

SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION

Vol. 1 — No. 5

August, 1957

CONTENTS

NOVELETTES

- THREE SURVIVED *by Robert Silverberg* 2
Roy thought his two companions would be dead weight
- THE SEARCH FOR SALLY *by A. Bertram Chandler* 46
Sally was dead. But her mind still survived!

SHORT STORIES

- ALTERNATE UNIVERSE *by Robert Bloch* 36
That mescaline drug had an odd effect
- I'LL TAKE OVER *by George Whitely* 76
The mechanical Brain ran the huge starship
- HUNT AND STRIKE *by Raymond E. Banks* 96
The ultimate guided missile will seek one man alone
- TWICE-TOLD TALE *by Theodore L. Thomas* 114
If space is curved, then the universe is round
- INVASION FOOTNOTE *by Cortwainer Bird* 121
Sim was just a robot—but he got ideas

FEATURES

- LOOK TO THE STARS *by Scott Nevets* 45
- NUCLEAR NEWS *by Steven Rory* 75
- THE MAIL BAG 126

COVER *by Kelly Freas*

ILLUSTRATIONS *by Emsch, Orban and Bowman*

W. W. Scott — Editor

SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION is published bi-monthly by Headline Publications Inc., at 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial office at 1790 Broadway, New York 19, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Holyoke, Mass., August 21, 1956, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copy, 35c. Subscription rates, \$4.00 for 12 issues. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts, and all such materials must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes. All stories printed in the magazine are fiction, and any similarity between the characters and actual persons is coincidental. Copyright 1957 by Headline Publications Inc. All rights, including translation, reserved under International Copyright Convention and Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in the U.S.A.

THREE SURVIVED

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

NOVELETTE

illustrated by BOWMAN

At first Roy thought his two companions were going to be just dead weight in the fight to survive from the spaceship wreck. They had no scientific skills at all

ABOARD the spaceship *Clyde Bohmer*, en route from Rigel IV to the Capella Orbiter via transspace hop, all hell had broken loose. The ship had blinked suddenly out of ultra-drive with an eyeball-jarring wrench and had drifted slowly into the system of a small golden-yellow G-type sun. A moment later, whatever it was that had given up the ghost in the drive compartment expired noisily, blasting away the nose of the ship.

Efficiently, the cybernetic governors slid the emergency partitions over the wounded section, but not before two ruptured bulkheads had yielded up the air they had penned in. In

his cabin just below Navigation Deck, Spatial Engineer Roy Kilbourne dialed *Info* and waited while the audio banks of the ship's computer fed him a precise account of the accident as reported by the scanning pickups.

"...failure in main drive generator, leading to destruction of nose section *in toto*." The computer always had had a fondness for Latin, Kilbourne thought irrelevantly.

The computer hummed for an instant and went on: "Air loss serious in Sections 8 and 9; compensation has been made but human inhabitants are suffering acute anoxia. Eight men *in extremis* there. Officer's



bridge destroyed; no survivors known. Engine room destroyed; several survivors. Passengers generally unharmed, though deaths are observable. Radon clouds causing hazard in lower levels of ship. Lifeships 3, 7, 8 are unusable. Computer section functioning and—”

The report would continue until the end of the emergency, but Kilbourne snapped the set off. He had the data he needed in order to act.

The ship was a wreck; of the thirty-eight men who had been aboard when they left Rigel, possibly ten were still alive. Kilbourne counted up on his fingers: six officers, all dead. Twelve passengers, “generally unharmed.” In the engine-room, “several survivors.” Eight of the twenty crewmen were as good as dead in Sections 8 and 9. The ship was crippled, and the only thing to do was to get off it and strike out for the nearest rescue signal beacon planet.

Kilbourne knew where the lifeships were, but he had two stops to make first. He himself was inconsequential to the

voyage, he knew, being merely an engineer transferring from the Rigel yards to do flight research at the artificial satellite in the Capella system. But he was a level-headed, logical man, and he knew the most important action he could ever perform in his life would be to rescue the two valuable things aboard ship: Professor David Loder, Earth’s outstanding gravitonic physicist, and the cargo of antivirotic drugs in Number Six Hold. Both were of vital importance to humanity.

Loder first, Kilbourne thought. The diminutive physicist was in Cabin Fifteen, up the companionway and around. Kilbourne pushed open his cabin door and was promptly greeted by a billowing roll of oily gray smoke. *Radon*, he thought in sudden alarm, then realized there was little danger from the radioactive gas this far from the drives. It was smoke, pure and simple—and it meant the ship was now on fire, along with its other woes.

CHOKING and gasping, Kilbourne made his way

through the smoke to Cabin Fifteen, and banged on the plasteel door. No answer came. He banged again, waited a moment, then shoved the door open.

"Professor Loder!" he called.

Loder was there, all right. Kilbourne saw the small, white-haired man huddled at his desk, a pencil clutched tightly in his dead fingers. He had been at work when the shift out of ultradrive had come. The jarring shock had been too much for the fragile old man.

Damn damn damn, Kilbourne thought. For a moment he felt frustration of a type quite new to him, and he stood there, trying to call the scientist back from the dead. He shook the bony arm, and Loder's head wobbled grotesquely. Kilbourne let go and glanced at the sheet of paper on the desk, covered with equations. His practiced eye comprehended them in a quick survey; they were, he saw, merely a preliminary restatement of Loder's 2451 Gravitonic Field theory, no more. There was no point in preserving the sheet; it contained nothing new, and

Kilbourne was not a sentimental man. Whatever Loder had planned to add was frozen forever in the dead man's brain.

"I think he's dead," said a quiet voice.

Kilbourne looked up and scowled. "Yes, he's dead." For a moment he was tempted to add, "*—and you're still alive, Leswick. There's no justice in the universe,*" but rejected the idea. This was no time for recrimination.

"Most of the others are dead too," the thin man in the doorway said. "I just looked in all the cabins. It's a great tragedy, isn't it?"

"Yes," Kilbourne said tightly. "Get out of my way now—I want to check on the drug cargo."

HE shouldered his way past and out into the companionway, feeling hollow and angry inside. For Loder to die, and Anthony Leswick to survive—

Leswick had been his pet bugaboo on the voyage up to now. He was a Metaphysical Synthesist, flaunting an impressive but meaningless de-

gree from some Terran university. Kilbourne had only a vague idea of what Metaphysical Synthesis was—a school of philosophy attempting to unify anthropology, history, psychology, sociology, and half a dozen other inexact sciences into one confused totality, he decided—but he had little love for speculative philosophy in any case. *It has no rules*, his precise engineer's mind would protest. *Anything goes. It's too damned illogical!* He particularly detested Leswick's kind of "science," aiming at some foggy-eyed and useless synthesis of art, science, history, and other things to determine the basic forces of society. For Leswick, a mystic masquerading as a man of learning, to survive, and Loder to die—!

