm not getting any response - but I am receiving garbled IS transmissions from the other Moon. I can't make any sense of them at all."

"That gives us a damn good idea what year this is" said Verdeschi. "The interstellar transmitter was only installed on the Moon in 1999."

The Eagle fleet was prepared for Operation Exodus in record time although it all seemed so pointless now. If they could not change the Moon's course...

The following day Maya and her science staff had installed a self-destruct switch in Main Mission hot-wired to the base's atomic reactors. Once

activated by the last Alphans away they would have one hour to fly out of range of the resulting nuclear explosion.

Maya informed Koenig that the sooner the reactors were blown the better chance of avoiding collision with the Earth.

"Prepare to commence evacuation of Alpha in fifteen minutes" ordered Koenig over the base's commlink system. "You have all been assigned an Eagle. Head for Earth if possible and remain in orbit until we know whether we have been successful in diverting the Moon...if not we - we will have to improvise. I wish you all good luck and I am proud to have been your Commander."

What else could he say? Maybe he should have ended his speech with " Life is hard and then you die". It would have been more appropriate.

The first Eagles lifted off from Moonbase Alpha's launch pads exactly fifteen minutes later and Operation Exodus continued for almost two hours until the whole fleet of thirty-nine transporters was flying towards the Earth. Koenig had been the last to leave, ensuring that everyone else was safely away before activating the self destruct switch. He had ordered Maya to make the process irreversible in case the Guardian returned.

The Guardian's warning about the Alphans being out of phase with the time stream worried Koenig alone in Eagle One, as he set course for Earth, but everything seemed fine so far.

Thankfully the recent quiet spell had allowed the seriously depleted Eagle fleet to be brought up to full strength again so there had been more than enough room for everyone.

They approached the Earth and found it hard to accept the other Moon still in orbit. The Eagle chronometers told them there was only one minute to go before the self-destruct detonated on their Moon. One minute seemed like an eternity. Would the reactors blow? Would the collision course with Earth be changed?

The countdown reached zero and the atomic reactors exploded in a tremendous chain reaction. Moonbase Alpha vaporised in the blast. Had they been successful? If not what else could they do? Absolutely nothing! Koenig felt cold sweat run down his back as he anxiously waited for the results of the blast to be analysed. The information finally flashed onto his Eagle's main computer screen... Yes, the Moon was changing course!

Suddenly the Alphans attention was captured by an even more powerful nuclear explosion on the other Moon. This confirmed the date - the Breakaway Disaster was about to happen before their eyes yet again but this time it was for real.

They watched in morbid fascination as the other Moon began to move out of orbit and head in their direction. What was happening? The two Moons were heading towards one another at a combined velocity that was beyond belief. Forces had been set in motion that could not be explained.

The Eagle fleet was caught in the gravitational shockwaves of the ensuing cosmic collision. Eagle One narrowly avoided destruction but the rest of the fleet were not so lucky. Koenig saw them flare out of existence in the terrible energies unleashed as the colliding Moons destroyed one another - like matter meeting anti-matter.

The energy became a swirling vortex pulling any solid matter that had survived the cataclysm down into the gaping void at its centre - including Eagle One.

"This can't be happening" said Koenig to himself as he wrestled with the controls of the Eagle. "This can't be happening" he screamed in frustration.

Helena and all the others - gone! Everyone he loved and cared about snuffed out like so many candles in the wind. The fact he had been last to leave Alpha had saved him - but only just.

Koenig's mind raced as he struggled to pull Eagle One away from the vortex...

If the Moon had been destroyed in 1999 the Alphan's galactic journey would never have taken place - but it must have for these events to be occurring. His desperate plan to stop the Moon colliding with the Earth had created a temporal paradox. The Alphans fight for survival had all been for nothing.

Eagle One began to disintegrate around Koenig as it plunged into the vortex. He was going to die - there was no escape this time.

His thoughts were of Helena just before he blacked out - if only he could have said goodbye and told her... told her he...



CHAPTER FIVE

John Koenig opened his eyes and found himself lying in a comfortable bed. He wondered where he was. The walls of the room he was in were bare but they shone with reflected light from a panoramic window which opened out onto an alien landscape with a bright orange sky.

"Where am I?"

No one answered. He tried to get up but found he could not move - he could turn his head and look around but that was all.

"Where am I?" bellowed Koenig.

