

Tomb Tapper

THE DISTANT glare of the atomic explosion had already faded from the sky as McDonough's car whirred away from the blacked-out town of Port Jervis and turned north. He was making fifty m.p.h. on U.S. Route 209 using no lights but his parkers, and if a deer should bolt across the road ahead of him he would never see it until the impact. 'It was hard enough to see the road.

But he was thinking, not for the first time, of the old joke about the man who tapped train wheels.

He had been doing it, so the story ran, for thirty years. On every working day he would go up and down both sides of every locomotive that pulled into the yards and hit the wheels with a hammer; first the drivers, then the trucks. Each time, he would cock his head, as though listening for something in the sound. On the day of his retirement, he was given a magnificent dinner, as befitted a man with long seniority in the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen and somebody stopped to ask him what he had been tapping for all those years.

He had cocked his head as though listening for something, but evidently nothing came. "I don't know," he said.

That's me, McDonough thought. I tap tombs, not trains.

But what am I listening for?

The speedometer said he was close to the turnoff for the airport, and he pulled the dimmers on. There it was. There was at first nothing to be seen, as the headlights swept along the dirt road, but a wall of darkness deep as all night, faintly edged at the east by the low domed hills of the Neversink valley. Then another pair of lights snapped on behind him, on the main highway, and came jolting after McDonough's car, clear and sharp in the dust clouds he had raised.

He swung the car to a stop beside the airport fence and killed the lights; the other car followed. In the renewed blackness the faint traces of dawn on the hills were wiped out, as though the whole universe had been set back an hour. Then the yellow eye of a flashlight opened in the window of the other car and stared into his face.

He opened the door. "Martinson?" he said tentatively.

"Right here," the adjutant's voice said. The flashlight's oval spoor swung to the ground. "Anybody else with you?"

"No. You?"

"No. Go ahead and get your equipment out. Ill open up the shack."

The oval spot of light bobbed across the parking area and came to uneasy rest on the combination padlock which held the door of the operations shack secure. McDonough flipped the dome light of his car on long enough to locate the canvas sling which held the components of his electroencephalograph, and eased the sling out onto the sand.

He had just slammed the car door and taken up the burden when little chinks of light sprang into being in the blind windows of the shack. At the same time, cars came droning out onto the field from the opposite side, four of them, each with its wide-spaced unblinking slits of paired parking lights, and ranked themselves on either side of the landing strip. It would be dawn before long, but if the planes were ready to go before dawn, the cars could light the strip with their brights.

We're fast, McDonough thought, with brief pride. Even the Air Force thinks the Civil Air Patrol is just a bunch of amateurs, but we can put a mission in the air ahead of any other CAP squadron in this county. We can scramble. He was getting his night vision back now, and a quick glance showed him that the windsock was flowing straight out above the black, silent hangar against the pearly false dawn. Aloft, the stars were paling without any cloud-dimming, or even much twinkling. The wind was steady north up the valley; ideal flying weather. Small lumpy figures were running across the field from the parked cars toward the shack. The squadron was scrambling. "Mac!" Martinson shouted from inside the shack. "Where are you? Get your junk in here and get started!" McDonough slipped inside the door, and swung his BEG components onto the chart table. Light was pouring into the briefing room from the tiny office, dazzling after the long darkness. In the briefing room the radio blinked a tiny red eye, but the squadron's communications officer hadn't yet arrived to answer it. In the office, Martinson's voice rumbled softly, urgently, and the phone gave him back thin unintelligible noises, like an unteachable parakeet. Then, suddenly, the adjutant appeared at the office door and peered at McDonough. "What are you waiting for?" he said. "Get that mind reader of yours into the Cub on the double." "What's wrong with the Aeronca? It's faster." "Water in the gas; she ices up. We'll have to drain the tank. This is a hell of a time to argue." Martinson jerked open the squealing door which opened into the hangar, his hand groping for the light switch. McDonough followed him, supporting his sling with both hands, his elbows together. Nothing is quite so concentratedly heavy as an electronics chassis with a transformer mounted on it, and four of them make a back-wrenching load. The adjutant was already hauling the servicing platform across the concrete floor to the cowling of the Piper Cub. "Get your stuff set," he said. "I'll fuel her up and check the oil." "All right. Doesn't look like she needs much gas." "Don't you ever stop talkin'? Let's move." McDonough lowered his load to the cold floor beside the plane's cabin, feeling a brief flash of resentment. In daily life Martinson was a job printer who couldn't, and didn't, give orders to anybody, not even his wife. Well, those were usually the boys who let rank go to their heads, even in a volunteer outfit. He got to work. Voices sounded from the shack, and then Andy Persons, the commanding officer, came bounding over the sill, followed by two sleepy-eyed cadets. "What's up?" he shouted. "That you, Martinson?" "It's me. One of you cadets, pass me up that can. Andy, get the doors open, hey? "There's a Russki bomber down north of us, somewhere near Howells. Part of a flight that was making a run on Schenectady." "Did they get it?" "No, they overshot, way overtook out Kingston instead. Stewart Field hit them just as they turned to regroup, and knocked this baby down on the first pass. We're supposed The rest of the adjutant's reply was lost in a growling, echoing roar, as though they were all standing underneath a

vast trestle over which all the railroad trains in the world were crossing at once. The sixty-four-foot organ reeds of jets were being blown in the night zenith above the fieldanother hunting pack, come from Stewart Field to avenge the hydrogen agony that had been Kingston.

