

WHAT
THE
LEFT HAND WAS DOING

By DARRELL T. LANGART

Illustrated by Foss



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WHAT THE LEFT HAND ... WAS DOING

By **DARRELL T. LANGART**

Illustrated by Freas

*There is no lie so totally convincing as something
the other fellow already knows-for-sure is the truth.
And no cover-story so convincing...*

The building itself was unprepossessive enough. It was an old-fashioned, six-floor, brick structure that had, over the years, served first as a private home, then as an apartment building, and finally as the headquarters for the organization it presently housed.

It stood among others of its kind in a lower-middle-class district of Arlington, Virginia, within howitzer range of the capitol of the United States, and even closer to the Pentagon. The main door was five steps up from the sidewalk, and the steps were flanked by curving balustrades of ornamental ironwork. The entrance itself was closed by a double door with glass panes, beyond which could be seen a small foyer. On both doors, an identical message was blocked out in neat gold letters: *The Society For Mystical and Metaphysical Research, Inc.*

It is possible that no more nearly perfect cover, no more misleading front for a secret organization ever existed in the history of man. It possessed two qualities which most other cover-up titles do not have. One, it was so obviously crackpot that no one paid any attention to it except crackpots, and, two, it was perfectly, literally true.

Spencer Candron had seen the building so often that the functional beauty of the whole setup no longer impressed him as it had several years before. Just as a professional actor is not impressed by being allowed backstage, or as a multimillionaire considers expensive luxuries as commonplace, so Spencer Candron thought of nothing more than his own personal work as he climbed the

five steps and pushed open the glass-paned doors.

Perhaps, too, his matter-of-fact attitude was caused partially by the analogical resemblance between himself and the organization. Physically, Candron, too, was unprepossessing. He was a shade less than five eight, and his weight fluctuated between a hundred and forty and a hundred and forty-five, depending on the season and his state of mind. His face consisted of a well-formed snub nose, a pair of introspective gray eyes, a rather wide, thin-lipped mouth that tended to smile even when relaxed, a high, smooth forehead, and a firm cleft chin, plus the rest of the normal equipment that normally goes to make up a face. The skin was slightly tanned, but it was the tan of a man who goes to the beach on summer weekends, not that of an outdoorsman. His hands were strong and wide and rather large; the palms were uncalloused and the fingernails were clean and neatly trimmed. His hair was straight and light brown, with a pronounced widow's peak, and he wore it combed back and rather long to conceal the fact that a thin spot had appeared on the top rear of his scalp. His clothing was conservative and a little out of style, having been bought in 1981, and thus three years past being up-to-date.

Physically, then, Spencer Candron, was a fine analog of the Society. He looked unimportant. On the outside, he was just another average man whom no one would bother to look twice at.

The analogy between himself and the S.M.M.R. was completed by the fact that his interior resources were vastly greater than anything that showed on the outside.

The doors swung shut behind him, and he walked into the foyer, then turned left into the receptionist's office. The woman behind the desk smiled her eager smile and said, "Good morning, Mr. Candron!"

Candron smiled back. He liked the woman, in spite of her semifanatic overeagerness, which made her every declarative sentence seem to end with an exclamation point.

"Morning, Mrs. Jesser," he said, pausing at the desk for a moment. "How have things been?"

Mrs. Jesser was a stout matron in her early forties who would have been perfectly happy to work for the Society for nothing, as a hobby. That she was paid a reasonable salary made her job almost heaven for her.

“Oh, just *fine*, Mr. Candron!” she said. “Just *fine*!” Then her voice lowered, and her face took on a serious, half conspiratorial expression. “Do you know what?”

“No,” said Candron, imitating her manner. “What?”

“We have a gentleman ... he came in yesterday ... a very nice man ... and very intelligent, too. And, you know what?”

Candron shook his head. “No,” he repeated. “What?”

Mrs. Jesser's face took on the self-pleased look of one who has important inside knowledge to impart. “He has actual photographs ... three-D, full-color *photographs* ... of the *control* room of a flying saucer! And one of the Saucerites, too!”

“Really?” Candron's expression was that of a man who was both impressed and interested. “What did Mr. Balfour say?”

“Well—” Mrs. Jesser looked rather miffed. “I don't really *know*! But the gentleman is supposed to be back *tomorrow*! With some *more* pictures!”

“Well,” said Candron. “Well. That's really fine. I hope he has something. Is Mr. Taggart in?”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Candron! He said you should go on up!” She waved a plump hand toward the stairway. It made Mrs. Jesser happy to think that she was the sole controller of the only way, except for the fire escape, that anyone could get to the upper floors of the building. And as long as she thought that, among other things, she was useful to the Society. Someone had to handle the crackpots and lunatic-fringe fanatics that came to the Society, and one of their own kind could do the job better than anyone else. As long as Mrs. Jesser and Mr. Balfour were on duty, the Society's camouflage would remain intact.

Spencer Candron gave Mrs. Jesser a friendly gesture with one hand and then headed up the stairs. He would rather not have bothered to take the stairway all the way up to the fifth floor, but Mrs. Jesser had sharp ears, and she might wonder why his foot-steps were not heard all the way up. Nothing—but *nothing*—must ever be done to make Mrs. Jesser wonder about anything that went on here.



The door to Brian Taggart's office was open when Candron finally reached the fifth floor. Taggart, of course, was not only expecting him, but had long been aware of his approach.

Candron went in, closed the door, and said, "Hi, Brian," to the dark-haired, dark-eyed, hawk-nosed man who was sprawled on the couch that stood against one corner of the room. There was a desk at the other rear corner, but Brian Taggart wasn't a desk man. He looked like a heavy-weight boxer, but he preferred relaxation to exercise.

But he did take his feet from the couch and lift himself to a sitting position as Candron entered. And, at the same time, the one resemblance between Taggart and Candron manifested itself—a warm, truly human smile.

"Spence," he said warmly, "you look as though you were bored. Want a job?"

"No," said Candron, "but I'll take it. Who do I kill?"

"Nobody, unless you absolutely have to," said Taggart.