Swallowing his anger, Kilbourne made his way hand-over-hand down to the storage holds. The antivirotics were in Hold Six—one hundred ampoules, worth as many hundred thousand dollars, and each needing a year of hard laboratory work to replace. The drugs were experimental steps toward elimination of the virus

diseases that plagued Terran colonists on some outer planets. The cargo was destined for the Orbiter labs for further analysis. If it didn't arrive—

Kilbourne reached the hold level at last and looked around. Number Six Hold was far down the corridor, near the damaged end of the ship. It was hard to see with all the smoke clogging things, and he knew he didn't have much time. He broke into a trot.

A massive figure appeared suddenly from the dimness ahead and came awkwardly toward Kilbourne. When the two men approached each other, the newcomer put one ponderous arm forward and held Kilbourne back.

"Where you think you goin', fella?"

"Get out of my way, will you?" Kilbourne said impatiently. "I'm in a hurry." The man was a deckhand, apelike in body and in mind—a big, slow-moving, slow-thinking animal of a man who probably performed the most menial tasks in the engine-room. It would be in keeping with the general pattern of things, Kil-

bourne thought bitterly, if this ape were the only survivor of the engine crew.

The man continued to hold him with a lackadaisical hand against his chest. "I told you I'm in a hurry," Kilbourne repeated. He grabbed the thick wrist with both hands and wrenched it away, and started to move fast.

"You ain't in any hurry, Mac," was the rumbling reply. "You can't go but twenty feet more thisaway. I just come from there myself."

"What do you mean?"

The deckhand shrugged. "The red wall's down thisaway. You can't get past that no-how."

The red wall? That was about the topper, Kilbourne thought. The chocolate frosting on the cake. The cybernetic governor had lowered the radiation-shields, blocking the fore part of the ship from the aft. It meant that anything on the other side of the wall—including the drug cargo—was hopelessly hot from a bath of hard radiation. He turned away, shoulders slumping. The accident had worked out devilishly well, and his rescue mis-

sion was a total failure.

The deckhand grinned cheerfully. "You look all bushed, Mac. Hey, smile! *You* ain't dead, are you?"

Kilbourne shook his head angrily. "I might as well be," he said. "Might as well."

"Hey! What kinda talk is that?" The big man pummelled Kilbourne jovially. "Come on, Mac—let's you and me go find a lifeship and clear outa here. I got a feeling the whole place is goin' to blow."

"Yeah. Let's go find a lifeship," Kilbourne agreed. "There's a guy on the passenger level still alive. We might as well go get him too. We might as well."

CHAPTER II

THE lifeship was hardly more than a bubble of metal, holding three men comfortably, four uncomfortably. A ship the size of the *Clyde Bohmer* carried ten such boats, the theory being that ten small ships would be more likely to survive an accident to the mother ship than two or three larger ones. Under ultradrive,

the extra mass didn't matter much.

In this case, theory was right. The blowup knocked out three of the lifeships—but there were seven left. On their way back to find Leswick, Kilbourne and the deckhand came across two other passengers still alive, but in bad shape. Cold-bloodedly, Kilbourne decided to leave them. Even if he could get them into one of the lifeships, they'd probably not survive the trip to the planet below—and if they made it there alive, the wait for rescue would finish them.

"Go on, get in," Kilbourne said harshly to the feathery-looking man in front of him. "And without the book."

Anthony Leswick turned in appeal. "But—I need this book, Kilbourne. How else will I pass my time before rescue? Here—look at it!"

Kilbourne took the book, glanced at the title. *An application of Matrix Field Theory to the Cultural Units of Eastern New Guinea*. For a moment, tempted by the thought that the book might in some way deal with math or phy-

sics, he held on to it. Then, realizing that whatever matrix field theory there might be in the volume was probably contorted to fit current Metaphysical Synthesist jargon, he tossed it aside.

"Sorry," he said. "I'll have enough trouble navigating this boat without extra mass."

Leswick shook his head sadly, swung open the airlock hatch, and stepped in. From somewhere deep in the ship came the rumblings of an approaching explosion, and the computer's audio offered a confusing burst of helpful suggestions, concluding with the flat statement, "*Safest procedure is to abandon ship.*"

The deckhand climbed in after Leswick, and Kilbourne followed him, yanking down the cord that sealed the lock. He strapped himself down on the pneumochair before the control panels, while the other two men climbed into waiting acceleration cradles just behind him.

Kilbourne suddenly began to sweat. He had hoped to be piloting David Loder and a cargo of precious drugs; that was down the drain, and in-

stead he was saving a more-or-less worthless metaphysician, a clod of a deckhand, and himself. The other two certainly weren't as important as Loder and the drugs, and Kilbourne had never evaluated his own importance to the universe as particularly high.

But now it was no longer a matter of utility and importance. Emphasis had shifted, and it was now a much more elemental matter. Three lives—including his own—lay in his hands. And he had never piloted any sort of spaceship before.

Dribblets of sweat poured down from his scalp, pasting together the stubby spikes of his close-cropped hair.

"We'd better take off," Leswick said nervously. "The ship may blow any second. Is there any problem?"

"None at all," Kilbourne forced himself to say. "I've got the thing well under control."

And to his surprise he realized it was so. Channels of his mind that he had thought long closed by rust suddenly opened brightly. He had never

piloted a ship, true enough—but he had basic knowledge, a grasp of theory. He knew how a spaceship worked and why, and he had more than enough math to compute a sort of an orbit. Maybe it wouldn't be a slick, professional job, but it would get them there. The thing *was* well under control.

With icy-calm fingers, he reached up and gripped the lever that would expel the lifeship from the mother vessel.

HE took a fix on the planet and began bringing the lifeship in on manual, feeling like a figure out of the earliest days of space travel, riding one in on her ear. The orbit he had concocted was a patchwork thing, blurred and smeared from repeated erasures, but he knew it was sound and would get them down. They'd land with a bang, perhaps, but they'd land. No one had any right to expect finesse on the first try.

Leswick and Tarzan—that was Kilbourne's new nickname for the deckhand, King of the Apes—had watched silently, craning to see over Kilbourne's

shoulders, as he had put together the rule-of-thumb orbit. The deckhand had stared with blunt uncomprehension, obviously fascinated by the doodling motions Kilbourne's pencil made in its rapid flight over the chart paper. As for Leswick, the metaphysician had kept silent out of deference to Kilbourne's apparent skill in a field in which he himself was totally ignorant, but he was watching with interest.