His head still inside the plane's greenhouse, McDonough listened transfixed. Like most CAP officers, he was too old to be a jet pilot, his reflexes too slow, his eyesight too far over the line, his belly muscles too soft to take the five-gravity turns; but now and then he thought about what it might be like to ride one of those flying blowtorches, cruising at six hundred miles an hour before a thin black wake of kerosene fumes, or being followed along the ground at top speed by the double wave-front of the "supersonic bang." It was a noble notion, almost as fine as that of piloting the one-man Niagara of power that was a rocket fighter.

The noise grew until it seemed certain that the invisible Jets were going to bullet directly through the hangar, and then dimmed gradually.

"The usual orders?" Persons shouted up from under the declining roar. "Find the plane, pump the live survivors, pick the corpses' brains? Who else is up?"

"Nobody," Martinson said, coming down from the ladder and hauling it clear of the plane. "Middletown squadron's deactivated; Montgomery hasn't got a plane; Newburgh hasn't got a field."

"Warwick has Group's L-16"

"They snapped the undercarriage off it last week," Martinson said with gloomy satisfaction. "It's our baby, as usual. Mac, you got your ghoul-tools all set in there?"

"In a minute," McDonough said. He was already wearing the Walter goggles, pushed back up on his helmet, and the detector, amplifier, and power pack of the EEG were secure in their frames on the platform behind the Cub's rear seat. The "hair net"the flexible network of electrodes which he would jam on the head of any dead man whose head had survived the bomber crashwas connected to them and hung in its clips under the seat, the leads strung to avoid fouling the plane's exposed control cables. Nothing remained to do now but to secure the frequency analyzer, which was the heaviest of the units and had to be bolted down just forward of the rear joystick so that its weight would not shift in flight. If the apparatus didn't have to be collimated after every flight, it could be left in the planebut it did, and that was that.

"O.K.," he said, pulling his head out of the greenhouse. He was trembling slightly. These tomb-tapping expeditions were hard on the nerves. No matter how much training in the art of reading a dead mind you may have had, the actual experience is different, and cannot be duplicated from the long-stored corpses of the laboratory. The newly dead brain is an inferno, almost by definition.

"Good," Persons said. "Martinson, you'll pilot. Mac, keep on the air; we're going to refuel the Airokknocker and get it up by ten o'clock if we can. In any case we'll feed you any spottings we get from the Air Force as fast as they come in. Martinson, refuel at Montgomery if you have to; don't waste time coming back here. Got it?"

"Roger," Martinson said, scrambling into the front seat and buckling his safety belt. McDonough put his foot hastily into

the stirrup and swung into the back seat.

"Cadets!" Persons said. "Pull chocks! Roll 'eri"

Characteristically, Persons himself did the heavy work of lifting and swinging the tail. The Cub bumped off the apron and out on the grass into the brightening morning.

"Switch off!" the cadet at the nose called. "Gasi Brakes!"

"Switch off, brakes," Martinson called back. "Mac, where to? Got any ideas?"

While McDonough thought about it, the cadet pulled the prop backwards through four turns. "Brakes! Contact!"

"Let's try up around the Otisville tunnel. If they were knocked down over Howells, they stood a good chance to wind up on the side of that mountain."

Martinson nodded and reached a gloved hand over his head. "Contact!" he shouted, and turned the switch. The cadet swung the prop, and the engine barked and roared; at McDonough's left, the duplicate throttle slid forward slightly as the pilot "caught" the engine. McDonough buttoned up the cabin, and then the plane began to roll toward the far, dim edge of the grassy field.

The sky got brighter. They were off again, to tap on another man's tomb, and ask of the dim voice inside it what memories it had left unspoken when it had died.

The Civil Air Patrol is, and has been since 1941, an auxiliary of the United States Air Force, active in coastal patrol and in air-sea rescue work. By 1954 when its ranks totaled more than eighty thousand men and women, about fifteen thousand of them licensed pilots the Air Force had nerved itself up to designating CAP as its Air Intelligence arm, with the job of locating downed enemy planes and radioing back information of military importance.

Aerial search is primarily the task of planes which can fly low and slow. Air Intelligence requires speed, since the kind of tactical information an enemy wreck may offer can grow cold within a few hours. The CAP'S planes, most of them single-engine, private-flying models, had already been proven ideal aerial search instruments; the CAP'S radio net, with its more than seventy-five hundred fixed, mobile and airborne stations, was more than fast enough to get information to wherever it was needed while it was still hot.