Spencer Candron understood. The one thing that characterized the real members of The Society for Mystical and Metaphysical Research—not the "front" members, like Balfour and Mrs. Jesser, not the hundreds of "honorable" members who constituted the crackpot portion of the membership, but the real core of the group—the thing that characterized them could be summed up in one word: *understanding*. Without that one essential property, no human mind can be completely free. Unless a human mind is capable of understanding the only forces that can be pitted against it—the forces of other human minds—that mind cannot avail itself of the power that lies within it.

Of course, it is elementary that such understanding must also apply to oneself. Understanding of self must come before understanding of others. *Total* understanding is not necessary—indeed, utter totality is very likely impossible to any human mind. But the greater the understanding, the freer the mind, and, at a point which might be called the "critical point," certain abilities inherent in the individual human mind become controllable. A change, not only in quantity, but in quality, occurs.

A cube of ice in a glass of water at zero degrees Celsius exhibits certain properties and performs certain actions at its surface. Some of the molecules

drift away, to become one with the liquid. Other molecules from the liquid become attached to the crystalline ice. But, the ice cube remains essentially an entity. Over a period of time, it may change slowly, since dissolution takes place faster than crystallization at the corners of the cube. Eventually, the cube will become a sphere, or something very closely approximating it. But the change is slow, and, once it reaches that state, the situation becomes static.

But, if you add heat, more and more and more, the ice cube will change, not only its shape, but its state. What it was previously capable of doing only slightly and impermanently, it can now do completely. The critical point has been passed.

Roughly—for the analog itself is rough—the same thing occurs in the human mind. The psionic abilities of the human mind are, to a greater or lesser degree, there to begin with, just as an ice cube has the *ability* to melt if the proper conditions are met with.

The analogy hardly extends beyond that. Unlike an ice cube, the human mind is capable of changing the forces outside it—as if the ice could seek out its own heat in order to melt. And, too, human minds vary in their inherent ability to absorb understanding. Some do so easily, others do so only in spotty areas, still others cannot reach the critical point before they break. And still others can never really understand at all.

No one who had not reached his own critical point could become a “core” member of the S.M.M.R. It was not snobbery on their part; they understood other human beings too well to be snobbish. It was more as though a Society for Expert Mountain Climbers met each year on the peak of Mount Everest—anyone who can get up there to attend the meeting is automatically a member.

Spencer Candron sat down in a nearby chair. “All right, so I refrain from doing any more damage than I have to. What's the objective?”

Taggert put his palms on his muscular thighs and leaned forward. “James Ch’ien is still alive.”

Candron had not been expecting the statement, but he felt no surprise. His mind merely adjusted to the new data. “He’s still in China, then,” he said. It was not a question, but a statement of a deduction. “The whole thing was a phony. The death, the body, the funeral. What about the executions?”

“They were real,” Taggert said. “Here’s what happened as closely as we can

tell:

“Dr. Ch’ien was kidnaped on July 10th, the second day of the conference in Peiping, at some time between two and three in the morning. He was replaced by a double, whose name we don’t know. It’s unimportant, anyway. The double was as perfect as the Chinese surgeons could make him. He was probably not aware that he was slated to die; it is more likely that he was hypnotized and misled. At any rate, he took Ch’ien’s place on the rostrum to speak that afternoon.

“The man who shot him, and the man who threw the flame bomb, were probably as equally deluded as to what they were doing as the double was. They did a perfect job, though. The impersonator was dead, and his skin was charred and blistered clear up to the chest—no fingerprints.

“The men were tried, convicted, and executed. The Chinese government sent us abject apologies. The double’s body was shipped back to the United States with full honors, but by the time it reached here, the eye-cone patterns had deteriorated to the point where they couldn’t be identified any more than the fingerprints could. And there were half a hundred reputable scientists of a dozen friendly nations who were eye-witnesses to the killing and who are all absolutely certain that it was James Ch’ien who died.”

Candron nodded. “So, while the whole world was mourning the fact that one of Earth’s greatest physicists has died, he was being held captive in the most secret and secure prison that the Red Chinese government could put him in.”

Taggart nodded. “And your job will be to get him out,” he said softly.

Candron said nothing for a moment, as he thought the problem out. Taggart said nothing to interrupt him.

Neither of them worried about being overheard or spied upon. Besides being equipped with hush devices and blanketing equipment, the building was guarded by Reeves and Donahue, whose combined senses of perception could pick up any activity for miles around which might be inimical to the Society.

“How much backing do we get from the Federal Government?” Candron asked at last.

“We can swing the cover-up afterwards all the way,” Taggart told him firmly. “We can arrange transportation back. That is, the Federal Government can. But getting over there and getting Ch’ien out of durance vile is strictly up to the

Society. Senator Kerotski and Secretary Gonzales are giving us every opportunity they can, but there's no use approaching the President until after we've proven our case."

Candron gestured his understanding. The President of the United States was a shrewd, able, just, and ethical human being—but he was not yet a member of the Society, and perhaps would never be. As a consequence it was still impossible to convince him that the S.M.M.R. knew what it was talking about—and that applied to nearly ninety per cent of the Federal and State officials of the nation.

Only a very few knew that the Society was an *ex officio* branch of the government itself. Not until the rescue of James Ch'ien was an accomplished fact, not until there was physical, logical proof that the man was still alive would the government take official action.

"What's the outline?" Candron wanted to know.

Taggert outlined the proposed course of action rapidly. When he was finished, Spencer Candron simply said, "All right. I can take care of my end of it." He stood up. "I'll see you, Brian."

Brian Taggert lay back down on the couch, propped up his feet, and winked at Candron. "Watch and check, Spence."

Candron went back down the stairs. Mrs. Jesser smiled up at him as he entered the reception room. "Well! That didn't take long! Are you leaving, Mr. Candron?"

"Yes," he said, glancing at the wall clock. "Grab and run, you know. I'll see you soon, Mrs. Jesser. Be an angel."

