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# WHITE MUTINY

By Malcolm Jameson

**You don't have to start a fight and shoot your officers to mutiny—and the officers don't have to beat men to drive 'em to mutiny! A rule book skipper in a prize-winning ship is dynamite enough for that!**

For the first time in his life, Commander Bullard found himself dreading something—dreading it intensely. And, oddly enough, that something was no more than the routine Saturday inspection. In ten minutes he would buckle on his sword, that quaint ceremonial relic of antiquity, put on his awkward fore-and-aft hat, and accompany the new captain—Chinnery—through the mazes of the good spaceship *Pollux*.

He sighed helplessly, glanced up at Lieutenant Commander Fraser, thence let his eyes rove to the bookshelf where a fathom's length of canvas bound stood. He stared savagely at them. He had never realized before there were so many of them. Heretofore he had done his duty as he saw it and left chapter and verse to the sky lawyers.

But those fat books contained the awful clauses that regulated the conduct of the Space Guard. There they were—eight thick volumes—of the Regulations Proper. Ranged next were three volumes more of the Ordinance Instructions, and five of the Engineering Instructions. Then came the set relating to Astragation, and the fourteen learned tomes on Interplanetary Law; then the ones on Tactics and Strategy, then—

Bullard shuddered. It was overwhelming. To violate, even unwittingly, any provision contained in that compact library was technically "neglect of duty." And the new skipper was a hound for regulations.

"From here out," he had told Bullard the week before, on the occasion of his confiscation and destruction of all the crew's tailor-made liberty uniforms, "the regulations are in effect. *All* of them, not just the ones that happen to please you." And Bullard remembered the sullen faces of what had been a happy ship's company as they tossed their trim outfits into the incinerator door. A tapeline in Chinnery's own hands had revealed the clothing much too tight in the waist, and as much as three inches too full in the shoulders. It was, he said, a clear violation of Article 8878, sections B and D.

So they were destroyed. It did not seem to matter to Chinnery that no self-respecting skyman would allow himself to be seen, even in the lowest dive, clad in the shoddy issue uniform, nor did it matter to him that each of those uniforms stood their owners two or three months' pay. They were non-reg, and that was that. What if the planet girls had a way of judging sailors by their clothes? What if the men sulked and grumbled at their work?

"A couple of days on bread and water will take that out of them," said Chinnery tartly when Bullard had protested. "The question is—are we going to run the ship the way the department wants it, or are we going to pamper the men?"

And Bullard thought back to the glowing report of their last admiral's inspection—that which had brought them all citations and promotions; and to the plaque in control that stated the *Pollux* to be the best all-around ship in the service. To a young man who had been taught that success lay in getting things done, that trophy seemed to be conclusive. Results, it seemed to him, were what counted, not the manner of the doing.

There was a rap at the door. It was the captain's orderly. Bullard took the folded paper he bought, read it, frowned, and tossed it onto the desk.

"Tell the captain I'll attend to it," he said to the orderly wearily. It was the umpty-umph message of the sort he had received in the past ten days.

"The captain said you were to answer forthwith in writing," said the orderly stiffly. His manner was punctiliously correct, yet there was the hint of insolence in the way he said it. Orderlies of man-baiting captains soon acquire the manner.

Bullard shot him a hard look, then reached for Volume II of the Regulations. The paper was upside down to Carlson, but he could read it.

From: Commanding Officer  
To: Executive Officer.  
Subject: Duties.  
Reference: Art. 2688, SS Regs.

1. It has been brought to my attention that reference is not being complied with.
2. You are directed to explain in writing at once the reasons for this dereliction in duty on your part.

CHINNERY.

Bullard found Article 2688, read it and gasped. It merely said:

The executive officer shall wind the chronometer.

"Damnation," he muttered, and pushed the button for his yeoman. He dictated three terse sentences. The *Pollux's* chronometer behaved perfectly, it was wound daily by the assistant navigator, as was the practice in the fleet, the executive officer did not understand the commanding officer's allusion to dereliction in duty.

Bullard gnawed his lip while the yeoman rapped out the letter, then signed it and handed it without a word to the waiting orderly.

Within two minutes the orderly was back.