When Kilbourne was finished, he turned to the controls and set to work; guiding the lifeship in. He swung the small vessel in an ever-narrowing helix around the planet below, moving closer and closer until he could graze it tangentially and bring it to a landing.

The planet was one of a system of three, revolving around a minor unnamed G-type star. According to the charts it was an Earth-type world, habitable and inhabited. It had never been explored, though a survey team had come through the area some fifty years earlier and planted a rescue beacon on it without stopping to explore.

Kilbourne was gambling that

the beacon was still there and in working order. The coordinated colonial forces were embarked on a vast program which would eventually see the planting of rescue beacons on every planet in the galaxy for the benefit of shipwrecked travellers; right now, they were about a tenth of the way through the job, after more than a century.

The beacon would be emitting the standard signal modulating a 30-megacycle carrier, and once they had landed it would be readily possible for Kilbourne to rig a detector by cannibalizing some of the lifeship's works. The problem now was to land the ship—and that wasn't necessarily so easy.

Kilbourne glanced back at the men in the acceleration cradles. Tarzan was rocking placidly from side to side, probably deriving some sort of sensuous thrill from the motion. Leswick was more nervously alert, peering at the control-board with beady eyes.

Kilbourne smiled tensely. Their lives were in his hands. They were completely unequipped for saving them-

selves. What did they know of orbits and thrust, of jet compensation and mass ratios? *Nothing*. They were utterly dependent on whatever book-learning Kilbourne had accumulated, in combination with the applications his mind could devise to make use of it logically. Leswick and the big deckhand were just dead weight on this trip, Kilbourne thought. Just dead weight.

WHEN they were thirty minutes out from the *Clyde Bohmer*, the air in the cabin grew suddenly warm, and Kilbourne heard the conditioners straining frantically to hold the temperature down. Impelled by a sudden thought, he flicked on the rear viewscreen.

The crude screen lit and wavered crazily for a moment, then focussed. Against the blackness of space there was a sprinkling of tiny bright stars, and in the foreground a blazing new star that was listed in no *Ephemeris*.

It was the *Clyde Bohmer*.

"Take a look at the ship," Kilbourne said. He pointed to the screen.

"Where?"

"It's the star right in front," Kilbourne said. "It makes a lovely little nova, doesn't it?"

"God! What happened to the men aboard it?" Leswick asked.

"It musta been bad," the deckhand said slowly. "The whole thing blew up."

Kilbourne nodded. "That's about the size of it, chum. That's what these lifeships are for."

"How much longer before we reach that planet?" Leswick asked.

"We're halfway there," said Kilbourne, glancing at the figures in the margin of his chart. "We don't have anything much to worry about ourselves, now that we're clear of the ship."

He returned his attention to the job of navigating. The planet below grew nearer and nearer, and the cold tension in Kilbourne's stomach was replaced with a sort of quiet joy as he realized that his savvy and his logic were going to get them there.

Who said piloting spaceships is tough? There's nothing to it. Nothing at all.

The planet was close enough

now so he could see the irregular rounded shape of the continent on which the rescue beacon was planted. The chart gave him the location down to fractions of a second of arc, but that didn't do him much good; he couldn't navigate to such fine specifications. He fed the rest of his orbit into the automatic pilot, hoping they'd land reasonably close to the beacon, and unstrapped himself.

"What's the matter?" Leswick asked.

"We're about to arrive," said Kilbourne. "It may be a noisy landing. I want to be in one of those cradles when it happens."

CHAPTER III

THE three of them stood together unharmed outside the wreckage of the lifeship, and Kilbourne felt a certain satisfaction at having gotten them there safely.

It *had* been a noisy landing. The lifeship had ploughed into soft loam, smashing up its landing fins and otherwise demolishing itself, without much damage to its passengers ex-

cept for some incidental jolting.

"It smells pretty good," the deckhand said. He stood leaning against the ship's hull, his legs planted firmly in the yielding soil, head thrown back. "Smells just like air—real air. Good place."

Leswick frowned uneasily. "Isn't it dangerous, breathing the air of an unknown world without making some tests?"

Kilbourne grinned. "We *are* making a test. We're breathing the air, and it isn't killing us. Risky, but it happens to be the only test we're equipped to make. Besides, the chart says the place has breathable air, which means it's mostly nitrogen and oxygen and no poisonous things like methane thrown in. And besides that, what metaphysical suggestion would you have for going elsewhere if the damned stuff *weren't* breathable? The lifeship isn't ever going to move again, you know."

It was all a matter of logic—and the metaphysician, curse him, just didn't like to think logically, which made him a worse handicap right now than the deckhand. The deck-

hand didn't like to think at all—but, unlike Leswick, he had a certain amount of brute strength that would no doubt be useful in the long trek to the beacon.

Kilbourne surveyed his team. Leswick was a small, thin man with graying hair and deep-set, apologetic-looking eyes. His blunt stubby fingers indicated a miserable mechanical aptitude, and there was something about the wavering line of his mouth that seemed to explain why his intellectual interests had not been caught by the rational sciences.

As for Tarzan—Bill Dombey was his real name—he was simply a good-natured animal, topping Kilbourne's solid five-eleven by nearly six inches. He moved with a gait that was at once shambling and felinely graceful; his face was broad and open, with thick, honest features. Dombey wore the traditional garb of his trade: a black turtleneck sweater, overalls, and a heavy growth of three-day stubble.

"Okay," Kilbourne said. "I'm going to build a detector out of some of the leftover

radar parts from the lifeship. We won't be needing the ship any more, and we will need the detector. After that we're going to find out where the rescue beacon is, and we're going to go there. Got that?"

"What are we going to eat?" Leswick asked. "It may take days to reach the beacon."

"Quite possibly. We'll test the food the same way we tested the air—by trying it. I'll be able to build a small water-purifier" — *thank the Lord for a technical education*, Kilbourne thought—"but we'll have to feel our way with the meat and the vegetables. There's not too much danger from strange bacteria, by the way. They'll probably run just as fast from us as we would from them." He folded his arms. "Both of you understand? I think it goes without saying that I'll assume leadership of this little expedition on the basis of my technical abilities."

"Very well," Leswick said. "I'll take your orders."

Dombey remained silent. "What about you, Tarzan?"

"I don't care," the big man

grunted. "I'm gettin' pretty hungry. We goin' to be doin' much more talkin'?"

AN hour later, Kilbourne crouched scowling over a tangled mass of wires and coils, while Leswick stood above him with a mild expression of curiosity on his face and Dombey munched a translucent green fruit he had found somewhere.

Kilbourne was tinkering frantically with the equipment, trying to turn a radar set into a peak-detector in the quickest possible time. He was cursing whatever manufacturer of electronics equipment on whatever backwater world had turned out the lifeships; they had used an old-fashioned "can-of-worms"-type circuitry instead of the simple, interchangeable modular units of steatite that were common through most of the galaxy, making Kilbourne's job about ten times as hard as it ought to be.