He went out the door again and headed down the street. Mrs. Jesser had been right; it hadn't taken him long. He'd been in Taggert's office a little over one minute, and less than half a dozen actual words had been spoken. The rest of the conversation had been on a subtler level, one which was almost completely nonverbal. Not that Spencer Candron was a telepath; if he had been, it wouldn't have been necessary for him to come to the headquarters building. Candron's talents simply didn't lie along that line. His ability to probe the minds of normal human beings was spotty and unreliable at best. But when two human beings understand each other at the level that existed between members of the Society,

there is no need for longwinded discourses.

The big stratoliner slowed rapidly as it approached the Peiping People's Airfield. The pilot, a big-boned Britisher who had two jobs to do at once, watched the airspeed indicator. As the needle dropped, he came in on a conventional landing lane, aiming for the huge field below. Then, as the needle reached a certain point, just above the landing minimum, he closed his eyes for a fraction of a second and thought, with all the mental power at his command: *NOW!*

For a large part of a second, nothing happened, but the pilot knew his message had been received.

Then a red gleam came into being on the control board.

“What the hell?” said the co-pilot.

The pilot swore. “*I told 'em that door was weak! We've ripped the luggage door off her hinges. Feel her shake?*”

The co-pilot looked grim. “Good thing it happened now instead of in mid-flight. At that speed, we'd been torn apart.”

“*Blown to bits, you mean,*” said the pilot. “Let's bring her in.”

By that time, Spencer Candron was a long way below the ship, falling like a stone, a big suitcase clutched tightly in his arms. He knew that the Chinese radar was watching the jetliner, and that it had undoubtedly picked up two objects dropping from the craft—the door and one other. Candron had caught the pilot's mental signal—anything that powerful could hardly be missed—and had opened the door and leaped.

But those things didn't matter now. Without a parachute, he had flung himself from the plane toward the earth below, and his only thought was his loathing, his repugnance, for that too, too solid ground beneath.

He didn't hate it. That would be deadly, for hate implies as much attraction as love—the attraction of destruction. Fear, too, was out of the question; there must be no such relationship as that between the threatened and the threatener. Only loathing could save him. The earth beneath was utterly repulsive to him.

And he slowed.

His mind would not accept contact with the ground, and his body was forced to follow suit. He slowed.

Minutes later, he was drifting fifty feet above the surface, his altitude held steady by the emotional force of his mind. Not until then did he release the big suitcase he had been holding. He heard it thump as it hit, breaking open and scattering clothing around it.

In the distance, he could hear the faint moan of a siren. The Chinese radar had picked up two falling objects. And they would find two: one door and one suitcase, both of which could be accounted for by the “accident.” They would know that no parachute had opened; hence, if they found no body, they would be certain that no human being could have dropped from the plane.

The only thing remaining now was to get into the city itself. In the darkness, it was a little difficult to tell exactly where he was, but the lights of Peiping weren’t far away, and a breeze was carrying him toward it. He wanted to be in just the right place before he set foot on the ground.

By morning, he would be just another one of the city’s millions.



Morning came three hours later. The sun came up quietly, as if its sole purpose in life were to make a liar out of Kipling. The venerable old Chinese gentleman who strolled quietly down Dragon Street looked as though he were merely out for a placid walk for his morning constitutional. His clothing was that of a middle-class office worker, but his dignified manner, his wrinkled brown face, his calm brown eyes, and his white hair brought respectful looks from the other passers-by on the Street of the Dragon. Not even the thirty-five years of Communism, which had transformed agrarian China into an industrial and technological nation that ranked with the best, had destroyed the ancient Chinese respect for age.

That respect was what Spencer Candron relied on to help him get his job done. Obvious wealth would have given him respect, too, as would the trappings of power; he could have posed as an Honorable Director or a People’s Advocate. But that would have brought unwelcome attention as well as respect. His disguise would never stand up under careful examination, and trying to pass himself off as an important citizen might bring on just such an examination. But

an old man had both respect and anonymity.

Candron had no difficulty in playing the part. he had known many elderly chinese, and he understood them well. even the emotional control of the oriental was simple to simulate; candron knew what “emotional control” *really* meant.

You don’t control an automobile by throwing the transmission out of gear and letting the engine run wild. Suppressing an emotion is not controlling it, in the fullest sense. “Control” implies guidance and use.

Peiping contained nearly three million people in the city itself, and another three million in the suburbs; there was little chance that the People’s Police would single out one venerable oldster to question, but Candron wanted an escape route just in case they did. He kept walking until he found the neighborhood he wanted, then he kept his eyes open for a small hotel. He didn’t want one that was too expensive, but, on the other hand, he didn’t want one so cheap that the help would be untrustworthy.

He found one that suited his purpose, but he didn’t want to go in immediately. There was one more thing to do. He waited until the shops were open, and then went in search of second-hand luggage. He had enough money in his pockets to buy more brand-new expensive luggage than a man could carry, but he didn’t want luggage that looked either expensive or new. When he finally found what he wanted, he went in search of clothing, buying a piece at a time, here and there, in widely scattered shops. Some of it was new, some of it was secondhand, all of it fit both the body and the personality of the old man he was supposed to be. Finally, he went to the hotel.

The clerk was a chubby, blandly happy, youngish man who bowed his head as Candron approached. There was still the flavor of the old politeness in his speech, although the flowery beauty of half a century before had disappeared.

“Good morning, venerable sir; may I be of some assistance?”

Candron kept the old usages. “This old one would be greatly honored if your excellent hostelry could find a small corner for the rest of his unworthy body,” he said in excellent Cantonese.

“It is possible, aged one, that this miserable hovel may provide some space, unsuited though it may be to your honored presence,” said the clerk, reverting as best he could to the language of a generation before. “For how many people

would you require accommodations?”

“For my humble self only,” Candron said.

“It can, I think, be done,” said the clerk, giving him a pleasant smile. Then his face took on an expression of contrition. “I hope, venerable one, that you will not think this miserable creature too bold if he asks for your papers?”

“Not at all,” said Candron, taking a billfold from his inside coat pocket. “Such is the law, and the law of the People of China is to be always respected.”

He opened the billfold and spread the papers for the clerk’s inspection. They were all there—identification, travel papers, everything. The clerk looked them over and jotted down the numbers in the register book on the desk, then turned the book around. “Your chop, venerable one.”