But the expected enemy, after all, was Russia; and how many civilians, even those who know how to fly, navigate, or operate a radio transmitter, could ask anyone an intelligent question in Russian, let alone understand the answer?

It was the astonishingly rapid development of electrical methods for probing the brain which provided the answer in particular the development, in the late fifties, of flicker-stimulus aimed at the visual memory. Abruptly, EEG technicians no longer needed to use language at all to probe the brain for visual images, and read them; they did not even need to know how their apparatus worked, let alone the brain. A few moments of flicker into the subject's eyes, on a frequency chosen from a table, and the images would come swarming into the operator's toposcope goggle the frequency chosen without the slightest basic knowledge of electrophysiology, as a woman choosing an ingredient from a cookbook is ignorant of and indifferent to the chemistry involved in the choice.

It was that engineering discovery which put tomb-tappers into the back seats of the CAP'S putt-putts when the war finally began for the images in the toposcope goggles did not

stop when the brain died.

The world at dawn, as McDonough saw it from three thousand feet, was a world of long sculptured shadows, almost as motionless and three-dimensional as a lunar landscape near the daylight terminator. The air was very quiet, and the Cub droned as gently through the blue haze as any bee, gaining altitude above the field in a series of wide climbing turns. At the last turn the plane wheeled south over a farm owned by someone Martinson knew, a man already turning his acres from the seat of his tractor, and Martinson waggled the plane's wings at him and got back a wave like the quivering of an insect's antenna. It was all deceptively normal.

Then the horizon dipped below the Cub's nose again and Martinson was climbing out of the valley. A lake passed below them, spotted with islands, and with the brown barracks of Camp Cejwin, once a children's summer camp but now full of sleeping soldiers. Martinson continued south, skirting Port Jervis, until McDonough was able to pick up the main line of the Erie Railroad, going northeast toward Otisville and Howells. The mountain through which the Otisville tunnel ran was already visible as a smoky hulk to the far left of the dawn.

McDonough turned on the radio, which responded with a rhythmical sputtering; the Cub's engine was not adequately shielded. In the background, the C.O.'s voice was calling them: "Huguenot to L-4. Huguenot to L-4."

"L-4 here. We read you, Andy. We're heading toward Otisville. Smooth as glass up here. Nothing to report yet."

"We read you weak but clear. We're dumping the gas in the Airokknocker crackle ground. We'll follow as fast as possible. No new AF spottings yet. If crackle, call us right away. Over."

"L-4 to Huguenot. Lost the last sentence, Andy. Cylinder static. Lost the last sentence. Please read it back."

"All right, Mac. If you see the bomber, crackle right away. Got it? If you see crackle, call us right away. Got it? Over."

"Got it, Andy. L-4 to Huguenot, over and out."

"Over and out."

The railroad embankment below them went around a wide arc and separated deceptively into two. One of the lines had been pulled up years back, but the marks of the long-ago stacked and burned ties still striped the gravel bed, and it would have been impossible for a stranger to tell from the air whether or not there were any rails running over those marks; terrain from the air can be deceptive unless you know what it is supposed to look like, rather than what it does look like. Martinson, however, knew as well as McDonough which of the two rail spurs was the discontinued one, and banked the Cub in a gentle climbing turn toward the mountain. The rectangular acres wheeled slowly and solemnly below them, brindled with tiny cows as motionless as toys. After a while the deceptive spur line turned sharply east into a woolly green woods and never came out again. The mountain got larger, the morning ground haze rising up its nearer side, as though the whole forest were smoldering sullenly there. Martinson turned his head and leaned it back to look out of the corner of one eye at the back seat, but McDonough shook his head. There was no chance at all that the crashed bomber could be on this side of that heavy-shouldered mass of rock.

Martinson shrugged and eased the stick back. The plane bored up into the sky, past four thousand feet, past four thousand, five hundred. Lake Hawthorne passed under the Cub's fat little tires, an irregular sapphire set in the pommel of the mountain. The altimeter crept slowly past five thousand feet; Martinson was taking no chances on being caught in the downdraft on the other side of the hill. At six thousand, he edged the throttle back and leveled out, peering back through the plexiglas.

But there was no sign of any wreck on that side of the mountain, either.

Puzzled, McDonough forced up the top cabin flap on the right side, buttoned it into place against the buffering slipstream, and thrust his head out into the tearing gale. There was nothing to see on the ground. Straight down, the knife-edge brow of the cliff from which the railroad tracks emerged again drifted slowly away from the Cub's tail; just an inch farther on was the matchbox which was the Otisville siding shack. A sort of shaking of pepper around the matchbox meant people, a small crowd of them though there was no train due until the Erie's No. 6, which didn't stop at Otisville anyhow.

He thumped Martinson on the shoulder. The adjutant tilted his head back and shouted, "What?"

"Bank right. Something going on around the Otisville station. Go down a bit."

The adjutant jerked out the carburetor-heat toggle and pulled back the throttle. The plane, idling, went into a long, whistling glide along the railroad right of way.