"What's the trouble?" Leswick asked.

"You won't understand if I tell you," Kilbourne snapped. The sun was hot, and the open clearing created by the

abrupt arrival of the ship gave no shade. He added an additional capacitor and slid the copper-shielded case closed with a twitch of his pliers. "That might do it," he said, and stood back.

Leswick peered mystifiedly at the confused-looking network of resistors, condensers, and crystal diodes, then turned away. "How can you tell one thing from another?"

"Sweat and toil, friend. Two words you probably haven't synthesized into your philosophy yet." Kilbourne picked the realigned equipment up gingerly and carried it back inside the ship. Carefully, he wired it to the power source, and a few tentative hums came forth.

So far, so good, he thought grimly. Just call me—Robin-son Caruso, was that his name? The fellow who lived on the island.

Fifteen minutes later he emerged from the ship, dripping with perspiration and carrying a much-bescribbled sheet of paper. Dombey now squatted over an enormous heap of the green fruits, and was devouring them with obvious joy,

while Leswick was leaning against the scaly gray side of an uprooted tree. The metaphysician seemed deep in thought.

"I've found the beacon," Kilbourne announced loudly. "It's—" he glanced at the crude map he had drawn—"located about four hundred kilometers east of here. That's the best approximation I could get."

"Four hundred kilometers! But that's—"

"I know, Professor. It's going to take us more than one afternoon to get there. And so far as I know it's all jungle between here and there. Tarzan, throw me one of those fruits, will you?"

"Here, boss." D o m b e y palmed one of the fruits and tossed it to Kilbourne, who snagged it, examined it perfunctorily, and took a hesitant bite.

It was watery and tasteless, like a half-ripened avocado, but it seemed to be harmless enough, and nutritious. Kilbourne finished it in four more bites and spat out the core, a small hard red seed. "Not

bad," he commented. "Professor, suppose you get off your backside and gather as many of these as you can find; they may be strictly localized, and we're going to need every safe kind of food we can find. Tarzan, you come here with me. I want to drag anything we can possibly use and carry out of the ship before nightfall."

He turned away and headed into the ship, followed by Dombey. Leswick, he saw, had begun to gather the fruits as directed. Good, Kilbourne thought. If the metaphysician would cooperate, they could probably make it through the jungle to the beacon without much difficulty.

He wondered if Dombey and Leswick would ever realize what a stroke of luck it was for them to have escaped with a trained engineer. Dombey, of course, never would; the poor dimwit was happy to be alive, but that was as far as it went.

Leswick, though—the professor of Metaphysical Synthesis, equipped only to map cultural arcs and tribal war-patterns and draw high-sounding conclusions from them. Kil-

bourne realized that his own attitude was rapidly becoming one of smugness, and in self-annoyance he tried to change his train of thought. He had no right being smug merely because his mechanical aptitudes had led him to study what subsequent events were proving a curriculum of survival.

"Come on, Tarzan. Help me get all the spare tin outside."

"Sure, boss. Sure." Dombey grinned, ran a finger through the heavy stubble on his cheek, and spat out a mouthful of food. He rubbed his stomach contentedly and belched. "You know somethin', boss—them fruits is pretty good, but I could go for a little beef now. Something to drink, maybe, too."

"You know something, Tarzan? So could I!"

UNEASINESS returned with nightfall. Kilbourne and his two fellow-castaways spent the night in the ship, while a guardian fire flickered outside. Kilbourne passed most of the night lying awake.

They wouldn't have the ship to protect them after this night

—and, unless he could figure out some way of constructing tents out of salvaged radiation shielding, which didn't seem likely, they were going to be sleeping in the open from now until the time they reached the beacon—and afterward, until the rescue ship showed.

Kilbourne didn't like that.

Not on a strange planet, the only information known about it the curt notation on the galactic charts, "Inhabited."

Inhabited? By what? Would they be able to deal with them? The lifeship's survival kit included a converter for communicating with intelligent aliens, but that didn't guarantee a peaceful reception.

And strange noises sounded in the jungle distance—the chittering of alien birds, the dull visceral rumbling of ponderous land-creatures, the thin neighing of roaming ungulates. Kilbourne listened worriedly, wondering what would happen later, when they were camped deeper in the forest. Right now, the animals stayed away; the fire in front of the ship was probably enough to make them keep their distance, and

aside from that the trees were burned and flattened for a few hundred yards around the landing-point. They kept away—now.

Kilbourne tossed uneasily, wondering how he was going to cope with the myriad problems of the forest alone. Dombey was a question-mark, and Leswick, soft bookish city-dweller that he was, would be no help at all. Kilbourne realized gloomily that the journey to the beacon would leave even him at a loss; the best technical education in the world would be no help when he was facing a springing tiger. The journey that would begin in the morning would be even more trying, if possible, than the voyage in the lifeship.

CHAPTER IV

IN the morning, the sun was blistering hot in the clearing. Kilbourne took two hours to assemble everything he was planning to take.

He had worked up a crude water-purifier, using pliers and savvy, and had sketched a vague map of the area they were about to cover, basing

his guesses on the data brought in by the detector. The acceleration-cradles had been ripped down and converted into sleeping-ponchos. Under Kilbourne's direction, Dombey had hammered a few pots and pans out of stripped-away shielding. With these things, plus the contents of the lifeship's pitifully inadequate survival kit, Kilbourne felt they stood a good chance of making it through the jungle to the beacon.

Unless, he thought cheerlessly, they ran into a situation that required weapons—wild animals, or, worse, dangerous aliens. Of firearms they had none, and Kilbourne had been unable to improvise any efficient substitutes. Dombey carried a small jackknife that would be useful for skinning animals but not much help otherwise; Leswick had suggested carving boomerangs, but Kilbourne had rejected the idea on the grounds that making them would take too long, and that the instruments would be of doubtful efficiency in the hands of unskilled users.

We'll get there, though. Kil-

bourne told himself that over and over again. There was a well-defined path leading eastward, possibly as far as the beacon; they would take that path and stick to it, meeting each danger as they came to it. It was the only way.

He looked around. The denuded lifeship was already the home of three or four bizarre bird-like things. Dombey stood placidly guarding the heap of possessions on the ground, and Leswick, once again, was lost in meditation.

"O k a y," Kilbourne said. "It's getting toward noon, and I think we've done all we can here. Let's load up and get going."

He strapped as much as he could to Dombey's broad, uncomplaining back. The giant gave a few experimental grunts.

"That too much for you?"

"Can manage," Dombey said, and staggered around a little to prove it.