"The captain says," said the orderly, with even more of an undertone of insolence, "that he is not interested in the so-called customs of the service. He says that the regulations require the executive to wind the chronometer, and that there is nothing about delegating the duty to some subordinate. And that hereafter he wants straightforward answers to his memos, not evasive alibis."

Bullard glared at the man, the color mounting to his face. The orderly returned the look with a cool stare.

"He said you were to acknowledge the—"

"Get out of here!" roared Bullard, rising and thumping his desk.

"He's riding you, that's what, the dumb fathead!" exclaimed Fraser as the orderly disappeared down the passage. "He's still sore over the way you showed him up at that admiral's inspection. He's envious, he's yellow—"

"Easy!" warned Bullard. "After all, he's our superior officer."

"Superior, my eye!" snorted Fraser. "He's got more rank, yes. But it burns me up to even look at the slob. And every time I see that smart-Aleck orderly I want to swing on him. That goes for that slippery ship's writer, too. Think of you having to wind the

chronometer personally! Why, how—"

"How?" laughed Bullard harshly. "If you think that's something, look at this. He sent it in just before you came."

He tossed Fraser the earlier memo.

"*Phew!*" whistled the gunnery officer, popping his eyes.

"Yes," said Bullard bitterly. "Article 2751 says that the exec. shall satisfy himself that the quarterly inventories are correct, but you see that his nibs construes that to mean an item-by-item personal check—and that don't mean sampling, either."

"What about all those firebricks in D-66? I used to do those by the cubic yard, but they are carried on the books by number —"

"I have to count 'em—the whole damn forty-two thousand some-odd of 'em."

"How will we ever get anything done?" asked Fraser blankly. He, like every other officer in the ship, had received his own quota of Captain Chinnery's curt queries as to this regulation and that. He had long since abandoned informal gunnery drills. All his gunner's mates were up to their necks, compiling lists of spare parts, motor serial numbers, and immersed in such other paper work.

"Thar she blows," remarked Bullard dully as the gong began to tap for quarters. He reached for his sword and cocked hat. "Well, let's go and get the bad news."

Bad news it was. Smug, plump little Chinnery stayed a long time in each compartment, blandly pointing out technical flaws. The only thing in the ship that seemed to please him were the ill-fitting, badly-dyed issue uniforms of the crew—made by the female convicts to kill time on bleak Juno. The disgruntled, sour looks of the men seemed not to disturb him at all. His ambition was to have the perfect ship—on paper—and his coup had been duly entered in the log. The reviewer in the department would read that and know of his zeal, whereas subtleties—like morale—were not so readily conveyed in cold type.

In sub-CC the inspecting party made its usual pause. The captain's eye lit on the old-style annunciator panel hung on the bulkhead above the intership communication board. He reached up and struck the glassite cover sharply with the heel of his hand. A black card bearing the number "24-B" dropped into view.

"What does that mean?" he barked at the unhappy operator, a recruit just come aboard. "What do you do when one of those drops?"

"I ... I don't know, sir, N-no-body ever told me—"

"What!" squealed Chinnery, "Here you are, intrusted with the watch, and don't know what to do when a magazine is on fire? Bullard! What is the meaning of this?" He swung viciously on Bullard, puckering his fat face into what was meant to be a stern expression.

"That board—" began Bullard patiently. But Chinnery cut him off.

"Never mind that. I know what the board is. Why has not this man been instructed in his duties?"

"Because—" Bullard tried a second time, but the captain was not listening.

"Never mind the alibi. Yeoman! Take a note ... for the commander's record ... about this. Let's see, that makes Specification No. 14 under the charge of 'neglect of duty,' doesn't it?"

"Seventeen, sir," answered the yeoman, riffling through the pages of his notebook.

"Hmm-m," muttered Chinnery.

"But—" objected Bullard, his wrath rising.

"But me no buts, young man. I am beginning to see that your vaunted efficiency was mostly luck. Imagine! Having a phone operator on watch who does not know what to do in case of a magazine fire!"

He turned to the now thoroughly frightened lad and, in what was meant to be a soothing voice, said:

"That, my boy, is an indicator of high magazine temperatures. If a number should ever drop, flood that magazine immediately—then notify me. The controls are to your right—there."