Cold fear flooded through him when no one answered. What had happened? Was he going insane? Surely this could not be death? Koenig forced himself to stay calm.

"Welcome to your new home."

The voice was in Koenig's mind - there was no one in the room with him.

"Who are you?"

No answer.

"Guardian, if this is some sick game of yours why don't you show yourself?"

"The Time Guardian and his people are all dead. You killed them, John Koenig!"

If Koenig had been hit by a stun beam on full power the shock could not have been greater.

"I don't understand any of this. Please will someone explain to me why I am here and what has happened to me?"

"You fell into the temporal anomaly created when the Moon destroyed itself," said the disembodied voice. "Ironically the Guardian's plans to

destroy the Earth before humanity could recover from the Breakaway Disaster would have failed if not for your actions."

Koenig dreaded what he was about to hear next.

"Your Moon was destined to be drawn back into Earth's orbit by the gravitational wake left behind when it was originally blasted out of orbit. Within a few years climatic conditions would have returned to near normality. Mankind would have survived the incident. Your actions changed the time line and led to the extinction of humanity."

Koenig could not accept this. How could his efforts to save the Earth have gone so wrong? How, damn it?

"Why isn't the Guardian gloating over me now then? This is a trick to brainwash me," but there was a hint of doubt in Koenig's words.

"The Time Guardian's race believed the destruction of humanity would allow their future dominance over the galaxy. They failed to realise that they were descended from the human race."

"So, they destroyed themselves?"

"No, you destroyed them - mankind and the Guardian's people."

"How? I stopped the Moon colliding with the Earth?"

"When the two Moons destroyed one another the release of temporal energy destroyed all life on your planet as if it had never existed."

"Who are you?" asked Koenig, struggling to accept what he had just been told.

"I am the collective consciousness of lost time - of what would have been. I am billions of lives that will never be born. I am the sentient manifestation of this time anomaly ... and you created me, John Koenig."

Koenig forced himself to think logically.

"If the time line can be changed it must be possible for me to go back and save the Earth" he reasoned. "Can you help me?"

"Yes! I can transport you to any point in time you wish to go - but if you are successful, I will cease to exist."

"Would you rather be a disembodied spirit trapped in this - this hole in time or the life force of billions of beings with the whole of eternity before you?" asked Koenig.

"Your question suggests that my existence here is without purpose. I agree with you, John Koenig. Which point in time do you wish me to send you?"

"If I could stop the Guardian before he had any effect on Earth's history none of these events would occur" mused Koenig.

Suddenly the room vanished around him...



CHAPTER SIX

John Koenig found himself walking along side Lake Geneva in Switzerland. The memory of making love with his wife Jean and then swimming in that clear cool water was still fresh in his mind and - now wait a minute. Jean had died in 1987. She died in the nuclear blast that had destroyed Switzerland and started the Third World War.

What was happening to him?

One minute he was flying Eagle One being drawn down into a spinning vortex and the next he was in a room talking to a disembodied voice. Now this - had he been transported back to 1987 or was he only dreaming?

He remembered kissing Jean goodbye and watching her run to board a flight for Zurich to attend the forthcoming peace talks with the Arab States.

Koenig had left Earth later the same day for another term of duty aboard the research station orbiting Venus, hopeful that a cure for the deadly plague infecting the planet's surface would soon be found to actually allow a manned landing in the near future.

He had naively thought the peace talks would stop the war with the Arabs breaking out...he never saw Jean again. If this was Switzerland in 1987 he was going to change all that - but why had he been sent to this time? Surely 1999 would have been the year to stop the Guardian?

He would go mad if he questioned everything that had happened in the last few days so he made his mind up on a course of action.

He had to find and disarm the nuclear device - save Switzerland and Jean's life. This would allow the peace talks to prevent the thermonuclear holocaust in the Middle East. This would avoid the moral outcry for the disposal of thousands of nuclear warheads after the conflict. Consequently, this would vastly reduce the amount of nuclear waste dumped on the Moon

in 1989 and the Guardian would not be able to trigger the Breakaway Disaster.

Suddenly everything made sense again amidst all the madness. History told Koenig that the nuclear device which destroyed Switzerland had been hidden in the Zurich Hilton Hotel where the peace talks had been held. He had said goodbye to Jean only eight hours before the blast so that's how long he had to find and disarm it.

Koenig felt he was trapped within a nightmare from which he could not wake up. He found money and credit cards in his wallet and headed for the airport to book the next flight to Zurich.