"Your turn," Kilbourne said to Leswick. The metaphysician presented his back with surprising willingness, and Kilbourne strapped on the bundled-up ponchos. He hoisted

what remained to his own back, and Leswick lashed it to.

"Onward and upward," Kilbourne said. He glanced at his compass for reassurance and began to walk eastward—toward the rescue beacon. Leswick fell in behind him, and Dombey brought up the rear.

They marched silently for nearly an hour. The path wound twistingly through the jungle, but Kilbourne, frequently referring to his compass, was gratified to find that their progression was predominantly easterly. The path was well worn, lined with stamped-down leaves and twigs, as if it were traversed often. Kilbourne wondered how long it would be before they encountered the people who had made the paths.

It was a semi-tropical jungle, heavy with fog and warm mist. Humming yellow-winged insects circled the three men's heads, and they marched forward through clouds of red gnats. The path was bordered with tall, narrow-boled, scaly-barked trees whose succulent compound leaves swung low into their faces. Behind them

was ranged a seemingly endless stand of the twisted shrubs that bore the edible green fruits. It was Leswick who pointed this out.

"I should have known it," the metaphysician said testily. "Those fruits are everywhere—and here am I, carrying ten pounds of them on my back!"

"Keep them there," Kilbourne said. "There's no reason to assume they grow everywhere—and we may be sorry later if we throw them away now."

"They grow everywhere," Dombey interjected suddenly, in unusually positive tones. "He *can* throw them away."

Kilbourne chuckled. "Oh? Have you made a study of floral dispersion here, Tarzan? Are you *positive* the fruits grow everywhere?"

Dombey grunted in annoyance and said, "Boss, he can throw those things away. He's only gonna get tired from carrying 'em, and there's plenty more."

"You hear that, Kilbourne?"

"Look here, Leswick—I'm sure Dombey means well, but until I'm convinced those

shrubs are common all over I don't intend to scrap our supply. Ten pounds more or less won't kill you."

"He's not a very strong man," Dombey persisted. "He don't need to carry them."

This time Kilbourne became angry. He whirled in his tracks and said, "That's enough from you, Dombey! When I need your suggestions I'll come asking for them!"

The big man shrugged, but said nothing. Kilbourne turned front again, and stepped up his pace. Up to now, Dombey had maintained a discreet silence, as befitted his conversational abilities. But if the big deckhand were going to start making trouble now—

Kilbourne scowled. If this kept on, the three of them would be at each other's throats inside half an hour. And it was going to take days to reach the beacen.

THE journey proceeded without further incident until half-past one, when Kilbourne announced it was time for lunch. To his surprise, he found Dombey shaking his head slowly.

"No. Don't stop now," the deckhand rumbled.

"What? Aren't you hungry?"

Dombey nodded.

"Then why shouldn't we stop now?" Kilbourne demanded, annoyed.

An expression close to pain passed over Dombey's thick features. His nostrils flickered momentarily as he sniffed the air. Then he shook his head again. "Bad to stop now. Don't like it here."

Kilbourne folded his arms and glanced around the little clearing. A sparkling stream wound down from a low hill not far away, and globular fruits hanging from a furry-branched tree gave promise of a delicious meal. And yet Dombey didn't want to stop for lunch.

He glanced at Leswick, whose face registered complete lack of concern. "You hungry, professor?"

Leswick nodded. "But if D o m b e y doesn't want to stop—"

"Let's go, boss," Dombey said uneasily, shifting his weight from one ponderous

foot to the other. "I don't want to stay here. Smells bad."

Keep your temper, Kilbourne thought. He forced a grin and said, "All right, Tarzan. We'll keep hiking until you get your appetite functioning. How's that?"

"Don't like it here," Dombey repeated dimly.

They moved on. After they had passed some thirty feet into the underbrush, Kilbourne turned and peered back at the clearing. He gasped and nudged Leswick, who also turned.

A gazelle-like creature about the height of a man had come down from the little hill and, standing on the hindmost of its three pairs of legs, was stretching upward like a neckless giraffe to nibble some of the fruits from the tree in the clearing.

Kilbourne watched in horror as an arm slithered silently out of the innocent-looking brook—a rubbery green arm, tipped with suckers and two bright, sharp claws. Seemingly infinitely extensible, it moved rapidly across the ground toward the unwary gazelle, which was still engaged in the difficult task of

knocking a fruit from the lowest branch.

In desperation, the gazelle gathered its six legs for a little leap that would enable it to reach the dangling fruit—and in that moment, the arm from the water reached it and snapped around all six hooves. The gazelle uttered a soft, frightened bleat as the arm began to retract.

It slid across the ground toward the brook, dragging the unfortunate gazelle with it. With a motion like the cracking of a whip, it yanked the animal the last few feet roughly, hoisted it over a rock at the brook's edge, and pulled it down out of sight into the water. Suddenly, the forest was very silent.

Kilbourne moistened his dry lips, but said nothing.

"It's a good thing we didn't stop to eat lunch in that clearing," Leswick said hoarsely.

Kilbourne nodded. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah." He turned away, inwardly shaken, after a glance at the unanimated face of Dombey.

How did he know? Kilbourne asked himself furious-

ly. *How could he possibly know?*

THERE WAS only one answer, Kilbourne decided, as they moved further along. Idiot's luck—a foolish hunch, nothing more. There was no rational explanation for what had just happened, and no need to look for one. It was a wild coincidence, and to compute it as valid data would be a statistical mistake.

So when they reached another clearing and Kilbourne announced they would eat here, he was prepared to overrule any objection.

"Don't want to eat here," Dombey said like a stubborn child.

"I say we do," Kilbourne responded immediately, and unpacked the knapsack. Dombey remained standing.

"Do we have to eat here, boss?"

"Yes," Kilbourne said. "Even if you don't want to."

Dombey shrugged and sat down, looking unhappy. Throughout the meal, Kilbourne found himself glancing off toward the forest whenever

he saw a frond waver in the breeze. He was nervous; the image of that slimy green arm stretching up from the little brook still shook him.

But he had to demonstrate that they couldn't operate on hunches, that that was the wrong way. At mealtime, you ate—and weren't swayed by



coincidences of any kind.

Sure enough, nothing untoward happened during the meal. They ate reasonably heartily, packed, and resumed march. Kilbourne felt a distinct sense of relief.

But no more than a hundred yards more had been covered Dombey said abruptly, "We get off the path here."

"What?"

Dombey gestured with a calloused thumb. "We gotta get off the path here."

"Are you going to make trouble every step of the way?" Kilbourne asked, putting acid into his tone even though he knew it would be wasted on the deckhand. "This is the third time you've stopped us, Dombey. We're never going to get there if—"

A look of sheer agony clouded Dombey's inarticulate face. "Say, boss, we gotta get off the path!"