Bullard, purple with fury, restrained himself. Then he caught Fraser's solemn wink and decided to let it go. Fraser knew as well as he did that the board was no longer connected with the thermocouples in the powder storerooms. The dropping of a number could only mean that the board had been jarred, a thing that had occurred before, with embarrassing consequences. It was for that reason that this alarm system had been condemned and replaced by a better one in Central. That was why there was a job order on file for its complete removal the very next time they were back to the home yard on Luna.

Similar outbursts on the part of the captain took place in other spots, but it was not until they were inside the port torpedo rooms that his legalistic mind showed itself in its fullest flower. He laid his hand on a curious bulge in the inboard bulkhead.

"What is behind this?" he demanded.

"The original torpedo hoists," replied Fraser, "but we use the magnetic ones altogether now. These are blanked off with plating to keep dirt from accumulating in them."

"Ah," said Chinnery, "I seem to remember." He sent his yeoman scurrying back to the cabin for his file of quarterly reports. After he had returned, Chinnery turned his scowl on Fraser.

"More negligence," he said. "No routine tests, no monthly operating by hand, no quarterly reports for more than three years. No inventories or requisitions for spare parts. Don't the regulations mean *anything* to you?"

Fraser looked at his captain in blank amazement.

"Tut, tut," said Chinnery testily, "don't stand there like a gaping fool. The point is that the hoists are still installed, whether you use them or not. And since they are installed, they are subject to the usual maintenance routine and reports."

"But, captain," interposed Bullard, "the only reason they are still here is because, being obsolete, the department figured it was cheaper to abandon them in place and blank them in than to tear them out. Moreover, we can't run them monthly—the leads to the motors have been removed."

"Then run new ones," snapped the captain, "and replace the motors, if necessary."

"Aye, aye, sir," growled Bullard.

This was the last straw. If Chinnery kept this sort of thing up, the ship would be a raving madhouse before the month was out—absolutely ruined as a fighting ship. There is nothing that takes the spirit out of men and officers more than useless, foolish work—particularly when done at the expense of something truly worth while.

Bullard was soon to learn, however, that his troubles had just begun. In his capacity as executive officer, it fell him to pass Chinnery's silly orders on to his juniors, who in their turn passed them on to the men, grumbling and venting themselves of caustic side remarks as they did. As for the men, they merely sulked, doggedly doing what they were told. Smoldering resentment was obvious everywhere, and it finally came to a

head the day Chinnery slapped four men in the brig and put Lieutenant Carlson under hack for ten days. Their exact offense was not clearly understood, but the captain characterized it as "officiousness." They had done something on their own, not waiting for his direct order.

"But, commander," pleaded Fraser, "we can't go on this way. We had the finest ship in the whole damn service, but what have we got now? A madhouse! She's going to hell right under our noses. The men are on the verge of mutiny ... both Benton and Tobelman had been disgraced, a rank injustice ... and I hear—"

"Yes, I know," replied Bullard morosely. He sat a moment in a brown study. He knew that a round robin was being circulated, that committees of petty officers had been formed, and that there were rocks ahead.

"Get those men up here," said Bullard suddenly, "and Carrick, too, the pharmacist."

When they came, Bullard looked them over steadily as they lined up before his desk. He knew them well, and they him. They were the mainstay of the ship—the real leaders of the crew—the men upon whom the officers depended to get things done. Men like those could make or break a captain. Bullard read their faces and thought back gratefully to a certain gruff old bos'n who had tactfully deflated him when he was a fresh-caught snotty. Some of that off-the-record discipline from beneath upward had been hard to take, but he knew now that he was a better officer for it.

"Men," he said, looking straight at them, "we have a tough

assignment. We have a new captain. He is ... well, *different* from Captain Dongan. He is more ... er ... regulation-minded, if you know what I mean."

"Yes, sir," chorused the men, "we know."

"The refuge of an incompetent," blurted out Fraser indignantly. "He knows damn well that as long as he sticks to the book they can't hang him, no matter what happens to the ship. But just let somebody exercise a little initiative, a little common sense, and right away his neck is in a bight. It *might* turn out wrong. He's yellow, I tell you. Bah!"

