

[13] Paris!

During the hour-long early morning ride to Sheremetyevoy International Airport just north of Moscow on the Leningradsky highway, Colonel Chernov had a great deal to say to everyone else in the small bus, but he didn't address one word to Viktor. It made him feel uncomfortably like an outsider—which indeed he was. They were supposed to be a delegation of top Russian parapsychologists led by internationally known Dr. Viktor Khorev. In fact, Chernov was in command, and out of the six “delegates” from the secret base, only Viktor and Pyotr were psychic researchers. The others were either military or Federal Security Service (FSB) officers. And Viktor had his suspicions about Pyotr.

He had requested that Dmitri, who was second in command of the lab, should come along as his assistant. Yet Dmitri had been rejected, and Pyotr, a relative newcomer, had been sent instead. Why? That question had bothered Viktor for some time. Had his too-close friendship with Dmitri been noticed after all? There was no use worrying about it now. He would be watched every minute and could look to no one for help in making his escape. It would not be easy. Chernov would like nothing better than to bring him back to Moscow as a criminal caught in the act.

“Stay with me,” ordered Chernov as they climbed out of their vehicle in front of the busy airport. “I have your passports and tickets.” The reminder was hardly necessary. No member of the party would see his passport again until they had returned to Russia.

It was a great shock to Viktor when they were joined by eight more “delegates” at the airport—FSB agents who would pose as “secretaries, lab assistants, and researchers.” Some of them would stay in the West after the Congress to complete their assignments. “They will accomplish by other means what you have failed to do!” Chernov told Viktor pointedly. This was a terrible last-minute blow to Viktor. It had already been an impossible dream to be able to slip away from the smaller group—but from 13 of them now sharing the task of

keeping him under surveillance around the clock? How could he do it? Somehow, somehow...

As they moved through the airport, Viktor did his best to suppress his excitement and to stifle the fear that he would be held back at the last moment by some unforeseen technicality. That he—with all the secrets he knew—should be leaving the country at last seemed too good to be true. It took all of his willpower to maintain an outward facade of calm. He steeled himself to ignore the suspicious stares that Chernov continued to aim at his bulging and very heavy briefcase.

“Open everything!” The command was barked by a grim-face customs officer as soon as he had lifted his baggage onto the long counter. He’d hoped that an official party would be exempted from close inspection. There was nothing to be concerned about in his suitcase, but as he opened the briefcase he could scarcely control the tremor in his hands.

The customs official dug around with practiced fingers, deliberately dumping precious documents out onto the counter. A chief aim of all border inspections was to prevent the smuggling out of any information that might weaken or harm the Russian cause. The paranoia for secrecy—a carryover from Soviet days—interpreted this law so broadly as to include the most mundane facts and figures. The officer straightened up and gave Viktor an accusing look.

“What are all these papers?” The question he’d feared took his breath away. Desperately he fought a growing feeling of dizziness. *Get hold of yourself, Viktor!*

“I’m part of an official delegation to a conference.” Viktor gestured toward the other members of the party, who were in front and behind him. “I have to give some talks. This is my—uh— documentation.” The officer stared at him coldly for a moment longer, then waved him on. It seemed to Viktor that he would never get the papers stuffed back inside, but on the third try he just managed to jam the briefcase shut. The fact that Chernov was standing nearby and watching him closely did not make it easier.

“You should have taken a suitcase for your papers!” hissed Chernov in a low voice, coming alongside of Viktor as the delegation moved through the shuffling crowds toward its departure gate. “Did you bring your whole office? You must have lots of classified documents there!”

Viktor gripped the briefcase tightly and kept walking. Any hesitation or hint of fear would be an admission of guilt. “I have support statistics in case anything I say in my two speeches is challenged,” he replied firmly. “And I have lots of

work to catch up on. I don't intend to waste any spare time!"

The look Chernov gave him said, *I don't believe you, but it doesn't matter. We've got you under the microscope!*

At least he had made the right decision to put the precious video of the Yakov disaster in an inside pocket of his heavy overcoat. Had it been in the briefcase, it would have been discovered. More than anything else, he wanted to show the Americans what Yakov "saw" in the CIA installation—and his brutal death. He had to know how it all correlated with what was actually going on in American psychic research. Was Leighton really with the CIA? Was that organization, like Russia's FSB, tied in so closely with psychic research? Why was Inman no longer in the news? And what about the hooded figure? He seemed to be the focus of power! Would he find the answer to these questions? Would he actually make it to the West? He *had* to—failure was not an option.