It was a matter of principle, Kilbourne realized. His leadership of the group was at stake. He looked at Leswick to find out where the metaphysician stood, but Leswick's face was totally noncommittal.

"We aren't getting off," Kilbourne said positively. "And I'll give the orders in this party, Dombey. Remember that. I'll give the orders."

A new expression entered Dombey's eyes—one that Kilbourne had never seen there before. The amiability had left the big man's face. "You ain't giving the orders no more," Dombey said. "We gets off this path." He moved toward Kilbourne, agile as a big cat despite the heavy load of gear strapped to his back.

"Get away, Dombey!" Kilbourne ordered, but the big man kept approaching. Kilbourne threw up an arm defensively just as Dombey brought his arm around. The punch caught Kilbourne in forearm and numbed it.

"Leswick! Pull him back! Get him away from me!"

The metaphysician, however, only moved further away from the two—and Dombey closed in.

A punch jarred Kilbourne's stomach. He tried to defend himself, but it was like fighting off a hurricane. Dombey grazed Kilbourne's jaw with

an open-handed blow that left him spinning dizzily, and followed with a head-rattling swipe to the right shoulder.

He's gone berserk, Kilbourne thought with curious clarity in the midst of the beating. But there was a strange intensity in Dombey's eyes—and to Kilbourne's amazement, it struck him as a totally sane expression.

He backed away, but Dombey grabbed him with one hand. He managed to land a feeble blow above the deckhands heart, and then Dombey slapped him, just once, on the side of the face. Kilbourne's head wobbled and his knees went out from under him. He felt a swinging sensation as Dombey hoisted him in the air and dumped him over his broad shoulder, and then he blanked out completely.

KILBOURNE woke, feeling as if he had been steam-rollered. He stood up uneasily and glared at the two men. Leswick looked away guiltily; Dombey gazed placidly, without a hint of his former rage visible. But it was clear to Kil-

bourne that he was no longer in charge.

They had paused by the side of a stream, and had bathed Kilbourne's face until he returned to consciousness.

"Where are we?"

"About a hundred yards off the path," Leswick said.

"I feel like I've been out for days," said Kilbourne.

"About five minutes," the metaphysician told him. "You might want to take a look back through the underbrush. It's very interesting out there on the path."

Kilbourne turned and squinted through the tangle of vegetation in the direction in which Leswick pointed. As he looked, he felt his skin grow cold.

"Pretty, aren't they?" Leswick asked.

They were quadrupeds, lean and low-slung, moving in what seemed an infinite procession along the path. There must have been a hundred of the vicious-looking things on parade, each grasping the tail of the one before, elephant-fashion, in his teeth.

The teeth: knife-blades,

more appropriately. Each beast had four visible incisors, needle-pointed, and at the sides of their mouths projected shovel-shaped yellow-green tusks that probably came to a razor's-edge sharpness. The beasts were dirty white in color, with staring blue-rimmed eyes. Their fur was filthy, matted, stinking. Even at this distance, Kilbourne could sense their overpowering musky odor.

They were killers—silent, moving on padded feet, demonstrating their massed might. He shuddered at the thought of what might have happened had the three Earthmen been on the path when the parade came by.

Dombey's baby-faced expression reflected no pride of accomplishment. *Another wild hunch?* Could be, Kilbourne thought. Whatever the answer was, Dombey's hunches about the forest had saved them twice from death. It was like giving responsibility to a child, but Kilbourne realized the sane thing to do would be to relinquish command without protest to the deckhand, and

let Dombey lead them the rest of the way. It made good common sense; after their experiences, Leswick was sure to support Dombey anyway.

Besides, Kilbourne rationalized, it couldn't hurt. He still had the compass, and if Dombey got too far off course it would always be possible to club him down unawares and take over leadership again. Cold-blooded, perhaps, but Kilbourne felt no desire to spend the rest of his life wandering aimlessly about on this planet. For the time being, though, so long as Dombey proceeded toward the beacon, it didn't much matter who actually led the party, Kilbourne thought.

Dombey got to his feet and grunted, "Animals are gone. Back to the path now."

He led them in cautious single-file through the thicket and back to the main path. Kilbourne, now bringing up the rear, watched in open admiration the graceful way in which the deckhand maneuvered through the thick forest. The Tarzan nickname, Kilbourne realized suddenly, was

appropriate. *Dombey's in his native habitat now.*

They returned to the path, which still was heavy with the smell of the now-vanished quadrupeds. Kilbourne stared nervously after them, but there was no sign of the beasts. The path was clear again.

Two uneventful days and nights passed under Dombey's leadership. Kilbourne did little talking; he knew he had suffered an incalculable loss of prestige in Leswick's eyes through his demotion, and he contented himself with following along detachedly. Dombey was keeping on course, and that was all that mattered.

On the third day, they encountered intelligent native life for the first time.

CHAPTER V

THEY had emerged in a wide clearing, and a group of alien beings stood there, each one looking as much like the next as was conceivable. It wasn't the first-glance indistinguishability of any unfamiliar species, but an almost total identity of appearance.

The aliens were squat, barrel-shaped creatures with round, staring eyes, heavy kangaroo-like hind legs, and fuzzy six-fingered forepaws with quite definitely opposable thumbs. They wore beaded sashes around their waists, but there was no evidence of any external sexuality, primary or secondary. Each of them clutched a barbed sword in one hand, and they were murmuring excitedly to each other. Their voices were dull, buzz-saw drones.

Kilbourne saw Dombey drop back from the lead and stare blankly at him, Dombey, having brought them safely through the jungle, was abdicating now that they had reached civilization.

Quickly, Kilbourne turned and unstrapped some of the gear from Dombey's back. He burrowed through the packet of pots and pans and finally drew forth the slim length of the thought-converter.

"Say a few words, friends," he told the aliens. Give us some palaver, so we can analyze your language."

The aliens replied with a

series of buzzes and clicks, and Kilbourne made rapid adjustments on the Thorson converter as they spoke, sliding the guide up and down the indicator until he struck the proper linguistic type. In mid-buzz, the alien language came clear.

"Buzzbuzz mumbleclick danger hostile-animal stranger-type surround with many swords if hostile *KILL*."

"We are not hostile," Kilbourne told them. He ransacked his brains for some way to demonstrate this, and came up with no useful suggestions. "We are from up there," he said, pointing toward the sky. "We have fallen. We want to go back to our homes."

"Hostile. Threat. Danger. *KILL*."

Kilbourne saw Dombey stirring dangerously, and hoped the deckhand would restrain himself until the situation was more stable. It would be certain slaughter if Dombey provoked them to make use of those shaggy-toothed swords.