The “chop” was a small stamp bearing the ideograph which indicated the name Candron was using. Illiteracy still ran high in China because of the difficulty in memorizing the tens of thousands of ideographs which made up the written language, so each man carried a chop to imprint his name. Officially, China used the alphabet, spelling out the Chinese words phonetically—and, significantly, they had chosen the Latin alphabet of the Western nations rather than the Cyrillic of the Soviets. But old usages die hard.

Candron imprinted the ideograph on the page, then, beside it, he wrote “Ying Lee” in Latin characters.

The clerk’s respect for this old man went up a degree. He had expected to have to put down the Latin characters himself. “Our humble establishment is honored by your esteemed presence, Mr. Ying,” he said. “For how long will it be your pleasure to bestow this honor upon us?”

“My poor business, unimportant though it is, will require it least one week; at the most, ten days.” Candron said, knowing full well that twenty-four hours would be his maximum, if everything went well.

“It pains me to ask for money in advance from so honorable a gentleman as yourself,” said the clerk, “but such are the rules. It will be seven and a half yuan per day, or fifty yuan per week.”

Candron put five ten-yuan notes on the counter. Since the readjustment of the Chinese monetary system, the yuan had regained a great deal of its value.

A young man who doubled as bellhop and elevator operator took Candron up to the third floor. Candron tipped him generously, but not extravagantly, and then proceeded to unpack his suitcase. He hung the suits in the closet and put the shirts in the clothes chest. By the time he was through, it looked as though Ying Lee was prepared to stay for a considerable length of time.

Then he checked his escape routes, and found two that were satisfactory. Neither led downward to the ground floor, but upward, to the roof. The hotel was eight stories high, higher than any of the nearby buildings. No one would expect him to go up.

Then he gave his attention to the room itself. He went over it carefully, running his fingers gently over the walls and the furniture, noticing every detail with his eyes. He examined the chairs, the low bed, the floor—everything.

He was not searching for spy devices. He didn't care whether there were any there or not. He wanted to know that room. To know it, become familiar with it, make it a part of him.

Had there been any spy devices, they would have noticed nothing unusual. There was only an old man there, walking slowly around the room, muttering to himself as though he were thinking over something important or, perhaps, merely reminiscing on the past, mentally chewing over his memories.

He did not peer, or poke, or prod. He did not appear to be looking for anything. He picked up a small, cheap vase and looked at it as though it were an old friend; he rubbed his hand over the small writing desk, as though he had written many things in that familiar place; he sat down in a chair and leaned back in it and caressed the armrests with his palms as though it were an honored seat in his own home. And, finally, he undressed, put on his nightclothes, and lay down on the bed, staring at the ceiling with a soft smile on his face. After ten minutes or so, his eyes closed and remained that way for three-quarters of an hour.

Unusual? No. An old man must have his rest. There is nothing unusual about an old man taking a short nap.

When he got up again, Spencer Candron was thoroughly familiar with the room. It was home, and he loved it.

Nightfall found the honorable Mr. Ying a long way from his hotel. He had, as his papers had said, gone to do business with a certain Mr. Yee, had haggled over the price of certain goods, and had been unsuccessful in establishing a mutual price. Mr. Yee was later to be able to prove to the People's Police that he had done no business whatever with Mr. Ying, and had had no notion whatever that Mr. Ying's business connections in Nanking were totally nonexistent.

But, on that afternoon, Mr. Ying had left Mr. Yee with the impression that he would return the next day with, perhaps, a more amenable attitude toward Mr. Yee's prices. Then Mr. Ying Lee had gone to a restaurant for his evening meal.

He had eaten quietly by himself, reading the evening edition of the *Peiping Truth* as he ate his leisurely meal. Although many of the younger people had taken up the use of the knife and fork, the venerable Mr. Ying clung to the chopsticks of an earlier day, plied expertly between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. He was not the only elderly man in the place who did so.

Having finished his meal and his newspaper in peace, Mr. Ying Lee strolled out into the gathering dusk. By the time utter darkness had come, and the widely-spaced street lamps of the city had come alive, the elderly Mr. Ying Lee was within half a mile of the most important group of buildings in China.

The Peiping Explosion, back in the sixties, had almost started World War Three. An atomic blast had leveled a hundred square miles of the city and started fires that had taken weeks to extinguish. Soviet Russia had roared in its great bear voice that the Western Powers had attacked, and was apparently on the verge of coming to the defense of its Asian comrade when the Chinese government had said irritatedly that there had been no attack, that traitorous and counterrevolutionary Chinese agents of Formosa had sabotaged an atomic plant, nothing more, and that the honorable comrades of Russia would be wise not to set off anything that would destroy civilization. The Russian Bear grumbled and sheathed its claws.

The vast intelligence system of the United States had reported that (A) the explosion had been caused by carelessness, not sabotage, but the Chinese had had to save face, and (B) the Soviet Union had no intention of actually starting an atomic war at that time. If she had, she would have shot first and made excuses afterwards. But she *had* hoped to make good propaganda usage of the blast.

The Peiping Explosion had caused widespread death and destruction, yes;

but it had also ended up being the fastest slum-clearance project on record. The rebuilding had taken somewhat more time than the clearing had taken, but the results had been a new Peiping—a modern city in every respect. And nowhere else on Earth was there one hundred square miles of *completely* modern city. Alteration takes longer than starting from scratch if the techniques are available; there isn't so much dead wood to clear away.

In the middle of the city, the Chinese government had built its equivalent of the Kremlin—nearly a third of a square mile of ultra-modern buildings designed to house every function of the Communist Government of China. It had taken slave labor to do the job, but the job had been done.

A little more than half a mile on a side, the area was surrounded by a wall that had been designed after the Great Wall of China. It stood twenty-five feet high and looked very quaint and picturesque.

And somewhere inside it James Ch'ien, American-born physicist, was being held prisoner. Spencer Candron, alias Mr. Ying Lee, had to get him out.

Dr. Ch'ien was important. The government of the United States knew he was important, but they did not yet know *how* important he was.



