

Something on My Mind



David A. Wimsett

*A future where a thought can bring every desire
or every nightmare*

Police Detective George Chen lives in a world devoid of want. A device implanted in his brain joins him to large data banks and every human being on Earth through a massive network called *The Connection* that shunts data, emotions and thoughts instantly around the world.

With it, George can contact any person, anywhere on the planet, with just a thought. *Cerbdramas* are fed into his mind. Robots anticipate his every want and bring food, clothing and other items directly to his apartment. There is no need for people to physically leave their homes.

George must investigate a man who has committed the most heinous crime, cutting himself off from *The Connection*.

What he finds is a conspiracy threatening the existence of the human race, but not the one he was seeking.

“Imagine a planet filled with humans who have forgotten how to think. Robots do everything. Excellent read.”

— C. MacLean on Amazon

“This book is an interesting take on where our society may be heading. It has a bit of mystery, a bit of the human condition, and a well-wrought story of a man searching for answers. Highly recommended.”

— J. Young on Amazon

**SOMETHING
ON MY MIND**

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The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental and unintended by the author

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To the memory of Ernest Dust
English Teacher Extraordinaire

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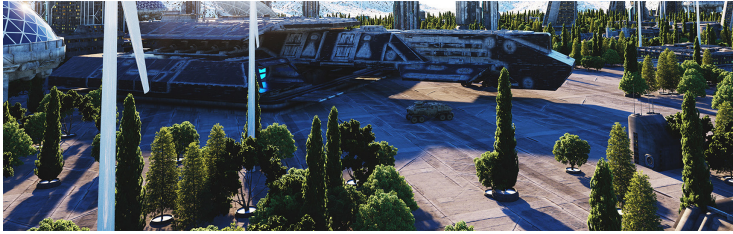
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CHAPTER ONE

ILLEGAL TRAFFIC

Detective Sgt. Chen. Meet me in my office.

The summons came to me as though it were my own conscious thought. There was always a slight hint of personality when one mind touched another across the world encompassing network known as *The Connection*. The message came from my supervisor, Lieutenant Jennings. I acknowledged the silent command and walked to the nearest Ramtube entrance to catch an InterCity to police headquarters.

I waited on the underground platform and wondered why Jennings wanted to see me in person. Anything sensitive he had to say could be fed through a secure channel on *The Connection*.

The platform was deserted. It might have been that way for weeks. Few people found a need to leave the comfort and security of their apartments. They could use *The Connection* to instantly reach anyone on Earth or have food, drink, clothes or whatever they desired delivered by service robots. I, myself, rarely went outside unless required to while working on a case.

An InterCity, suspended and propelled by linear magnetics inside an evacuated tube, arrived quickly. There was one other passenger, a young man who sat at the far end. Out of habit, I scanned the man's data in *The Connection* as police in past ages might have studied his face. The other passenger was in closed mode, his thoughts private and unreachable. Still, as with every other human being on the planet, his carrier wave was connected to Central Control.

As a police officer, I was able to absorb his name, residence, occupation, education, and a hundred other facts in seconds. He had made some critical comments about the government in several forums, but they were not subversive. It wasn't a crime to think. The police were only concerned with those who acted out their thoughts.

The InterCity reached the Ruby Hansford Police Center, named after the legendary director who had died in a selfless act a century before. The lobby was deserted. I took an elevator to the illegal traffic division on the ninth floor. This had nothing to do with the ground vehicles of the past. Traffic was the movement of thought through *The Connection*.

My division tracked criminals who used illegal devices to alter links and adopt false identities or commandeer those of others in order to commit crimes. Tampering with *The Connection* was a felony that carried severe penalties.

Like every officer, Jennings usually worked across the network unless he had to go out in the field. Still, every lieutenant and captain on the police force maintained a physical office. Jennings motioned me inside. "Close the door, George."

I was surprised that the lieutenant used spoken words. He almost always sent his thoughts directly to me. It had

been months since I had heard speech.

“All right, George. Just for the record. Detective Sergeant George Chen. Thirty-four years old. Single. Mother’s name Mary. Father’s name Yi. Residential region 4498645, address block 55699963 location 4489. Graduate of North Central Police Academy with honors. Promoted to sergeant.”

I nodded.

We verbally reviewed old cases I had solved over the last few years. As Jennings asked questions he certainly knew the answers to, I shifted in my seat and wondered just how long this would go on. I was about to ask when Jennings accessed *The Connection* and silently transmitted, “You’re doing a fine job, Detective Chen. That will be all.”

As I began to stand, Jennings reached beneath his desk. Instantly, all the traffic in my head stopped. I could no longer sense the people in the other offices, on the street outside or in cities around the world. The vast databank libraries of facts, images and sounds were cut off. I experienced something I had never known before, utter silence. I felt as though I had been punched in the stomach.

I bit back a scream. My breath came in erratic spasms. I had faced death several times as a police officer and was not ashamed to admit that I had known fear. This was blind terror.

Thoughts formed, but remained locked in my head without the satisfying sensation that accompanies the acknowledgment of receipt signal. I leaped to my feet, drew my tranquer pistol from my jacket pocket and searched for an assailant.