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Only when the Aeroflot Ilyushin 86 jet had rattled its way down the long runway, shaken itself like a huge bird, and lifted into the air to begin climbing toward the southwest did Viktor at last lean back in his seat with a contented sigh and begin to breathe easier. The flight offered a chance to relax and time to think about a serious problem that had been troubling him. He had originally planned, at the earliest opportunity, to confide to the American delegation his desire to defect. Surely they could be counted on to get word to the American Embassy, which would in turn contact some branch of intelligence to provide the help—and above all, the protection—he would need.

Viktor had been confident that the Americans would consider him a prize and thus be willing to do whatever would be necessary to effect his escape. After Yakov's death, however, he was no longer so certain. It seemed doubtful now that he had any expertise to offer that they needed or would want. For years it had been common knowledge that the Russians were far ahead of all competitors in psychic research. That no longer appeared to be the case. Something had happened to make the Americans superior. After all, they had been probing a CIA installation when the three psychics had been killed. Could it be that "Archon," whom he had long suspected was the real power behind psychic phenomena, was represented by the hooded one? And was Archon, then, in some kind of partnership with the Americans? There was no escaping the implication of Dr. Frank Leighton standing near the hooded one in the image that had been projected on the screen from Yakov's brain just before he'd been killed.

The implications became more disturbing—for him personally and for his

planned escape—the longer he allowed his thoughts to run in that direction. Leighton seemed to be looking directly at Yakov's position. Would that mean that he had known that Yakov had psychically penetrated their secret research facility? Would he not also be aware of Russian intentions and capabilities, and of Viktor's part in the program? Would the hooded one, who had made the threatening gestures and was apparently responsible for Yakov's death, be at the Congress in Paris? It seemed strange that Russian intelligence had never even hinted at the existence of such a unique figure among the American psychics. Leighton, of course, would be at the Congress. He was listed as the head of the American delegation and a keynote plenary session speaker.

If I tell Leighton I want to defect, will he turn me down—perhaps even betray me? That would be one way to set the Russian program back a few years. There's no one to replace me. What can I offer the Americans in exchange for my safety? If not insights into psychic power, certainly a briefcase crammed with information about top secret Russian research. That's my trump card—or is it? Do they really need anything I've got?

Such thoughts gave Viktor little comfort and much concern. Nevertheless, under the mesmerizing effect of the throbbing engines and despite the apprehensions churning inside him, he dozed off at last from sheer exhaustion. Almost immediately, it seemed, someone was gripping his shoulder and shaking him. With great effort, he groped his way out of a labyrinth of unconsciousness and back to the present. At last his startled eyes focused upon the unwelcome figure of Colonel Chernov, now occupying the seat beside him.

"I've been studying your speeches. Some things have to be changed." The colonel was pointing accusingly to a word he had circled in the very first paragraph. "*Telepathy*." He spat it out contemptuously. That's a mystical term incompatible with scientific materialism."

"It's not mystical. That's the common term in the West and my audience will be mostly Westerners."

"Change that to 'biological radio.'" It was an order.

Viktor snorted in disgust. For his own survival he had to play it tough. "Western scientists will laugh at that. *Biological radio*! The strongest brain waves hardly carry more than a meter, and the subjects in this experiment were nearly 2000 kilometers apart!"

The look in Chernov's steel-gray eyes pierced to Viktor's soul. "Let's get this straight, Dr. Khorev, so we have no more misunderstandings. I'm in charge. You're taking orders from me. Now is that clear?"

If I let him bully me and don't fight back, this whole trip could become a disaster! He'll control everything I say and do, and I'll come off as a bumbling lackey of Marxism materialism that no one would help defect! They wouldn't want me! But what can I do? Viktor fought to control the panic welling up inside and to conceal any outward expression of the fear and confusion that made him feel suddenly ill. *Get tough, Viktor, get tough—for your own survival! You've come this far. Don't buckle now!*

Steeling himself, Viktor returned Chernov's icy stare without flinching. "And I consider myself duty bound to give you sound technical advice, sir." It required a tremendous effort to keep his voice even. "If you refuse to take it then you, sir, will be responsible for holding Russian psychic research up to ridicule in front of the whole world!"

"Don't play games with me. I know your leanings towards the West!" Chernov's angry voice had risen above the dull roar of the aircraft and several other members of the delegation were stealing curious glances in their direction. "You step one centimeter out of line, and I'll send you right back to Moscow!"

Viktor's flashing eyes dared him. "You think Pyotr can take my place? Without me, you don't have a delegation. Send me home and you've lost all credibility—you might as well all pack up. I don't think the committee would be happy about that!"

Chernov's face was red with suppressed rage. He held the page in question under Viktor's nose and thrust a pen into his hand. "Now do it!"

Slowly and deliberately Viktor scratched out "telepathy" and wrote in above it "biological radio." Then he handed the pen, covered with icy sweat back to the colonel, who was now a seething volcano on the verge of eruption.