"An outburst like that may relieve the emotions, Fraser," said Bullard calmly, "but it does not alter the situation. Captain Chinnery is still the skipper, and as such he is much more than a man. He is a symbol ... the symbol of the supreme authority. Moreover, every order he has issued has been strictly legal. Any refusal on our part to carry them out merely ruins us and hurts him not at all. We have no choice but to comply."

"And see the ship go merrily to hell!" Fraser was outraged.

"Perhaps."

It was then that Fraser and the three silent enlisted men first noted the half smile playing on Bullard's lips and the fleeting twinkle in his eye.

"Supposing," remarked Bullard dryly, fixing his eyes on the rows of books, "it does. There will be an investigation, naturally. Blame will be fixed. They always start at the top. I propose to let them stop there. I, for one, do not mean to accept

the buck."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that the only possible course open to us is co-operation."

"Co-operation?" Fraser's laugh was hard and dry. Benton and his comrades remained silent.

"Exactly. Captain Chinnery complains of misplaced initiative. Well, let's cut out initiative. He wants a 'reg' ship. Let's bone the book—turn sky lawyers. Let's do what we're told—*and not one damn thing more!*"

Bullard let his glance drift back to the three stolid men and the flushed officer before him. He noted Benton and Tobelman as they wiped the grins from their faces, and saw Fraser's hot indignation fade as comprehension dawned.

"Not bad ... not bad," said the latter slowly. "Fight fire with fire, eh?"

"We'll pass the word, sir," came from Benton, and the other two men grinned frankly then, "co-operation it will be."

"Good," said Commander Bullard, and promptly immersed himself in Volume 2 of Regulations. None but a god, omnipotent and with all eternity to do it in, could expect to do all the things required of an executive officer, but he could try, paragraph by paragraph, just as they came.

He looked at 2707.

From time to time, the executive officer shall satisfy himself, by personal inspection, that boat boxes are in order—

"Ah," breathed Bullard, "I'll beat him to that one." And he walked out onto the broad fin where the boats were cradled. One hundred and nineteen items in each boat box—and there were eight boats! It would take two days' work, that simple duty alone!

## II.

It was about two weeks after that that the rumors began to fly about the revival of banditry on Neptune. Only spaceships could cope with them, for over that jagged and precipitous terrain and in that airless sky the usual planetary gendarmerie could not operate effectively. The scuttlebutt was more and more persistent that one of the larger ships of the Jovian Patrol was about to be detached and sent there to wipe the villains out.

Bullard made a wry face when he heard of it, for the most likely ship was, of course, the *Pollux*. Ironically enough, Admiral Abercrombie's last report of her unequivocally pronounced her to be the ship best fitted for emergency duty. Yet Bullard knew, as every man jack aboard—unless Chinnery himself be excepted—that the *Pollux* of a scant four months

before was a thing of the past, a legend. Morale? It was to laugh! Or weep.

Only three days before, the starboard condenser had sprung a leak, and when it was reported to the captain he went to have a look.

"Well, pull it down and roll in that tube," he snapped.

Benton's men turned to, pulled it down, and rolled the tube. Then they replaced the shell, laboriously made all the connections and put it back in service. An hour later two more tubes went.

"Hell's bells!" squealed Chinnery when they told him. "How can that be? You were in that condenser only yesterday. Couldn't you see those other two tubes were about to go?"

"You told us to roll the leaky one, sir," said Benton, his face the ultimate in dead pan. He might have added that it was not the tubes that were at fault, but a warped header. But he was not asked that.

"Such stupidity!" muttered Captain Chinnery. "Very well, yank it down again and do it all over."

"The one we did yesterday?" asked Benton, registering faint surprise.

"No, fool, the two that just blew out!"

"Yes, sir."

Bullard looked on impassively. Chinnery's tart words of a few weeks past still burned. "When I want anything done, I'll order it—this ship is not so complicated that one man can't do the thinking for it."