"Can't go too low here," he said. "If we get caught in the downdraft, we'll get slammed right into the mountain."

"I know that. Go on about four miles and make an airline approach back. Then you can climb into the draft. I want to see what's going on down there."

Martinsen shrugged and opened the throttle again. The Cub clawed for altitude, then made a half-turn over Howells for the bogus landing run.

The plane went into normal glide and McDonough craned his neck. In a few moments he was able to see what had happened down below. The mountain from this side was steep and sharp; a wounded bomber couldn't possibly have hoped to clear it. At night, on the other hand, the mouth of the railroad tunnel was marked on all three sides, by the lights of the station on the left, the neon sign of the tavern which stood on the brow of the cliff in Otisville (POP. 3,000 HIGH AND HEALTHY) and on the right by the Erie's own signal standard. Radar would have shown the rest: the long regular path of the embankment leading directly into that cul-de-sac of lights, the beetling mass of contours which was the mountain. All these signs would mean "tunnel" in any language.

And the bomber pilot had taken the longest of all possible chances: to come down gliding along the right of way, in the hope of shooting his fuselage cleanly into that tunnel, leaving behind his wings with their dangerous engines and fuel tanks. It was absolutely insane, but that was what he had done.

And, miracle of miracles, he had made it. McDonough could see the wings now, buttered into two-dimensional profiles over the two pilasters of the tunnel. They had hit with such force that the fuel in them must have been vaporized instantly; at least, there was no sign of a fire. And no sign of a fuselage, either.

The bomber's body was inside the mountain, probably half-way or more down the tunnel's one-mile length. It was inconceivable that there could be anything intelligible left of it; but where one miracle has happened, two are possible. No wonder the little Otisville station was peppered over with the specks of wondering people.

"L-4 to Huguenot. L-4 to Huguenot. Andy, are you there?"

"We read you, Mac. Go ahead."

"We've found your bomber. It's in the Otisville tunnel. Over."

"Crackle to L-4. You've lost your mind."

"That's where it is, all the same. We're going to try to make a landing. Send us a team as soon as you can. Out."

"Huguenot to L-4. Don't be a crackle idiot, Mac, you can't land there."

"Out," McDonough said. He pounded Martinson's shoulder and gestured urgently downward.

"You want to land?" Martinson said. "Why didn't you say so? We'll never get down on a shallow glide like this." He cleared the engine with a brief burp on the throttle, pulled the Cub up into a sharp stall, and slid off on one wing. The whole world began to spin giddily.

Martinson was losing altitude. McDonough closed his eyes and hung onto his back teeth.

Martinson's drastic piloting got them down to a rough landing, on the wheels, on the road leading to the Otisville station, slightly under a mile away from the mountain. They taxied the rest of the way. The crowd left the mouth of the tunnel to cluster around the airplane the moment it had come to a stop, but a few moments' questioning convinced McDonough that the Otisvilleans knew very little. Some of them had heard "a turrible noise" in the early morning, and with the first light had discovered the bright metal coating the sides of the tunnel. No, there hadn't been any smoke. No, nobody heard any sounds in the tunnel. You couldn't see the other end of it, though; something was blocking it.

"The signal's red on this side," McDonough said thoughtfully while he helped the adjutant tie the plane down. "You used to run the PBX board for the Erie in Port, didn't you, Marty? If you were to phone the station master there, maybe we could get him to throw a block on the other end of the tunnel."

"If there's wreckage in there, the block will be on automatically."

"Sure. But we've got to go in there. I don't want the Number Six piling in after us."

Martinson nodded, and went inside the railroad station. McDonough looked around. There was, as usual, a motorized hand truck parked off the tracks on the other side of the embankment. Many willing hands helped him set it on the right of way, and several huskies got the one-lung engine started for him. Getting his own apparatus out of the plane and onto the truck, however, was a job for which he refused all aid. The stuff was just too delicate, for all its weight, to be allowed in the hands of laymen and never mind that McDonough himself was almost as much of a layman in neurophysiology as they were; he at least knew the counting tables and the cookbook.

"O.K.," Martinson said, rejoining them. "Tunnel's blocked at both ends. I talked to Ralph at the dispatcher's; he was

steamingsays he's lost four trains already, and another due in from Buffalo in forty-four minutes. We cried a little about it. Do we go now?"

"Right now."

Martinson drew his automatic and squatted down on the front of the truck. The little car growled and crawled toward the tunnel. The spectators murmured and shook their heads knowingly.

Inside the tunnel it was as dark as always, and cold, with a damp chill which struck through McDonough's flight jacket and dungarees. The air was still, and in addition to its musty smell it had a peculiar metallic stench. Thus far, however, there was none of the smell of fuel or of combustion products which McDonough had expected. He found suddenly that he was trembling again, although he did not really believe that the EEG would be needed.

"Did you notice those wings?" Martinson said suddenly, just loud enough to be heard above the popping of the motor. The echoes distorted his voice almost beyond recognition.

"Notice them? What about them?"