Man had already reached the Moon and returned. The Martian expedition had landed safely, but had not yet returned. No one had heard from the Venusian expedition, and it was presumed lost. But the Moon was being jointly claimed by Russian and American suits at the United Nations, while the United Nations itself was trying to establish a claim. The Martian expedition was American, but a Russian ship was due to land in two months. The lost Venusian expedition had been Russian, and the United States was ready to send a ship there.

After nearly forty years, the Cold War was still going on, but now the scale had expanded from the global to the interplanetary.

And now, up-and-coming China, defying the Western Powers and arrogantly ignoring her Soviet allies, had decided to get into the race late and win it if she could.

And she very likely could, if she could exploit the abilities of James Ch'ien to the fullest. If Dr. Ch'ien could finish his work, travel to the stars would no longer be a wild-eyed idea; if he could finish, spatial velocities would no longer

be limited to the confines of the rocket, nor even to the confines of the velocity of light. Man could go to the stars.

The United States Federal Government knew—or, at least, the most responsible officers of that government knew—that Ch'ien's equations led to interstellar travel, just as Einstein's equations had led to atomic energy. Normally, the United States would never have allowed Dr. Ch'ien to attend the International Physicists Conference in Peiping. But diplomacy has its rules, too.

Ch'ien had published his preliminary work—a series of highly abstruse and very controversial equations—back in '80. The paper had appeared in a journal that was circulated only in the United States and was not read by the majority of mathematical physicists. Like the work of Dr. Fred Hoyle, thirty years before, it had been laughed at by the majority of the men in the field. Unlike Hoyle's work, it had never received any publicity. Ch'ien's paper had remained buried.

In '81, Ch'ien had realized the importance of his work, having carried it further. He had reported his findings to the proper authorities of the United States Government, and had convinced that particular branch of the government that his work had useful validity. But it was too late to cover up the hints that he had already published.

Dr. James Ch'ien was a friendly, gregarious man. He liked to go to conventions and discuss his work with his colleagues. He was, in addition, a man who would never let anything go once he had got hold of it, unless he was convinced that he was up a blind alley. And, as far as Dr. Ch'ien was concerned, that took a devil of a lot of convincing.

The United States government was, therefore, faced with a dilemma. If they let Ch'ien go to the International Conferences, there was the chance that he would be forced, in some way, to divulge secrets that were vital to the national defense of the United States. On the other hand, if they forbade him to go, the Communist governments would suspect that Ch'ien knew something important, and they would check back on his previous work and find his publications of 1980. If they did, and realized the importance of that paper, they might be able to solve the secret of the interstellar drive.

The United States government had figuratively flipped a coin, and the result was that Ch'ien was allowed to come and go as he pleased, as though he were nothing more than just another government physicist.

And now he was in the hands of China.

How much did the Chinese know? Not much, evidently; otherwise they would never have bothered to go to the trouble of kidnaping Dr. James Ch'ien and covering the kidnaping so elaborately. They *suspected*, yes: but they couldn't *know*. They knew that the earlier papers meant something, but they didn't know what—so they had abducted Ch'ien in the hope that he would tell them.

James Ch'ien had been in their hands now for two months. How much information had they extracted by now? Personally, Spencer Candron felt that they had got nothing. You can force a man to work; you can force him to tell the truth. But you can *not* force a man to create against his will.

Still, even a man's will can be broken, given enough time. If Dr. Ch'ien weren't rescued soon...

Tonight, Candron thought with determination. *I'll get Ch'ien tonight*. That was what the S.M.M.R. had sent him to do. And that's what he would—*must*—do.

Ahead of him loomed the walls of the Palace of the Great Chinese People's Government. Getting past them and into the inner court was an act that was discouraged as much as possible by the Special Police guard which had charge of those walls. They were brilliantly lighted and heavily guarded. If Candron tried to levitate himself over, he'd most likely be shot down in midair. They might be baffled afterwards, when they tried to figure out how he had come to be flying around up there, but that wouldn't help Candron any.

Candron had a better method.



When the automobile carrying the People's Minister of Finance, the Honorable Chou Lung, went through the Gate of the Dog to enter the inner court of the Palace, none of the four men inside it had any notion that they were carrying an unwanted guest. How could they? The car was a small one; its low, streamlined body carried only four people, and there was no luggage compartment, since the powerful little vehicle was designed only for maneuvering in a crowded city or for fast, short trips to nearby towns. There was simply no room for another passenger, and both the man in the car and the guards who passed it through were so well aware of that fact that they didn't

even bother to think about it. It never occurred to them that a slight, elderly-looking gentleman might be hanging beneath the car, floating a few inches off the ground, holding on with his fingertips, and allowing the car to pull him along as it moved on into the Palace of the Great Chinese People's Government.

Getting into the subterranean cell where Dr. James Ch'ien was being held was a different kind of problem. Candron knew the interior of the Palace by map only, and the map he had studied had been admittedly inadequate. It took him nearly an hour to get to the right place. Twice, he avoided a patrolling guard by taking to the air and concealing himself in the darkness of an overhead balcony. Several other times, he met men in civilian clothing walking along the narrow walks, and he merely nodded at them. He looked too old and too well-dressed to be dangerous.

The principle that made it easy was the fact that no one expects a lone man to break into a heavily guarded prison.

After he had located the building where James Ch'ien was held, he went high-flying. The building itself was one which contained the living quarters of several high-ranking officers of the People's Government. Candron knew he would be conspicuous if he tried to climb up the side of the building from the outside, but he managed to get into the second floor without being observed. Then he headed for the elevator shafts.

It took him several minutes to jimmy open the elevator door. His mind was sensitive enough to sense the nearness of others, so there was no chance of his being caught red-handed. When he got the door open, he stepped into the shaft, brought his loathing for the bottom into the fore, and floated up to the top floor. From there it was a simple matter to get to the roof, drop down the side, and enter the open window of an officer's apartment.

He entered a lighted window rather than a darkened one. He wanted to know what he was getting into. He had his gun ready, just in case, but there was no sign of anyone in the room he entered. A quick search showed that the other two rooms were also empty. His mind had told him that there was no one awake in the apartment, but a sleeping man's mind, filled with dimmed, chaotic thoughts, blended into the background and might easily be missed.