Jenkins spoke in a calming voice, “It’s all right, George.

Please, sit down.”

I returned to my chair and said, “Is *The Connection* down?” Even as I spoke the words, I knew that was not possible. In its entire existence, *The Connection* had never failed. My voice was hoarse from more than apprehension. I was out of practice. A person had little use for speech after the age of four when a link is installed in the brain.

Jenkins said, “I cut the traffic. I had to. No one can know what I’m about to tell you, even on a secure channel.”

The lieutenant poured some water into a glass and pushed it across the desk. “I know. It’s quite a shock.”

I grabbed the glass with both hands and took a sip. I felt stupid now, a cowering child instead of a seasoned police detective. I sat the glass back down. “You could have warned me.”

Jennings shook his head. “No, I couldn’t. No one can know that we’re even having this conversation. That’s why the pretense of a review at the beginning.” He smiled. “If it’s any consolation, I nearly wet myself the first time I lost *The Connection*. I still don’t like it, but sometimes Captain Barnes has to tell me things no one else can learn about, and this time I have to tell you. That is why I’ve blocked all traffic within these walls. Even our carrier waves have been cut off.”

The most fundamental rule of *The Connection* was that a carrier wave could not be blocked. The devices implanted into every brain constantly transmitted a person’s conditions and locations to Central Control.

“That’s impossible,” I said.

“There are ways, but it requires the authorization of a director. That should give you some idea of how high up this goes. You can imagine the alarms in Central Control

right now if I hadn't been given that authorization. Two days ago the alarms did go off.

"On Tuesday, at zero-four thirty-seven UTC, the carrier wave of a forty-seven year old male named Phillip Kromka disappeared from Central Control's sensors."

"Disappeared?" The self-powered unit in Kromka's brain would continue to broadcast his location and notify Central Control even if he died.

Jennings clasped his hands behind his head. "That's the mystery. It wasn't a hijacking or redirection. Kromka just vanished. Somehow, he disconnected himself."

"Why would he do such a thing?" I tried to imagine why anyone would want to detach from *The Connection*. A person might just as well stop breathing.

Jennings leaned forward. "That's what we want you to find out, George. Only a handful of people know about Kromka. That's why we had to meet outside the network. If word of this gets out, there'll be panic. Who knows where Kromka is and what he plans to do. The captain isn't sure if this is an isolated incident or part of a wider conspiracy."

Instinctually, I called on *The Connection* for facts, figures, and opinions as I normally would. Nothing came. Without these lifelong aids I had to concentrate intently to make sense of what Jennings was saying.

The lieutenant said, "You took a pseudo tour in the area around the Grand Canyon in North America last year, didn't you?"

I nodded. The summer before, I'd lain on my bed while a medic robot inserted feeder tubes into my arms to sustain me. Then, I jumped across *The Connection* to implant my consciousness into the mind of a local resident, a host

who rented out his body for people to hike, explore, and soak up the warm sun as if they were actually there. It wasn't just an impression. I lost all conscious awareness of my own body as my mind was coupled through *The Connection* to all of my host's senses; sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. I had complete control over every muscle of the host. It had been a wonderful week and I came back refreshed without ever physically leaving my home.

"Just south of the canyon is a town named Williams," said Jennings. "It's one of those retro-resorts. That's the last place Kromka's link was detected."

Retro-resorts ranged in size from small spas to entire towns. They recreated a particular period in history with costumes, food, entertainment and speech. People who wanted to feel as if they had stepped back in time traveled physically to a resort and took on the persona of someone from that era. I had heard about Williams on my pseudo tour. The whole town was set in the mid-twentieth century.

Jennings said, "He stayed in a motel named The Wooden Spoke."

"Motel?"

"A type of lodging for travelers. They were popular when people still used ground transportation. He was in room 6. A judge has issued a search warrant for the entire motel. There's an air car in the garage with all the necessary maps loaded. We also packed a case with clothes and incidentals. You leave immediately."

"How often should I report?"

Jennings said, "You don't, not until you find Kromka. Between now and then no one can know where you are or what you find."

He brought out a round, flat object just larger than a

thumb. "This is a Cdisk. They were once used as currency. It's self-powered and filled with a small fortune to cover your expenses."

Jenkins took a rectangular object out of a desk drawer. It was a thin, plastic sheet a little larger than his hand that could be unfolded to twice that size or rolled into a tube. I recognized it, but had never seen one before. They had once been the primary method of conveying and analyzing information. Its official name was Thin Membrane Data Appliance, but people almost immediately began referring to them as thims.

He said, "It contains all the data you'll need for the assignment. It was synchronized with *The Connection* just before you came in. I've disconnected it now to prevent anyone from tracking you. You'll find it invaluable for research, but it has another more important function. When you find Kromka, press these three symbols simultaneously. The thim will re-sync with *The Connection* and send a homing signal to Central Control.

"I could just use a secure channel."

"You won't be able to."

The door to Jennings's office opened. A tall, humanoid robot entered. Even though the robot had no need for clothes, it still wore a white coat.

Jennings said, "I'm sorry, George. No one can know where you are. The medic is here to disconnect you."