Yet, as he recalled that, knowing that that very morning the condenser had been pulled down for the third time, he wondered just how the *Pollux* could get to Neptune, if ordered, and what she could do if she got there. Bullard shrugged, and dismissed the matter from his mind. That was Chinnery's worry. Then he looked up to see the goat-getting orderly standing by his desk with the inevitable memorandum in his hand. Listlessly Bullard took it and read:

In view of our probable departure shortly for one of the outer planets, you will take such action as may be necessary to insure that no contraband is brought on board. Section 10,009, SS Regs.

Bullard straightened up in his chair and frowned. He knew without looking what the reference was—it was the *one* article in the book that even the most arrant martinet found it expedient to ignore. That is, where Neptune and Pluto were concerned. For Martian *joola-joola*, the forbidden beverage, was the only known specific against the mysterious and invisible radiations emanated by those cold and rocky dim planets. Out there it did not intoxicate—it was a vital stimulant. Yet since the control board were Puritanical Earthlings, the space guard had never

been able to have the article modified. Hence the unwritten law of the service that its breach must be winked at.

The young exec knew that the returning liberty party would be well heeled with the stuff—cleverly enough concealed to save the face of the O.D., who, at least, had to go through the motions of upholding the regulations. He glanced at the clock. It was well after five, 10 time, and shortly boats would start coming back. He got up uneasily and walked out toward the exit port. He had learned something about Chinnery's methods and he feared dirty work of some sort.

"What is that gadget?" Bullard asked of Ensign Pitto, the officer of the deck, pointing to a contraption being erected in the gangway.

"A field fluoroscope, sir. Captain's orders. They are setting up the X-ray tube behind that sheet of canvas across the passage."

Bullard scowled at the layout, then hurried to his office. Lately he had learned to suppress anger, but at the moment it was hard. For he saw instantly through the captain's malicious plan. Apparently Chinnery, when it suited his purposes, knew how to evade the regulations, too. To be sure he was right, Bullard snatched down the volume entitled "Pertaining to Enlisted Personnel." Yes, it was there. The men had *some* rights.

11,075: Neither the person nor the effects of any enlisted man may be searched except upon good and sufficient grounds. Except in cases of

suspected theft, and where a man has a known bad record, a man's own statement that he possesses no contraband shall be deemed sufficient—

"So," he murmured grimly, "a search that is not a search. A slinking, slimy way to smear the records of hundreds of men—and to hang me on the rebound." He slammed the book shut. "Well—he'll do neither."

Twenty minutes later, Bullard jumped out of one of the gyrocopters that were acting as tenders for the ship. The landing stage was still empty, but soon it would be full at returning skymen, their arms full of bundles—innocent purchases—and somewhere else upon them the forbidden *joola-joola*. And out at the ship, Captain Chinnery waited craftily with his trap all set.

"Hold the next boat for the ship until I get back," Bulard said hastily to Lieutenant Carlson, who was handling the beach guard. With that he dashed off to the nearest liquor dive.

On his way he passed a number of the *Pollux's* men, heading for the boat landing. They saluted sheepishly, still painfully self-conscious for having to wear the unsightly issue uniforms that made them pariahs on shore.

By the time he reached the liquor joint, though, it was empty. Or almost. In one corner, almost concealed by a post, sat the

captain's yeoman—Ship's Writer Norvick. As the door slammed behind Bullard, he saw the yeoman fold up a notebook and slide it into a pocket. Ranged on the bar stood a row of flat curved-glass bottles, most of them empty. The bartender was filling the others from a huge demijohn of the delicate violet joola-joola.

"Aha," thought Bullard, "check and double check, eh? Chinnery's chief spy is getting the dope at the source!"

He turned abruptly and strode from the place. He had seen enough. The belly flasks lined up on the bar told him how the stuff was being smuggled. The presence of the skipper's snooping yeoman, coupled with the waiting X-ray machine at the gangway of the *Pollux* told him how the captain had planned to trip him up—and most of the crew with him.

He bounded toward the landing stage, inwardly raging. But his anger did not cloud his thought. At every step he turned over some new plan for defeating the captain's scheme. He was actuated, as he had been when he had proposed non-co-operative co-operation to forestall overt mutiny, by the highest motives. He wanted to save the crew—and the junior officers—from their small-minded incompetent captain. Constantly goaded as they were by picayune quibbling and nagging, he was fearful of an outright rupture. And in that event everybody would lose.