Then Spencer Candron used the telephone, punching the first of the two code numbers he had been given. A connection was made to the room where a twenty-four-hour guard kept watch over James Ch'ien via television pickups

hidden in the walls of his prison apartment in the basement.

Candron had listened to recordings of one man's voice for hours, getting the exact inflection, accent, and usage. Now, he made use of that practice.

"This is General Soong," he said sharply. "We are sending a Dr. Wan down to persuade the guest. We will want recordings of all that takes place."

"Yes, sir," said the voice at the other end.

"Dr. Wan will be there within ten minutes, so be alert."

"Yes, sir. All will be done to your satisfaction."

"Excellent," said Candron. He smiled as he hung up. Then he punched another secret number. This one connected him with the guards outside Ch'ien's apartment. As General Soong, he warned them of the coming of Dr. Wan. Then he went to the window, stepped out, and headed for the roof again.

There was no danger that the calls would be suspected. Those two phones could not be contacted except from inside the Palace, and not even then unless the number was known.

Again he dropped down Elevator Shaft Three. Only Number One was operating this late in the evening, so there was no fear of meeting it coming up. He dropped lightly to the roof of the car, where it stood empty in the basement, opened the escape hatch in the roof, dropped inside, opened the door, and emerged into the first basement. Then he started down the stairs to the subbasement.

The guards were not the least suspicious, apparently. Candron wished he were an honest-to-God telepath, so he could be absolutely sure. The officer at the end of the corridor that led to Ch'ien's apartment was a full captain, a tough-looking, swarthy Mongol with dark, hard eyes. "You are Dr. Wan?" he asked in a guttural baritone.

"I am," Candron said. This was no place for traditional politeness. "Did not General Soong call you?"

"He did, indeed, doctor. But I assumed you would be carrying—" He gestured, as though not quite sure what to say.

Candron smiled blandly. "Ah. You were expecting the little black bag, is it not so? No, my good captain; I am a psychologist, not a medical doctor."

The captain's face cleared. "So. The persuasion is to be of the more subtle type."

"Indeed. Only thus can we be assured of his co-operation. One cannot force the creative mind to create; it must be cajoled. Could one have forced the great K'ung Fu-tse to become a philosopher at the point of a sword?"

"It is so," said the captain. "Will you permit me to search you?"

The affable Dr. Wan emptied his pockets, then permitted the search. The captain casually looked at the identification in the wallet. It was, naturally, in perfect order for Dr. Wan. The identification of Ying Lee had been destroyed hours ago, since it was of no further value.

"These things must be left here until you come out, doctor," the captain said. "You may pick them up when you leave." He gestured at the pack of cigarettes. "You will be given cigarettes by the interior guard. Such are my orders."

"Very well," Candron said calmly. "And now, may I see the patient?" He had wanted to keep those cigarettes. Now he would have to find a substitute.

The captain unlocked the heavy door. At the far end, two more guards sat, complacently playing cards, while a third stood at a door a few yards away. A television screen imbedded in the door was connected to an interior camera which showed the room within.

The corridor door was closed and locked behind Candron as he walked toward the three interior guards. They were three more big, tough Mongols, all wearing the insignia of lieutenants. This was not a prisoner who could be entrusted to the care of common soldiers; the secret was too important to allow the *hoi polloi* in on it. They carried no weapons; the three of them could easily take care of Ch'ien if he tried anything foolish, and besides, it kept weapons out of Ch'ien's reach. There were other methods of taking care of the prisoner if the guards were inadequate.

The two officers who were playing cards looked up, acknowledged Dr. Wan's presence, and went back to their game. The third, after glancing at the screen, opened the door to James Ch'ien's apartment. Spencer Candron stepped inside.

It was because of those few seconds—the time during which that door was open—that Candron had called the monitors who watched Ch'ien's apartment. Otherwise, he wouldn't have bothered. He needed fifteen seconds in which to act, and he couldn't do it with that door open. If the monitors had given an alarm in these critical seconds...

But they hadn't, and they wouldn't. Not yet.

The man who was sitting in the easy-chair on the opposite side of the room looked up as Candron entered.

James Ch'ien (B.S., M.S., M.I.T., Ph. D., U.C.L.A.) was a young man, barely past thirty. His tanned face no longer wore the affable smile that Candron had seen in photographs, and the jet-black eyes beneath the well-formed brows were cold instead of friendly, but the intelligence behind the face still came through.

As the door was relocked behind him, Candron said, in Cantonese: "This unworthy one hopes that the excellent doctor is well. Permit me to introduce my unworthy self: I am Dr. Wan Feng."

Dr. Ch'ien put the book he was reading in his lap. He looked at the ceiling in exasperation, then back at Candron. "All right," he said in English, "so you don't believe me. But I'll repeat it again in the hope that I can get it through your skulls." It was obvious that he was addressing, not only his visitor, but anyone else who might be listening.

"I do not speak Chinese," he said, emphasizing each word separately. "I can say 'Good morning' and 'Good-by', and that's about it. I *do* wish I could say 'drop dead,' but that's a luxury I can't indulge. If you can speak English, then go ahead; if not, quit wasting my time and yours. Not," he added, "that it won't be a waste of time anyway, but at least it will relieve the monotony."

Candron knew that Ch'ien was only partially telling the truth. The physicist spoke the language badly, but he understood it fairly well.

"Sorry, doctor," Candron said in English, "I guess I forgot myself. I am Dr. Wan Feng."

Ch'ien's expression didn't change, but he waved to a nearby chair. "Sit down, Dr. Feng, and tell me what propaganda line you've come to deliver now."

Candron smiled and shook his head slowly. "That was unworthy of you, Dr.

Ch'ien. Even though you have succumbed to the Western habit of putting the family name last, you are perfectly aware that 'Wan,' not 'Feng,' is my family name."