The aliens were moving closer now. "We are heading east toward our friends," Kilbourne said desperately. "When we

find them, we will leave your world and never return. Do you understand? We're not hostile. We want to leave as soon as we find our friends. We want to leave."

The buzzing continued ominously, and the converter rendered it as: "We are not capable of deciding. We refer to higher authority who decides. Make no more words, but come with us to village-place."

"Very well," Kilbourne said. "Take us there."

He shut off the converter as the swarm of aliens converged on them, forming a tight, buzzing circle. Turning to Dombey he said, "Do everything they tell us to do, without complaining, or they'll kill us. *KILL*. You understand, Dombey?"

The deckhand nodded slowly. "I don't like them," he rumbled. "They're no good."

"I don't like them much either, but there are too many of them to fight. They can kill us, Dombey. Go where they tell you."

"Okay," Dombey said agreeably. "I'll go."

Kilbourne looked at Les-

wick. The metaphysician had said nothing the past five minutes, and was permitting himself to be shoved along uncomplainingly. Leswick's mild eyes were heavy with thought.

"What's the matter with you, Professor?" Kilbourne asked harshly. "You synthesizing some new cultural phenomena?"

"Quiet, Kilbourne," the metaphysician said with unusual force. "Let me think this out, will you?"

"Sorry!" Kilbourne said, in mock humility. "Exceedingly sorry!"

THE VILLAGE of the aliens began to draw near, and Kilbourne's brows were pulled tight in painful concentration. There *had* to be some way out of this. There had to be some way he could prove peaceful intentions to these untrusting aliens and secure permission to move on toward the beacon. He wondered if a possible tack might be to allow the aliens to imprison them, and then break out during the night. It was simpler than trying to fathom the complexities

of an alien way of thinking.

Dammit, there ought to be some logical solution! But none presented itself as they entered the village.

The scene before them was an almost terrifyingly industrious one. Hundreds more of the barrel-shaped aliens bustled around with awesome haste, performing many tasks. Here, four of them were pounding grain; there, eight were erecting a new hut.

The village consisted of row on row of these identical huts, each about six feet high and five wide—big enough, that is, to hold just one alien. The round creatures built in a roughly rectangular pattern—not so rough, Kilbourne corrected, as he saw the precise way in which the rows of huts were aligned.

In the center of the rectangle was an enormous hut, of the same design but perhaps twenty feet high and about as wide, towering over the others like a domed skyscraper. *The higher authority*, Kilbourne thought. The big building was obviously a temple, or palace, or city hall, where the tribal

rulers lived. Concluding from this that the interview which would decide their fate was near, Kilbourne snapped the thought-converter on again.

"You will go there," the aliens told him. "We will take your case to the high one."

Kilbourne nodded abstractedly and glanced around. No children were evident in the village—merely hosts of identical-looking aliens, all of the same height and general appearance. To his surprise, he saw a few loafers also, as the procession toward the temple continued. These aliens lay stretched on the ground in attitudes of utter laziness. Their skin-coloring was a slightly deeper brown, and their bodies were flabby and obese. The sight of these apparently privileged few struck Kilbourne as odd, in view of the frantic industry of the rest of the aliens.

Finally they reached the large building. Kilbourne turned to the nearest of his captors.

"Do we go in now?"

"Negative negative negative. Strange ones must not enter.

Stay here while we convey information."

Kilbourne shrugged. "I guess we can wait," he said to Leswick. Dombey, vacant-eyed, stood by idly.

Time passed—one minute, three, five. Kilbourne fidgeted uneasily. He had defied the odds by getting the life-ship free of the doomed ship and safely to the planet despite lack of practical astronautical experience; somehow, they had gotten safely through the jungle as well. But now he was stumped. Their lives were the toys of these aliens, and he had no ready way out. Unarmed, outnumbered, they were totally at the mercy of these creatures.

After another five minutes, the three aliens who had entered the temple returned, and buzzed something to the ring that guarded the Earthmen. The converter failed to pick up the statement, but a moment later one of the aliens turned to Kilbourne.

"You threaten our safety."

"No!" Kilbourne protested. "We'll leave as soon as we

reach our—our friend, to the east!”

“The Mother says you threaten our safety,” the alien said stolidly. “Therefore you must die.”

Swords lifted. Then, before anyone could move, before Kilbourne had even begun to evaluate that last statement, Leswick came to life.

“I demand to see the Mother!” he said loudly. “I claim the right to return to our hive!”

KILBOURNE did a double-take, blinking stupidly for an instant, then reacting. He looked at Leswick, who stood in sudden animation, weak eyes bright, hands quivering in nervous anticipation.

“What did you say?”

“Hush,” Leswick muttered. The aliens were strangely silent, turning to face each other, buzzing and humming beneath the converter’s range of audibility. Kilbourne realized in that moment what the world of Bill Dombey must be like, for now he shared the deckhand’s blank stupefaction. He heard Leswick’s tense, nerv-

ous breathing as the aliens continued to confer.

Finally one of them said, “We will talk to the Mother again. We will see if she will admit you.”

The alien re-entered the domed building, returning after some two or three minutes. When the creature spoke, the unemotional buzz seemed to have an undertone of surprise in it.

“You may enter,” the alien said. “The Mother will see you.”

Kilbourne moved forward instinctively, but Leswick put a hand on his arm.

“No—I’ll go in alone. You stay out here and keep Dombey company.” Leswick took the converter from him.

“But — ” Kilbourne shrugged, realizing he was out of his depth, and let the metaphysician enter. The ring of guards closed tightly around Dombey and Kilbourne after Leswick disappeared.

Again time passed. Kilbourne watched the seconds drag interminably until the moment he finally heard Les-

wick's voice call from within the building.

"Kilbourne, will you come in here now? Better bring Dombey, too."

"Coming," Kilbourne said. He nudged the deckhand. "Let's go in, Tarzan—and remember, stand still and keep your hands to yourself."

Dombey grinned appealingly. "Sure, boss."

They went in. Leswick was standing in near-darkness, looking upward. Kilbourne paused, while his eyes adjusted themselves to the change in lighting.

"This is the Mother of this tribe, Kilbourne."

"Welcome, strange one."

The engineer looked upward in the direction of the voice, and saw the Mother. She sat in the darkest recess of the tomb-like building, staring down. The Mother was a strange sight.

She—somehow, the sex seemed apparent—was vast and bloated, nearly twice the height of the other aliens and grotesquely distended. Kilbourne gasped. He had been on alien worlds and seen alien life

before, but there was something weird and frightening about the Mother.

"Tell the Mother about *our* Mother," Leswick urged him, in a dry, staccato voice. "Go ahead, Kilbourne. Tell—her—about—our—Mother. Describe our Mother's all-enfolding thirty-megacycle carrier beam."