It should have taken less than an hour to fly from Geneva to Zurich but because of the peace talks all direct flights were fully booked for the rest of the day - it was six hours before he was hailing a taxi to take him to Jean's hotel situated on the bank of the Limmat River.

Security was tight outside the hotel - Koenig had to show his NASA identity card and wait for the armed guards to confirm that his wife was an official attending the peace talks before they would allow him to enter.

Adrenaline pumped through his body as he ran into the hotel foyer and recognised the bald man standing in front of him asking for his room key. It was the Time Guardian!

The man's skin appeared normal and he wore a dark business suit and carried a black briefcase - but Koenig knew it was the alien Guardian. He knew it!

So, he had caused the Third World War - it hadn't been the Butcher of Baghdad as the West had suspected. This was obviously the Guardian's first attempt to destroy Mankind. Every time he had failed - maybe time was harder to change than the alien had suggested. Koenig had to use his pre-knowledge to break the temporal paradox the Moon was caught up in, save

his people and all of humanity into the bargain, and finally defeat the alien time meddler. He only hoped the Guardian was more vulnerable in this earlier incarnation - he certainly looked it.

The Guardian took his key and walked towards the hotel's elevator but not before Koenig had read the room number on its fob - the alien was staying in room number 21. Koenig now asked which room his wife was staying in and was told number 69 but that she was dining at the moment. He longed to see her again before confronting the Guardian but he dared not waste the little time he had left.

He convinced the receptionist to give him a key to Jean's room saying he wished to surprise her as it was their wedding anniversary. Luckily John Koenig was a persuasive man and he tipped the receptionist healthily - wondering whether she would have the time to spend any of it.

He walked calmly over to the elevator but did not select the top floor - he chose the second where room 21 was situated. The elevator doors opened silently and Koenig's heart pounded - he could see room 21 just down the corridor. He decided on a direct approach and knocked the door.

Koenig hurled his whole-body weight at the door as it opened. He heard a groan of pain as he dived into the hotel room, grabbing the man he knew was the Time Guardian by the throat and ramming his head against the wall in one fluid motion. With a sickening thud the disguised alien went limp.

Koenig kicked the door closed behind him and looked around the room - everything appeared normal but then he saw the brief case open on the bed. It certainly did not contain documents! Koenig at first thought it was a laptop computer but then he knew instinctively it was the thermonuclear device. There was no obvious way to disarm such alien technology and he had less than two hours left.

Koenig quickly tied the unconscious Guardian's hands behind his back using the alien's own neck tie. He then placed him on a bedside chair and began shaking him roughly.

"Come on you bastard. For God's sake wake up."

The guardian's eyes opened and he stared coldly at Koenig.

"I know what is in your brief case" roared Koenig. "I want you to disarm it now!"

"So, you are a time traveller like me," said the Guardian.

"Yes, and I intend to put an end to your plans to destroy humanity. Disarm the bomb - now!"

"No."

"We will sit here until you do," said Koenig.

"Then you will die too, human."

"At least I will have stopped you carrying out any further atrocities in the future" said Koenig calmly, prepared to give his life if he had to in order to save the future of mankind.

Suddenly the Guardian began to glow. Koenig grabbed the alien's rapidly fading form hoping to stop him teleporting away only to feel the glow envelope him too. His thoughts were of Jean as he realised he had not been able to save her or any of the innocents that would die/had died in the destruction of Switzerland.

CHAPTER SEVEN

John Koenig was not in Switzerland any more.

He lay on the bed back in the room again - somewhere within the time anomaly created when the Moons had collided.

"You were lucky I was able to retrieve you." The words pounded in his mind. "The Guardian had caught you in his temporal transporter - I was only just in time."

"What do you mean 'just in time'?" questioned Koenig disbelievably. "You exist outside of time. If you had missed me, why couldn't you just go back a few minutes and try again? Why can't I go back and try again for that matter?"

"History cannot easily be changed, John Koenig." said the voice. "The Guardian has learnt this lesson already. You were able to change events in 1999 because passage through the black hole left you slightly out of phase with the time stream, but even that fact does not allow me to send you to 1987 again - doing so would create further temporal paradoxes which could lead to the collapse of the whole space/time continuum. Travelling in time has many limitations that cannot be ignored without plunging the very fabric of reality into chaos."