The physicist didn't turn a hair. "Force of habit, Dr. Wan. Or, rather, a little retaliation. I was called 'Dakta Chamis' for two days, and even those who could pronounce the name properly insisted on 'Dr. James.' But I forget myself. I am supposed to be the host here. Do sit down and tell me why I should give myself over to Communist China just because my grandfather was born here back in the days when China was a republic."

Spencer Candron knew that time was running out, but he had to force Ch'ien into the right position before he could act. He wished again that he had been able to keep the cigarettes. Ch'ien was a moderately heavy smoker, and one of those drugged cigarettes would have come in handy now. As it was, he had to handle it differently. And that meant a different approach.

"No, Dr. Ch'ien," he said, in a voice that was deliberately too smooth, "I will not sit down, thank you. I would prefer that you stand up."

The physicist's face became a frozen mask. "I see that the doctorate you claim is not for studies in the field of physics. You're not here to worm things out of me by discussing my work talking shop. What is it, *Doctor Wan*?"

"I am a psychologist." Candron said. He knew that the monitors watching the screens and listening to the conversation were recording everything. He knew that they shouldn't be suspicious yet. But if the real General Soong should decide to check on what his important guest was doing....

"A psychologist," Ch'ien repeated in a monotone. "I see."

"Yes. Now, will you stand, or do I have to ask the guards to lift you to your feet?"

James Ch'ien recognized the inevitable, so he stood. But there was a wary expression in his black eyes. He was not a tall man; he stood nearly an inch shorter than Candron himself.

"You have nothing to fear, Dr. Ch'ien," Candron said smoothly. "I merely wish to test a few of your reactions. We do not wish to hurt you." He put his hands on the other man's shoulders, and positioned him. "There," he said. "Now."

Look to the left."

"Hypnosis, eh?" Ch'ien said with a grim smile. "All right. Go ahead." He looked to his left.

"Not with your head," Candron said calmly. "Face me and look to the left with your eyes."

Ch'ien did so, saying: "I'm afraid you'll have to use drugs after all, Dr. Wan. I will not be hypnotized."

"I have no intention of hypnotizing you. Now look to the right."

Ch'ien obeyed.

Candron's right hand was at his side, and his left hand was toying with a button on his coat. "Now up," he said.

Dr. James Ch'ien rolled his eyeballs upward.

Candron had already taken a deep breath. Now he acted. His right hand balled into a fist and arced upwards in a crashing uppercut to Ch'ien's jaw. At almost the same time, he jerked the button off his coat, cracked it with his fingers along the special fissure line, and threw it to the floor.

As the little bomb spewed forth unbelievable amounts of ultra-finely divided carbon in a dense black cloud of smoke, Candron threw both arms around the collapsing physicist, ignoring the pain in the knuckles of his right hand. The smoke cloud billowed around them, darkening the room and obscuring the view from the monitor screens that were watching them. Candron knew that the guards were acting now; he knew that the big Mongols outside were already inserting the key in the door and inserting their nose plugs; he knew that the men in the monitor room had hit an alarm button and had already begun to flood the room with sleep gas. But he paid no attention to these things.

Instead, he became homesick.

Home. It was a little place he knew and loved. He could no longer stand the alien environment around him; it was repugnant, repelling. All he could think of was a little room, a familiar room, a beloved room. He knew the cracks in its ceiling, the feel of the varnish on the homely little desk, the touch of the worn carpet against his feet, the very smell of the air itself. And he loved them and

longed for them with all the emotional power that was in him.

And suddenly the darkness of the smoke-filled prison apartment was gone.

Spencer Candron stood in the middle of the little hotel room he had rented early that morning. In his arms, he held the unconscious figure of Dr. James Ch'ien.

He gasped for breath, then, with an effort, he stooped, allowed the limp body of the physicist to collapse over his shoulder, and stood straight again, carrying the man like a sack of potatoes. He went to the door of the room and opened it carefully. The hall was empty. Quickly, he moved outside, closing the door behind him, and headed toward the stair. This time, he dared not trust the elevator shaft. The hotel only boasted one elevator, and it might be used at any time. Instead, he allowed his dislike for the stair treads to adjust his weight to a few pounds, and then ran up them two at a time.

On the roof of the hotel, he adjusted his emotional state once more, and he and his sleeping burden drifted off into the night, toward the sea.



No mind is infinitely flexible, infinitely malleable, infinitely capable of taking punishment, just as no material substance, however constructed, is capable of absorbing the energies brought to bear against it indefinitely.

A man can hate with a virulent hatred, but unless time is allowed to dull and soothe that hatred, the mind holding it will become corroded and cease to function properly, just as a machine of the finest steel will become corroded and begin to fail if it is drenched with acid or exposed to the violence of an oxidizing atmosphere.

The human mind can insulate itself, for a time, against the destructive effects of any emotion, be it hatred, greed, despondency, contentment, happiness, pleasure, anger, fear, lust, boredom, euphoria, determination, or any other of the myriads of "ills" that man's mind—and thus his flesh—is heir to. As long as a mind is capable of changing from one to another, to rotate its crops, so to speak, the insulation will remain effective, and the mind will remain undamaged. But any single emotional element, held for too long, will break down the resistance of the natural insulation and begin to damage the mind.

Even that least virulent of emotions, love, can destroy. The hot, passionate

love between new lovers must be modified or it will kill. Only when its many facets can be shifted around, now one and now the other coming into play, can love be endured for any great length of time.

Possibly the greatest difference between the sane and the insane is that the sane know when to release a destructive force before it does more than minimal damage; to modify or eliminate an emotional condition before it becomes a deadly compulsion; to replace one set of concepts with another when it becomes necessary to do so; to recognize that point when the mind must change its outlook or die. To stop the erosion, in other words, before it becomes so great that it cannot be repaired.

For the human mind cannot contain any emotion, no matter how weak or how fleeting, without change. And the point at which that change ceases to be *constructive* and becomes, instead, *destructive*—*that* is the ultimate point beyond which no human mind can go without forcing a change—*any* change—in itself.

Spencer Candron knew that. To overuse the psionic powers of the human mind is as dangerous as overusing morphine or alcohol. There are limits to mental powers, even as there are limits to physical powers.