"Too short to be bomber wings. Also, no engines."

McDonough swore silently. To have failed to notice a detail as gross as that was a sure sign that he was even more frightened than he had thought. "Anything else?"

"Well, I don't think they were aluminum; too tough.

Titanium, maybe, or stainless steel. What have we got in here, anyhow? You know the Russkies couldn't get a fighter this far."

There was no arguing that. There was no answering the question, either not yet.

McDonough unhooked the torch from his belt. Behind them, the white aperture of the tunnel's mouth looked no bigger than a nickel, and the twin bright lines of the rails looked forty miles long. Ahead, the flashlight revealed nothing but the slimy walls of the tunnel, coated with soot.

And then there was a fugitive bluish gleam. McDonough set the motor back down as far as it would go. The truck crawled painfully through the stifling blackness. The thudding of the engine was painful, as though his own heart were trying to move the heavy platform.

The gleam came closer. Nothing moved around it. It was metal, reflecting the light from his torch. Martinson lit his own and brought it into play.

The truck stopped, and there was absolute silence except for the ticking of water on the floor of the tunnel.

"It's a rocket," Martinson whispered. His torch roved over the ridiculously inadequate tail empennage facing them. It was badly crumpled. "In fair shape, considering. At the clip he was going, he must have slammed back and forth like an alarm clapper."

Cautiously they got off the truck and prowled around the gloaming, badly dented spindle. There were clean shears where the wings had been, but the stubs still remained, as though the metal itself had given to the impact before the joints could. That meant welded construction throughout, McDonough remembered vaguely. The vessel rested now roughly in the center of the tunnel, and the railroad tracks had spraddled under its weight. The fuselage bore no identifying marks, except for a red star at the nose; or rather, a red asterisk.

Martinson's torch lingered over the star for a moment, but the adjutant offered no comment. He went around the nose, MeDonough trailing.

On the other side of the ship was the death wound; a small, ragged tear in the metal, not far forward of the tail. Some of the raw curls of metal were partially melted.

Martinson touched one.

"Flak," he muttered. "Cut his fuel lines. Lucky he didn't blow up."

"How do we get in?" MeDonough said nervously. "The cabin didn't even crack. And we can't crawl through that hole."

Martinson thought about it. Then he bent to the lesion in the ship's skin, took a deep breath, and bellowed at the top of his voice:

"Hey in there! Open up!"

It took a long time for the echoes to die away. MeDonough was paralyzed with pure fright. Anyone of those distorted, ominous rebounding voices could have been an answer. Finally, however, the silence came back.

"So he's dead," Martinson said practically. "I'll bet even his footbones are broken, every one of 'em. Mac, stick your hair net in there and see if you can pick up anything."

"N-not a chance. I can't get anything unless the electrodes are actually t-touching the skull."

"Try it anyhow, and then we can get out of here and let the experts take over. I've about made up my mind it's a missile, anyhow. With this little damage, it could still go off."

MeDonough had been repressing that notion since his first sight of the spindle. The attempt to save the fuselage intact, the piloting skill involved, and the obvious cabin windshield all argued against it; but even the bare possibility was somehow twice as terrifying, here under a mountain, as it would have been in the open. With so enormous a mass of rock pressing down on him, and the ravening energies of a sun perhaps waiting to break loose by his side

No, no; it was a fighter, and the pilot might somehow still be alive. He almost ran to get the electrode net off the truck.

He dangled it on its cable inside the flak tear, pulled the goggles over his eyes, and flicked the switch with his thumb.

The Walter goggles made the world inside the tunnel no darker than it actually was, but knowing that he would now be unable to see any gleam of light in the tunnel, should one

appear from somewheresay, in the ultimate glare of hydrogen fusionincreased the pressure of blackness on his brain. Back on the truck the frequency-analyzer began its regular, meaningless peeping, scanning the possible cortical output bands in order of likelihood: First the 0.5 to 3.5 cycles/second band, the delta wave, the last activity of the brain detectable before death; then the four to seven c.p.s. theta channel, the pleasure-scanning waves which went on even during sleep; the alpha rhythm, the visual scanner, at eight to thirteen c.p.s.; the beta rhythms at fourteen to thirty c.p.s. which mirror the tensions of conscious computation, not far below the level of real thought; the gamma band, where

The goggles lit.

. . . And still the dazzling sky-blue sheep are grazing in the red field under the rainbow-billed and pea-green birds. . . .

McDonough snatched the goggles up with a gasp, and

stared frantically into the blackness, now swimming with residual images in contrasting colors, melting gradually as the rods and cones in his retina gave up the energy they had absorbed from the scene in the goggles. Curiously, he knew at once where the voice had come from: it had been his mother's reading to him, on Christmas Eve, a story called "A Child's Christmas in Wales." He had not thought of it in well over two decades, but the scene in the toposcope goggles had called it forth irresistibly.

"What's the matter?" Martinson's voice said. "Get anything? Are you sick?"

"No," McDonough muttered. "Nothing."