"Not so fast, comrade. You've got lots of other changes to make!" Chernov flipped through the pages methodically, pointing out Viktor's further deviations from materialist orthodoxy, each of which he had already marked in red.

Slapping the pen back into Viktor's hand, the colonel twisted around until they were almost nose to nose. "You don't fool me, Khorev," he hissed. "I'm going to get you if it kills me!"

Those words haunted Viktor for the rest of the flight. What if Chernov did send him back? The man was a maniac and just might do it then blame him for sabotaging the Russian mission. Already the trip he had looked upon with such hope was turning into a nightmare. To enhance his chance to escape, he could just go along with Chernov's stupid demands and even pretend to agree with them. There was, however, such a thing as professional pride in one's work. It

was one thing to pacify Chernov by making his ridiculous changes on paper. It was something else to be humiliated before an international gathering of scientists by making foolish statements in a speech. It was a terrible dilemma that he'd have to deal with when the time came.

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The ride in the long black limousine from Charles de Gaulle Airport through the suburbs of Paris, then across the Seine over Pont de Neuilly and down the broad and stately Avenue Charles de Gaulle left Viktor gaping in awe. Moscow and Leningrad had their broad avenues as well, but there was no denying that they were drab in comparison with the graceful elegance before him. Everything was brighter here: the festive storefronts and rich window displays, the rainbow-colored umbrellas unfurled above the well-dressed Parisiens sipping wine or tea at the innumerable sidewalk cafes. The great abundance of fruits and vegetables displayed in the front of shop after shop was staggering—and nobody standing in long lines for anything, anywhere. It was hard to believe. And the trees! Everywhere along the avenues there were trees, graceful and groomed, lending an almost feminine softness to the gray of stone and expanse of boulevard.

The crowds moving along the sidewalks seemed to exude an almost tangible gaiety. He had read of it—what the French affectionately called *joie de vivre*. A vibrant enthusiasm hung in the air, a saucy, brazen individuality that seemed shocking but appealing. Viktor winced at the vividly recollected contrast the stolid, impassive doggedness of the typical Russian shopper, who rarely found anything even in the largest stores to make him or her happy and was consistently bullied by clerks who could care less whether something was sold or not. Could Paris be on the same planet?

There was a sophistication and an obvious affluence that was utterly foreign. The heavy traffic, with so many luxurious autos he'd never seen before and whose names he now strained his eyes curiously to read—Mercedes, BMW, Volvo, Renault Alfa Romeo--left him breathless. This was the West he'd heard about and longed to visit for himself! To be here—at last! For the moment, caught up in the kaleidoscope of wondrous images, he even forgot Chernov, who was riding in the other limousine provided by the Russian embassy.

As they entered the huge traffic circle fed by nine converging avenues in front of the Palais des Congres, the magnificent Arc deTriomphe lay directly ahead, just visible in the distance at the end of Avenue de La Grande Armee. Beyond it stretched the fabled Champs Elysees. Off to the right the Eiffel Tower pierced the blue sky. The few photographs he had seen were enticing, but Paris

in real life exceeded his dreams. Moscow, which had always looked so impressive, now seemed somber and poverty-stricken in comparison. Even St Petersburg—that magnificent city of the czars—appeared dull and dismal in retrospect.

While Chernov was registering the delegation, Viktor took in his dazzling surroundings. He glanced through a color brochure showing some of the huge conference rooms and exhibition halls, the 3700-seat auditorium, luxurious shops and restaurants, and the thousand-room high-rise hotel that made up the huge Palais des Congres complex. Moscow had its proud hotels as well. While they looked splendid from a distance, closer inspection inevitably revealed the disappointingly shoddy workmanship. The stark contrast to the flawless proficiency now before him could not be denied. It was his first glimpse of the “evil fruits of capitalism” he had heard denounced most of his life, and to Viktor the grandeur and opulence were beyond belief—but there they were.

Chernov herded the Russian delegation up the elevator to the twelfth floor, where the embassy had reserved a block of rooms. Before giving them their separate keys, the colonel held a brief meeting for everyone in his large and luxurious suite. Viktor was certain that no one else in the group would have such quarters!

“Two people in each room,” recited Chernov, as though he had given similar speeches before. “One key, kept by the senior officer. We stay together. No one goes *anywhere* alone.” He was looking directly at Viktor. “And every contact with anyone outside this delegation must be reported daily. You know your assignments.”

Viktor’s roommate, Fyodr, was a rather suave young man of about 30. Fyodr had already tried to strike up a conversation with him in the Moscow airport while they were waiting for the plane and had ridden beside him in the limousine to the Palais. It was quite obvious that his assignment was to gain Viktor’s confidence in order to catch him in an incriminating slip of some kind. It was a game Viktor had played all his life, a game in which he was confident he could best any informant—and one which he even enjoyed at times. But not in Paris. It would only add to his burdens and stand in his way.