It was a situation he found galling, for, like the crew, he was capable of the fiercest loyalty—if properly led. It was unfortunate that out of such a generally splendid service the crack crew of the *Pollux* should draw a weak sister for a captain, a man who hid his lack of ability behind the technicalities of the printed word. But it had. The thing to do

was make the best of it.

Bullard's heart fell when he reached the landing stage. Carlson had finished his superficial inspection and already loaded the men into the boat, which stood waiting to shove off. That was bad, for if it could be proved that the men had carried the liquor into one of the ship's tenders it was the same as having taken it on board the *Pollux* herself. Bullard's plan for warning the men while still beyond the jurisdiction of the space guard was unworkable. And as he saw the yeoman Norvick had come along behind him, he knew that calling the liberty party back ashore so they could get rid of the contraband would be worse than doing nothing. Like a flash, he changed his plans.

"Out of the boat, all you men, and fall in on the dock. Single rank."

Several of the waiting men blinked in surprise at the order, but they got out of the boat and fell in.

"I have orders," said Bullard slowly, "to see that no contraband goes aboard. But before I question you on that score, I will make a brief uniform inspection."

He turned around to where a patrolman stood behind him twirling an oak nightstick.

"Lend me that a moment," said Bullard, and took the stick.

He paused before the first man in line and looked him up and

down. The skin-tight issue trousers afforded no hiding place for anything. Yes, it must be all in belly flasks. Thoughtfully he extended the club and gently tapped the rigid skyman on his blouse, just above the middle. There was a faint clink.

*Pam!* With a quick and unexpected stroke, Bullard brought the stick down harder. Then he stepped on to the next man. Behind him he thought he heard the *tinkle-tinkle* of glass fragments raining on the pavement, but he did not look back. Again the tentative tap, again the sharp, sudden blow, again the muffled crash—and a slowly widening damp spot on the barbarous issue uniform. Bullard did not give it a glance, but stepped forward. Somewhere in the background someone snickered, but the young exec's face was a study in nonexpression.

Fourteen times down that line he detected the telltale clink, and fourteen times he swatted. Then he stood back, looking the men in the face, not at the small, widening puddies of violet something at their feet.

"Have any of you men any contraband substance in your possesiou?"

"No, sir!"

The yell was in unison, as if previously rehearsed. Bullard's face almost cracked into a wide grin, but he managed to get the better of it.

"Embark!" he said.

The men got back into the boat, Norvick among them. Bullard was about to follow when he saw a fresh group of men coming

down the dock, Benton and Carrick among them. Bullard walked to meet them.

"When you get aboard, Carrick," said Bullard in the most matter-of-fact way, "you had better check up on the operation of your X-ray-fluoroscope outfit. Captain Chinnery is using it at the gangway."

"The sunnuva—" began Carrick.

"Pipe down!" growled Benton to Carrick. Then to the commander, "Thank you, sir; we'll be coming out in the next boat."

"Splendid," said Bullard, and there was just the slightest little jerk of his right eyelid. Benton wheeled and spread out his arms to the group of skymen assembling for the boat.

"Back, men. I want to talk to you."

"Shove off," said Bullard to the coxswain, settling himself among the slightly damp and odoriferous men he had just inspeeled. He shot one look at the ship's writer sitting opposite him with a crooked little smile on his face, as if he was sucking the marrow out of some private joke, then looked out at the fleeting Ionian landscape. He shrugged. There was no contraband in *this* boat. Nor, in so far as anybody could prove, had ever been.

"You're hair-splitting, Bullard, and that is all there is to it!"

Chinnery was fairly screaming with rage. "You should have arrested those men, confiscated the bottles for evidence, and brought them to me to—"

"My orders," said Bullard, struggling for calm expression, "said to take such action as may be necessary to prevent contraband being brought aboard. To the best of my knowledge, none was. Those orders are in my safe, awaiting the court of inquiry the *Pollux* is certain to have before—"

"The court-martial *you* are sure to have!" yelled the captain. "For I have an independent witness who saw those flasks of *joola-joola*—"

"Saw flasks filled with a pale-violet liquid." corrected Bullard coolly. "Unhappily, they were flimsy flasks, and the stuff is lost. There is no way to prove what was in them. So far as I know, it was that perfume they make from the Ganymedian *plimris* bloom."