"Then let's beat it. Do you make a noise like that over nothing every day? My Uncle Crosby did, but then, he had asthma."

Tentatively, McDonough lowered the goggles again. The scene came back, still in the same impossible colors, and almost completely without motion. Now that he was able to look at it again, however, he saw that the blue animals were not sheep; they were too large, and they had faces rather like those of kittens. Nor were the enormously slow-moving birds actually birds at all, except that they did seem to be flying in unlikely straight lines, with slow, mathematically even flappings of unwinglike wings; there was something vegetable about them. The red field was only a dazzling blur, hazing the feet of the blue animals with the huge, innocent kitten's faces. As for the sky, it hardly seemed to be there at all; it was as white as paper.

"Come on," Martinson muttered, his voice edged with irritation. "What's the sense of staying in this hole any more? You bucking for pneumonia?"

"There's . . . something alive in there."

"Not a chance," Martinson said. His voice was noticeably more ragged. "You're dreaming. You said yourself you couldn't pick up"

"I know what I'm doing," McDonough insisted, watching the scene in the goggles. "There's a live brain in there. Something nobody's ever hit before. It's powerfulno mind in the books ever put out a broadcast like this. It isn't human."

"All the more reason to call in the AF and quit. We can't get in there anyhow. What do you mean, it isn't human? It's a Red, that's all."

"No, it isn't," McDonough said evenly. Now that he thought he knew what they had found, he had stopped trembling. He was still terrified, but it was a different kind of terror: the fright of a man who has at last gotten a clear idea of what it is he is up against. "Human beings just don't broadcast like this. Especially not when they're near dying. And they don't remember huge blue sheep with cat's heads on them, or red grass, or a white sky. Not even if they come from the USSR. Whoever it is in there comes from some place else."

"You read too much. What about the star on the nose?"

McDonough drew a deep breath. "What about it?" he said steadily. "It isn't the insignia of the Red Air Force. I saw that it stopped you, too. No air force I ever heard of flies a red asterisk. It isn't a cocarde at all. It's just what it is."

"An asterisk?" Martinson said angrily.

"No, Marty, I think it's a star. A symbol for a real star. The AF's gone and knocked us down a spaceship." He pushed the goggles up and carefully withdrew the electrode

net from the hole in the battered fuselage.

"And," he said carefully, "the pilot, whatever he is, is still alive and thinking about home, wherever that is." Though the Air Force had been duly notified by the radio net of McDonough's preposterous discovery, it took its own time about getting a technical crew over to Otisville. It had to, regardless of how much stock it took in the theory. The nearest source of advanced Air Force EEG equipment was just outside Newburgh, at Stewart Field, and it would have to be driven to Otisville by truck; no AF plane slow enough to duplicate Martinson's landing on the road could have handled the necessary payload.

For several hours, therefore, McDonough could do pretty much as he liked with his prize. After only a little urging, Martinson got the Erie dispatcher to send an oxyacetylene torch to the Port Jervis side of the tunnel, on board a Diesel camelback. Persons, who had subsequently arrived in the Aeronca, was all for trying it immediately in the tunnel, but McDonough was restrained by some dim memory of high school experiments with magnesium, a metal which looked very much like this. He persuaded the C.O. to try the torch on the smeared wings first.

The wings didn't burn. They carried the torch into the tunnel, and Persons got to work with it, enlarging the flak hole.

"Is that what-is-it still alive?" Persons asked, cutting steadily.

"I think so," McDonough said, his eyes averted from the tiny sun of the torch. "I've been sticking the electrodes in there about once every five minutes. I get essentially the same picture. But it's getting steadily weaker."

"D'you think we'll reach it before it dies?"

"I don't know. I'm not even sure I want to."

Persons thought that over, lifting the torch from the metal. Then he said, "You've got something there. Maybe I better try that gadget and see what I think."

"No," McDonough said. "It isn't tuned to you."

"Orders, Mac. Let me give it a try. Hand it over."

"It isn't that, Andy. I wouldn't buck you, you know that; you made this squadron. But it's dangerous. Do you want to have an epileptic fit? The chances are nine to five that you would."

"Oh," Persons said. "All right. It's your show." He resumed cutting.

After a while McDonough said, in a remote, emotionless voice: "That's enough. I think I can get through there now, as soon as it cools."

"Suppose there's no passage between the tail and the nose?" Martinson said. "More likely there's a firewall, and we'd never be able to cut through that."

"Probably," McDonough agreed. "We couldn't run the torch near the fuel tanks, anyhow, that's for sure."

"Then what good"

"If these people think anything like we do, there's bound to be some kind of escape mechanism something that blows the pilot's capsule free of the ship. I ought to be able to reach it."

"And fire it in here?" Persons said. "You'll smash the cabin against the tunnel roof. That'll kill the pilot for sure."

"Not if I disarm it. If I can get the charge out of it, all

firing it will do is open the locking devices; then we can take the windshield off and get in. I'll pass the charge out back to you; handle it gently. Let me have your flashlight, Marty, mine's almost dead."