Viktor, Pyotr, Fyodr, and Chernov—who was posing as a parapsychologist named Dr. Alexandr Pavlov, allegedly Viktor’s assistant--went together to the magnificent dinner and reception for all delegates held later that evening. It was a get-acquainted time before the opening session of the First International Congress on Parapsychology to be held the next morning. The colonel never left

Viktor's side as he mingled among the numerous Westerners who were familiar with his published research and were eager to meet him at last.

Suddenly Chernov stiffened and grabbed his arm. "There he is! Right out of Yakov's video! So it was the Americans!" Out of the corner of his eye, Viktor could see Dr. Frank Leighton edging over in his direction. At last they came face-to-face.

"Dr. Khorev, what a privilege to meet you!" Leighton shook Viktor's extended hand vigorously. This is your first time in Paris?" Viktor nodded. "We're so pleased to have you and your distinguished colleagues here on this historic occasion!" He reached out to shake Chernov's hand as well.

This is my assistant, Dr. Alexandr Pavlov," said Viktor. "We are every happy to be here. I'm looking forward to exchanging ideas and sharing information."

Leighton was observing "Pavlov" curiously, an undisguised look of amusement on his face. "Any relation to the famous behaviorist?" he asked with exaggerated, innocent interest.

"He was actually a great uncle," responded "Pavlov" smoothly.

Leighton continued his scrutiny for another moment, then added in an offhanded and disarming tone, "I was just thinking that you bear a remarkable resemblance to Colonel Alexei Chernov. You know him, I'm sure—the commander of the elite Russian corps of psychic combat troops. They have a base north of Moscow."

There was no mistaking, at least to Viktor, what Leighton was doing. *He's trying to shake us up... let us know how far ahead the Americans are... what incredible power they have... that we're an open book. If he knows who Chernov is—not by ordinary spying techniques, but psychically—then he knows everything we've been doing, and all about me as well. So why would he help me escape, or even want me in the West?*

"I wasn't aware of the existence of such a corps," replied Pavlov in feigned surprise. He looked over at Viktor, who shook his head in confirmation of the nonexistence of such troops. "Where did you get such an intriguing idea?" asked Viktor, not knowing what else to say.

Leighton threw his head back and laughed. He patted Pavlov good-naturedly on the arm. "Isn't that the way it always is? You only hear the news of what's happening in your own backyard when you're thousands of miles away."

He turned his attention back to Viktor. "I'm very eager to have you come and see exactly what we're doing. We've made some remarkable progress that I hope will contribute to international peace. You'll be getting a formal invitation

to visit our country through the proper channels.”

“I would be very happy if that could be arranged,” replied Viktor, wondering whether the man was serious now, but seeing a faint glimmer of hope. “It is my privilege to invite you to Russia.” *If only Chernov weren’t hanging on every word!* “We’ll have to get together before the conference is over to work out the details.” *If only I could see him alone!*

“Let’s do it over lunch,” suggested Leighton with enthusiasm, “in a nice secluded setting where we won’t be bothered by your many Western fans interrupting us. How about tomorrow? I know a restaurant—*very French*—with the most delicious food you’ve ever tasted. It’s not five minutes walk from here, just off Boulevard Victor Hugo.”

“I’d like that” said Viktor wistfully. “Tomorrow, then?”

Viktor felt Chernov’s steel-like grip closing in on his arm. “My assistant, of course, always accompanies me,” he added obediently. “I hope that’s agreeable.”

“Of course,” responded Leighton, giving Chernov a penetrating look. He turned to Viktor. “I understand fully. You’ll both be my guests tomorrow after the morning session. I’ll look forward to seeing you then.”

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“Next time you won’t forget to tell your Western friends that you never go anywhere without your assistant, will you!” whispered Chernov threateningly, as they rode the elevator up to their rooms when the gala reception broke up late that night. “I’m sure they’ll all understand.”

“Leighton seems to understand plenty,” returned Viktor caustically. “Like who you *really* are, for instance—and probably everything we’re doing.”

“And *our* job is to find out *how* he gets that information and to prevent it in the future!”

Viktor took some comfort in the word *our*. At least Chernov was beginning to recognize how important he was and wouldn’t be likely to ship him back to Moscow without sufficient reason. But how would he get away from this leech long enough to seek asylum? That was going to be far more difficult than he had anticipated! Perhaps he could slip a note to Leighton somehow. No, there was too much to explain; the risk of misunderstanding was too great. There had to be another way.