Psychokinesis is defined as the ability of a human mind to move, no matter how slightly, a physical object by means of psionic application alone. In theory, then, one could move planets, stars, even whole galaxies by thought alone. But, in physical terms, the limit is easily seen. Physically, it would be theoretically possible to destroy the sun if one had enough atomic energy available, but that would require the energy of another sun—or more. And, at that point, the Law of Diminishing Returns comes into operation. If you don't want a bomb to explode, but the only way to destroy that bomb is by blowing it up with another bomb of equal power, where is the gain?

And if the total mental power required to move a planet is greater than any single human mind can endure—or even greater than the total mental endurance of a thousand planetsfull of minds, is there any gain?

There is not, and can never be, a system without limits, and the human mind is a system which obeys that law.

None the less, Spencer Candron kept his mind on flight, on repulsion, on movement, as long as he could. He was perfectly willing to destroy his own

mind for a purpose, but he had no intention of destroying it uselessly. He didn't know how long he kept moving eastward; he had no way of knowing how much distance he had covered nor how long it had taken him. But, somewhere out over the smoothly undulating surface of the Pacific, he realized that he was approaching his limit. And, a few seconds later, he detected the presence of men beneath the sea.

He knew they were due to rise an hour before dawn, but he had no idea how long that would be. He had lost all track of time. He had been keeping his mind on controlling his altitude and motion, and, at the same time, been careful to see whether Dr. Ch'ien came out of his unconscious state. Twice more he had had to strike the physicist to keep him out cold, and he didn't want to do it again.

So, when he sensed the presence of the American submarine beneath the waves, he sank gratefully into the water, changing the erosive power of the emotion that had carried him so far, and relaxing into the simple physical routine of keeping both himself and Ch'ien afloat.

By the time the submarine surfaced a dozen yards away, Spencer Candron was both physically and mentally exhausted. He yelled at the top of his lungs, and then held on to consciousness just long enough to be rescued.



“The official story,” said Senator Kerotski, “is that an impostor had taken Dr. Ch'ien's place before he ever left the United States—” He grinned. “At least, the substitution took place before the delegates reached China. So the ‘assassination’ was really no assassination at all. Ch'ien was kidnaped here, and a double put in his place in Peiping. That absolves both us and the Chinese Government of any complicity. We save face for them, and they save face for us. Since he turned up here, in the States, it's obvious that he couldn't have been in China.” He chuckled, but there was no mirth in it. “So the cold war still continues. We know what they did, and—in a way—they know what we did. But not how we did it.”

The senator looked at the other two men who were with him on the fifth floor office of the *Society for Mystical and Metaphysical Research*. Taggart was relaxing on his couch, and Spencer Candron, just out of the hospital, looked rather pale as he sat in the big, soft chair that Taggart had provided.

The senator looked at Candron. “The thing I don't understand is, why was it necessary to knock out Ch'ien? He'll have a sore jaw for weeks. Why didn't you

just tell him who you were and what you were up to?”

Candron glanced at Taggert, but Taggert just grinned and nodded.

“We couldn’t allow that,” said Candron, looking at Senator Kerotski. “Dr. James Ch’ien has too much of a logical, scientific mind for that. We’d have ruined him if he’d seen me in action.”

The senator looked a little surprised. “Why? We’ve convinced other scientists that they were mistaken in their observations. Why not Ch’ien?”

“Ch’ien is too good a scientist,” Candron said. “He’s not the type who would refuse to believe something he saw simply because it didn’t agree with his theories. Ch’ien is one of those dangerous in-betweens. He’s too brilliant to be allowed to go to waste, and, at the same time, too rigid to change his manner of thinking. If he had seen me teleport or levitate, he wouldn’t reject it—he’d try to explain it. And that would have effectively ruined him.”

“Ruined him?” The senator looked a little puzzled.

Taggert raised his heavy head from the couch. “Sure, Leo,” he said to the senator. “Don’t you see? We *need* Ch’ien on this interstellar project. He absolutely *must* dope out the answer somehow, and no one else can do it as quickly.”

“With the previous information,” the senator said, “we would have been able to continue.”

“Yeah?” Taggert said, sitting up. “Has anyone been able to dope out Fermat’s Last Theorem without Fermat? No. So why ruin Ch’ien?”

“It would ruin him,” Candron broke in, before the senator could speak. “If he saw, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that levitation and teleportation were possible, he would have accepted his own senses as usable data on definite phenomena. But, limited as he is by his scientific outlook, he would have tried to evolve a scientific theory to explain what he saw. What else could a scientist *do*?”

Senator Kerotski nodded, and his nod said: “I see. He would have diverted his attention from the field of the interstellar drive to the field of psionics. And he would have wasted years trying to explain an inherently nonlogical area of knowledge by logical means.”

“That’s right,” Candron said. “We would have set him off on a wild goose chase, trying to solve the problems of psionics by the scientific, the logical, method. We would have presented him with an unsolvable problem.”

Taggert patted his knees. “We would have given him a problem that he could not solve with the methodology at hand. It would be as though we had proved to an ancient Greek philosopher that the cube *could* be doubled, and then allowed him to waste his life trying to do it with a straight-edge and compass.”

“We know Ch’ien’s psychological pattern,” Candron continued. “He’s not capable of admitting that there is any other thought pattern than the logical. He would try to solve the problems of psionics by logical methods, and would waste the rest of his life trying to do the impossible.”

The senator stroked his chin. “That’s clear,” he said at last. “Well, it was worth a cracked jaw to save him. We’ve given him a perfectly logical explanation of his rescue and, simultaneously, we’ve put the Chinese government into absolute confusion. They have no idea of how you got out of there, Candron.”

“That’s not as important as saving Ch’ien,” Candron said.

“No,” the senator said quickly, “of course not. After all, the Secretary of Research needs Dr. Ch’ien—the man’s important.”

Spencer Candron smiled. “I agree. He’s practically indispensable—as much as a man can be.”

“He’s the Secretary’s right hand man,” said Taggert firmly.

THE END

Transcriber's Notes and Errata

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One instance each of 'secondhand' and 'second-hand' occur in the text.

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