Silently, Martinson handed him the light. He hesitated a moment, listening to the water dripping in the background. Then, with a deep breath, he said, "Well. Here goes nothin'." He clambered into the narrow opening.

The jungle of pipes, wires and pumps before him was utterly unfamiliar in detail, but familiar in principle. Human beings, given the job of setting up a rocket motor, set it up in this general way. McDonough probed with the light beam, looking for a passage large enough for him to wiggle through. There didn't seem to be any such passage, but he squirmed his way forward regardless, forcing himself into any opening that presented itself, no matter how small and contorted it seemed. The feeling of entrapment was terrible. If he were to wind up in a cul-de-sac, he would never be able to worm himself backwards out of this jungle of piping . . .

He hit his head a sharp crack on a metal roof, and the metal resounded hollowly. A tank of some kind, empty, or nearly empty. Oxygen? No, unless the stuff had evaporated long ago; the skin of the tank was no colder than any of the other surfaces he had encountered. Propellant, perhaps, or compressed nitrogensomething like that.

Between the tank and what he took to be the inside of the hull, there was a low freeway, just high enough for him to squeeze through if he turned his head sideways. There were occasional supports and ganglions of wiring to be writhed around, but the going was a little better than it had been, back in the engine compartment. Then his head lifted into a slightly larger space, made of walls that curved gently against each other: the front of the tank, he guessed, opposed to the floor of the pilot's capsule and the belly of the hull. Between the capsule and the hull, up rather high, was the outside curve of a tube, large in diameter but very short; it was encrusted with motors, small pumps, and wiring.

An air lock? It certainly looked like one. If so, the trick with the escape mechanism might not have to be worked at all if indeed the escape device existed.

Finding that he could raise his shoulders enough to rest on his elbows, he studied the wiring. The thickest of the cables emerged from the pilot's capsule; that should be the power line, ready to activate the whole business when the pilot hit the switch. If so, it could be shorted out provided that there was still any juice in the batteries. He managed to get the big nippers free of his belt, and dragged forward into a position where he could use them, with considerable straining. He closed their needlelike teeth around the cable and squeezed with all his might. The jaws closed slowly, and the cusps bit in.

There was a deep, surging hum, and all the pumps and motors began to whirr and throb. From back the way he had come, he heard a very muffled distant shout of astonishment.

He hooked the nippers back into his belt and inched forward, raising his back until he was almost curled into a ball. By careful, small movements, as though he were being born, he managed to somersault painfully in the cramped, curved space, and get his head and shoulders back under the tank again, face up this time. He had to trail the flash-

light, so that his progress backwards through the utter darkness was as blind as a mole's; but he made it, at long last. The tunnel, once he had tumbled out into it again, seemed miraculously spacious almost like flying.

"The damn door opened right up, all by itself," Martinson was chattering. "Scared me green. What'd you dosay 'Open sesame' or something?"

"Yeah," McDonough said. He rescued his electrode net from the hand truck and went forward to the gaping air lock. The door had blocked most of the rest of the tunnel, but it was open wide enough.

It wasn't much of an air lock. As he had seen from inside, it was too short to hold a man; probably it had only been intended to moderate the pressure drop between inside and outside, not prevent such a drop absolutely. Only the outer door had the proper bank-vault heaviness of a true air lock. The inner one, open, was now nothing but a narrow ring of serrated blades, machined to a Johannson-block finish so fine that they were airtight by virtue of molecular cohesion alone a highly perfected iris diaphragm. McDonough wondered vaguely how the pinpoint hole in the center of the diaphragm was plugged when the iris was fully closed, but his layman's knowledge of engineering failed him entirely there; he could come up with nothing better than a vision of the pilot plugging that hole with a wad of well-chewed bubble gum.

He sniffed the damp, cold, still air. Nothing. If the pilot had breathed anything alien to Earth-normal air, it had already dissipated without trace in the organ pipe of the tunnel. He flashed his light inside the cabin.

The instruments were smashed beyond hope, except for a few at the sides of the capsule. "The pilot had smashed them or rather, his environment had.

Before him in the light of the torch was a heavy, transparent tank of iridescent greenish-brown fluid, with a small figure floating inside it. It had been the tank, which had broken free of its moorings, which had smashed up the rest of the compartment. The pilot was completely enclosed in what looked like an ordinary G-suit, inside the oil; flexible hoses connected to bottles on the ceiling fed him his atmosphere, whatever it was. The hoses hadn't broken, but something inside the G-suit had; a line of tiny bubbles was rising from somewhere near the pilot's neck.

He pressed the EEG electrode net against the tank and looked into the Walter goggles. The sheep with the kitten's faces were still there, somewhat changed in position; but almost all of the color had washed out of the scene.

McDonough grunted involuntarily. There was now an atmosphere about the picture which hit him like a blow, a feeling of intense oppression, of intense distress . . .

"Marty," he said hoarsely. "Let's see if we can't cut into that tank from the bottom somehow." He backed down into the tunnel.