Kilbourne felt as if he were treading water for an instant, and then he caught on. Taking the hint, he said, "Our Mother stands to the east, several days journey. She is taller than we are, and does not move from where she stands. Set in her forehead is an eye of great beauty." He went on to describe the signal beacon in as careful detail as he could, while underneath the description his mind protested against the sheer insanity of what was taking place.

Finally he ran out of details, and the huge alien said, "Yes, we know the place and we have seen your Mother. We know her and we have long wondered where her children might be."

"We long to return to her,"

Leswick said anxiously. "We did not mean to enter your hive, but it became necessary in the course of our journey toward the Mother."

"We understand," came the solemn reply.

"Then you will help us?"

"Yes," the Mother said.

"Yes, we will cause our people to guide you to your Mother. We know and take pity upon you, strange ones."

Leswick knelt, and Kilbourne felt impelled to do the same. Only Dombey remained standing—and then even he, in superstitious awe, lowered himself ponderously to his knees.

"We thank you," Leswick said with deep gravity.

"Yes, we thank you," Kilbourne added.

Uncomprehendingly, Dombey echoed their thanks with a deep-voiced "Thanks" of his own.

CHAPTER VI

MUCH later Kilbourne began to understand.

They had left the village the following morning, after being

fed lavishly on a jelly-like food with a pungent, likable taste. Twelve of the aliens, swords bared, escorted them into the forest, and, deploying themselves six before and six behind, led the three wanderers further toward the east—toward the signal beacon, toward their Mother.

Kilbourne was ill at ease and depressed. The sight of the bloated alien creature in the temple disturbed him, for one, and the fact that Leswick had handled the situation with such complete success upset him as well.

It was not until they were well out of sight of the village, though, and moving at a fast easterly pace, that Kilbourne voiced the question that had burned in his mind since the strange interview.

"How did you know they were what they were, Leswick? And how did you know they would react this way?"

The metaphysician smiled mildly. "How did I *know*? That's a loaded word, Kilbourne. It means different things to you and to me. You, for instance, won't accept the

validity of intuitive judgment. So I can say I *knew* it would happen, but that's meaningless to you."

"And Dombey *knew* there would be carnivores parading down the path, I suppose," Kilbourne said sourly. "Which is why he beat the blazes out of me while you stood by grinning."

"It was the only way to get you to accept the evidence," Leswick said. "There wasn't time for further discussion—so Dombey had to use his fists. Similarly, I raised my voice when I thought I had the solution."

Kilbourne nodded. "We've been through this discussion before, Leswick."

"I know. And you still stick to empiricism. You'd be lying headless in the dirt right now if I shared that attitude."

They reached a fork in the road, and the aliens turned left. Kilbourne realized he'd again been scored against; how would he have known which way to turn, if the aliens hadn't come along to guide him to the beacon?

"So you guessed the aliens

were bee-analogues," Kilbourne said. "And it was damned clever of you to win the Queen Bee's sympathy by claiming the beacon was our mother and we were returning to the hive. But how could you *tell*?" Kilbourne demanded exasperated. "How did you know what to do?"

"You haven't studied Metaphysical Synthesis, have you?" Leswick asked suddenly.

"I know a little about it," Kilbourne said. "But—"

"You know enough about it not to like it, but not enough to understand it, obviously—or you'd know how I arrived at my conclusions."

"You got there through inductive reasoning," Kilbourne said. "That's all Metaphysical Synthesis is."

"That's part of it," Leswick admitted. "The base." He grinned. "But Dombey's something of a Metaphysical Synthesist too, even if he doesn't know it himself. Ask him what *his* techniques of logic are, some time."

THE beacon came into sight the next day. Kilbourne's

first indication of that came when the leading group of aliens dropped back and began to jabber excitedly with each other.

"Give me the converter," Leswick said.

Kilbourne switched the instrument on and handed it to the metaphysician. "There is our Mother," Leswick announced loudly. "We thank you for your help. You may not approach any closer."

The aliens nodded acquiescence. "We wish you well, strange ones," one of them said, and they backed away and began to move off down the path toward their village. Within five minutes, there was no sign of them.

"There was a time when I thought we wouldn't make it," Leswick said. "I wondered if Dombey and I were ever going to assert control over you long enough to keep you from fouling things up. You outlived your usefulness about the time we started through the jungle."

"What do you mean?" Kilbourne asked, although he now knew perfectly well what Leswick meant.

"I mean that logic can carry you only so far—logic and technical knowhow. The one thing you *didn't* know when the lifeship pushed off was when to stop limiting your actions to logical ones."

Kilbourne reddened. He had tried to run the whole journey as intelligently and logically as he could—and, somehow, to Dombey and Leswick he appeared an utter fool. And he wouldn't have made it through without both of them.

Sure, logical thinking was necessary and valuable—but it didn't take you the whole journey. Sheer animal instinct was needed in the jungle. Dombey had that—Dombey, who had practically no mind at all, had that survival ability in the jungle. And in dealing with an alien race, logic didn't work too well either. It was the kind of logic-plus that the metaphysician dealt in that had pulled them through.

For the first time in his life, Kilbourne felt his faith in his own competence and self adequacy falter. He wasn't at all sure he comprehended what Dombey and Leswick had

done, but he knew right well he couldn't do it himself. The knowledge hurt.

"How long are you going to stand there dreaming?" Leswick asked impatiently.

"There's the beacon, you know."

Kilbourne paused, tonguetied and confused.

"We're waiting for you," Leswick said. "You don't think I know how to operate a *machine*, do you?"

Ignoring the sarcasm, Kilbourne stepped forward to the signal beacon. The beacon showed the signs of half a century's weathering, but otherwise it was in fine shape, and the pilot light glowed a pleasant red, indicating that it was in working order. He depressed the call-stud.

Almost instantly a voice said, "State name and location."

"Spacial Engineer Roy Kilbourne, of Earth. I'm on an unnamed planet in an unnamed system." He proceeded to give the coordinates of the world they had landed on.

When he was finished, the voice said, "Hey, you're from the *Clyde Bohmer*, aren't you?"

"That's right. I escaped in a lifeship."

"Your name's here on the casualty list. You're the first survivor to call in. You all alone?"

"No," Kilbourne said. "I'm with Anthony Leswick and William Dombey. As far as I know we're the only survivors."

The voice at the other end was silent for a moment. Then: "Leswick... Dombey. Yeah, they're on the list too. A metaphysical whatsit and a jetmonkey. Musta been some time of it, huh?"

"It wasn't bad," Kilbourne said.

"I mean—running a lifeship with all that dead weight with you. Lot of good those two musta been."

Kilbourne frowned, then smiled as he realized the other man would never understand. "Yeah," he said quietly. "All that dead weight."

THE END