"Then send me back to Moonbase Alpha after the Eagles have left," said Koenig. "If I can sabotage the self-destruct switch, and stop the reactors blowing, the Moon should follow the Guardian's original course - and be pulled back into Earth's orbit if what you've told me is true."

"Yes, I can do that. I cannot guarantee you success but it is the critical event which you set in motion therefore you have more influence over that point in time than anyone else. If you succeed you will have to face the Time Guardian again. You will have to defeat him without my help ...because I will no longer exist."

The room vanished around him again and in its place appeared Main Mission. Koenig was the only one on Moonbase Alpha and he had 45 minutes to deactivate the self-destruct mechanism. He wished he could call Maya and ask her to return and help but that would cause one too many questions. He had to do this on his own.

Koenig began to work on the self-destruct switch. If he'd wanted to be a bomb disposal officer he would have joined the World Army. He exposed the circuitry and prepared to remove the controlling chips when a familiar voice sounded in his mind.

"Hello Commander. What are you doing?" It was the Time Guardian! "Please move away from that control panel or I will kill you."

Koenig was forced to step back. He had to do something - there was only 35 minutes left!

"If you don't let me stop the reactors blowing, the Moon will collide with itself and create a time paradox."

"What do I care?" said the Guardian. "Whether the Moon collides with the Earth or itself it will still destroy the human race. I will have succeeded. The galaxy will fall before my people!"

"They will never exist Guardian!" bellowed Koenig. "Your people are descended from the human race. You destroy Earth and you destroy yourselves."

The Guardian looked stunned and then Koenig could feel the alien's mind probing the deep recesses of his brain.

"No!" screamed the Guardian. "I had finally succeeded - finally achieved ...if you are trying to trick me, human, I'll tear your mind apart."

Now it was Koenig's turn to scream as he felt his mind probed again - but this time raped was a better description.

"Deactivate the self-destruct switch" ordered the Guardian, at last accepting the truth. "You have humbled me, Koenig. I will allow the Moon to return into Earth's orbit as it was destined to do. I will return to my people and warn them of the dangers of time travel. Maybe we will give up our dreams of conquest and become a race of observers, recording the passage of time for all posterity - only time will tell. Farewell."

The Time Guardian was gone!

Koenig could not believe what had just happened as he turned back to the self-destruct switch. One minute the Guardian wanted to destroy the human race and had started a world war and then blown the Moon out of Earth's orbit to achieve his aims - the next he was saying 'farewell'. Aliens were strange at times. Koenig could not help smiling as these thoughts crossed his mind. He had to force himself to concentrate on the switch or he would have broken into hysterical laughter.

With sixty seconds to go he finished deactivating the destruct mechanism.

EPILOGUE

One minute seemed like an eternity.

Would the reactor blow? Would the collision course with Earth be changed? The countdown reached zero and the atomic reactors did not explode!

"What the hell's gone wrong?" bellowed Koenig over the commlink from Eagle One.

"I don't know John" came Maya's response.

"I'm going back to - " suddenly Koenig's words were cut off as the Alphans attention was captured by an incredibly powerful nuclear explosion on the other Moon. This confirmed the date - the Breakaway Disaster was about to happen before their eyes yet again but this time it was for real.

They watched in morbid fascination as the other Moon began to move out of orbit and head in their direction. What was happening? The two Moons were heading towards one another at a combined velocity that was beyond belief. Forces had been set in motion that could not be explained.

Their Moon was caught in the gravitational wake left behind the old Moon as it blasted past them on its runaway journey to explore the galaxy for the next seven years. For a moment there was hope that this might deflect it's course but then Keonig realised the Moon - their Moon - was still heading for Earth. The Time Guardian had won!

The world was about to be destroyed, and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

Then, at the last minute, the collision that would have destroyed humanity was avoided - the gravitational wake that held the Moon pulled it back into its old orbit around the Earth.

A miracle had occurred - or so many of the survivors of the Breakaway Disaster would declare over the next hundred years. Scientists on Earth

never could agree upon what had happened. The official story was that the rogue planetoid Meta had been drawn into Earth's orbit - but no satisfactory reason was ever given to explain its amazing similarity to the Moon. It was renamed Luna II but soon became referred to as just the Moon again.

The return of the Alphans upon the same day they were blasted out of orbit, but sadly without Victor Bergman, Paul Morrow, David Kano and the many others who had lost their lives in deep space, was kept from the public.

How many people would believe what had really happened anyway, or that a shape changing alien now lived among them?