"Why? If he's got internal injuries"

"The suit's been breached. It's filling with that oil from the bottom. If we don't drain the tank, he'll drown first."

"All right. Still think he's a man-from-Mars, Mac?"

"I don't know. It's too small to be a man, you can see that. And the memories aren't like human memories. That's all I know. Can we drill the tank some place?"

"Don't need to," Persons' echo-distorted voice said from inside the air lock. The reflections of his flashlight shifted in the opening like ghosts. "I just found a drain pet cock. Roll up your trouser cuffs, gents."

But the oil didn't drain out of the ship. Evidently it went into storage somewhere inside the hull, to be pumped back into the pilot's cocoon when it was needed again.

It took a long time. The silence came flooding back into the tunnel.

"That oil-suspension trick is neat," Martinson whispered edgily. "Cushions him like a fish. He's got inertia still, but no mass like a man in free fall."

McDonough fidgeted, but said nothing. He was trying to imagine what the multicolored vision of the pilot could mean. Something about it was nagging at him. It was wrong. Why would a still-conscious and gravely injured pilot be solely preoccupied with remembering the fields of home? Why wasn't he trying to save himself instead as ingeniously as he had tried to save the ship? He still had electrical power, and in that litter of smashed apparatus which he alone could recognize, there must surely be expedients which still awaited his trial. But he had already given up, though he knew he was dying.

Or did he? The emotional aura suggested a knowledge of things desperately wrong, yet there was no real desperation, no frenzy, hardly any fear almost as though the pilot did not know what death was, or, knowing it, was confident that it could not happen to him. The immensely powerful, dying mind inside the G-suit seemed curiously uncaring and passive, as though it awaited rescue with supreme confidence so supreme that it could afford to drift, in an oil-suspended floating dream of home, nostalgic and unhappy, but not really afraid.

And yet it was dying!

"Almost empty," Andy Persons' quiet, garbled voice said into the tunnel.

Clenching his teeth, McDonough hitched himself into the air lock again and tried to tap the fading thoughts on a higher frequency. But there was simply nothing to hear or see, though with a brain so strong, there should have been, at as short a range as this. And it was peculiar, too, that the visual dream never changed. The flow of thoughts in a powerful human mind is bewilderingly rapid; it takes weeks of analysis by specialists before its essential pattern emerges. This mind, on the other hand, had been holding tenaciously to this one thought complicated though it was for a minimum of two hours. A truly subidiot performance being broadcast with all the drive of a super genius.

Nothing in the cookbook provided McDonough with any precedent for it.

The suited figure was now slumped against the side of the empty tank, and the shades inside the toposcope goggles suddenly began to be distorted with regular, wrenching blurs: pain waves. A test at the level of the theta waves confirmed it; the unknown brain was responding to the pain with terrible knots of rage, real blasts of it, so strong and uncontrolled that McDonough could not endure them for more than a second. His hand was shaking so hard that he could hardly tune back to the gamma level again.

"We should have left the oil there," he whispered. "We've moved him too much. The internal injuries are going to kill

him in a few minutes."

"We couldn't let him drown, you said so yourself," Persons said practically. "Look, there's a seam on this tank that looks like a torsion seal. If we break it, it ought to open up like a tired clam. Then we can get him out of here."

As he spoke, the empty tank parted into two shell-like halves. The pilot lay slumped and twisted at the bottom, like a doll, his suit glistening in the light of the C.O.'s torch. "Help me. By the shoulders, real easy. That's it; lift. Easy, now."

Numbly, McDonough helped. It was true that the oil would have drowned the fragile, pitiful figure, but this was no help, either. The thing came up out of the cabin like a marionette with all its strings cut. Martinson cut the last of them: the flexible tubes which kept it connected to the ship. The three of them put it down, sprawling bonelessly.

. . . AND STILL THE DAZZLING SKY-BLUE SHEEP ARE GRAZING IN THE RED FIELD . . .

Just like that, McDonough saw it.

A coloring book!

That was what the scene was. That was why the colors were wrong, and the size referents. Of course the sheeplike animals did not look much like sheep, which the pilot could never have seen except in pictures. Of course the sheep's heads looked like the heads of kittens; everyone has seen kittens. Of course the brain was powerful out of all proportion to its survival drive and its knowledge of death; it was the brain of a genius, but a genius without experience. And of course, this way, the USSR could get a rocket fighter to the United States on a one-way trip.

The helmet fell off the body, and rolled off into the gutter which carried away the water condensing on the wall of the tunnel. Martinson gasped, and then began to swear in a low, grinding monotone. Andy Persons said nothing, but his light, as he played it on the pilot's head, shook with fury.

McDonough, his fantasy of space ships exploded, went back to the hand truck and kicked his tomb-tapping apparatus into small shards and bent pieces. His whole heart was a fuming caldron of pity and grief. He would never knock upon another tomb again.

The blond head on the floor of the tunnel, dreaming its waning dream of a colored paper field, was that of a little girl, barely eight years old.