A boat bell clanged.

"Never mind," said Chinnery, triumph supplanting his petulant anger, "step with me to the gangway. The moment I heard of your pusillanimous behavior I sent a message to the beach guard that there was to be no more belly-patting inspections."

Bullard followed along with considerably mixed feelings. He had the utmost reliance on Benton's quickness of perception and on his versatility. What fruit had the veiled warning he had thrown out brought?

"Here are three of them," said Ensign Pitto, motioning toward

the three skymen lined up against the bulkhead. "The rest were clean."

"Aha!" gloated Chinnery, shooting an I-told-you-so look at the discomfitted Bullard.

The three men were the three outstanding petty officers of the ship—Benton, Tobelman, and Carrick. Chinnery stooped and squinted at the fluoroscope. Bullard could not help seeing, too. Each of the men had a flat, rectangular package under his jacket athwart his navel. The shape was unmistakable—*jooia-joola* bottles! Made of lead glass, they showed up like a sore thumb.

"Search them—strip them!" yelled the captain, sure of his victory.

"Sir, we protest." It was Benton who spoke. "We pledge our word we have no contraband. You have no right—"

"Carry out my orders!" screamed the captain, turning in fury on the bos'n's mate of the watch.

In a moment the jackets were ripped away and the flask-shaped objects snatched out of the tight belts of the three protesting men.

"W-w-what the—" Captain Chinnery turned one of them over and over in his hands, absolutely nonplused. The slab was slightly curved and of a sort of plaster. On the face of it was a crude bas-relief of a heifer and a scribbled inscription reading, "Souvenir of the Ionian Barium Mines, made of one of our products—gamma-ray-resisting barium plaster."

For a moment Captain Chinnery stood stupidly staring at the thing he was twisting in his hands. Then he dashed it to the deck and strode off down the passage, combing his hair with agitated fingers and muttering, "Damn, damn, damn!" Bullard looked after the departing figure and began to laugh. In an instant, the whole corridor was reverberating with the howls of twenty laughing men as the next boatload of men poured through the port and down toward their lockers. Ensign Pitto, mystified and baffled by the entire proceedings, looked wonderingly on, not bothering to use the now discredited fluoroscope again.

Benton picked up his plaster *objet d'art* and stuck it back under his belt.

"Somebody owes me a quart," he said to a man passing.

"You'll get it," said the man. "Two of 'em."

### III.

The precipitous walls of Kerens Crater ringed them like a huge Coliseum. The face of every man in the control room of the *Pollux* was set in hard, grim lines. They were anxious, and many of them wondered whether they had been so smart, after all. For they were hurtling straight downward toward the ragged cone in the center at hideous velocity, and everyone of them knew the ship about them was a semiwreck. Half her engine room was torn apart—for routine tests—and the same applied to her battery. She could hardly be worked. It was problematical whether she could be fought. And in this crater were said to be

more than a thousand of the toughest rascals who ever slit a throat.

Yet as each man turned over in his mind his own contribution to the chaos, he could not help recall some saying of the captain. Throughout the cramped room through the mind of one or another of them ran the memory of such curt and devastating sayings as these—all quotations from Captain Chinnery:

"When I want information, I'll ask for it."

"I'm long on ideas, young man. All I expect of you is execution."

"Never mind why—I tell you to do it."

"Of course it handicaps gunfire—but the regulations call for it."

"Cancel the drill—you have three quarterly reports to get out."

"You exceed your authority! Wait for orders hereafter!"

And on and on. You were damned if you did, damned if you didn't. When a man cannot be pleased, nobody tries.

Captain Chinnery set the counter-blasts to raging, and the fall of the ship was checked with a shudder. Fraser was searching the horizon for the bandit lair. Then of a sudden the roar of the exhaust sputtered and stopped. Chinnery angrily barked into the engine-room communicator.

"Who stopped those motors?"

"Fuel exhausted, sir."

Chinnery paled. No one spoke, but all knew the inevitable answer. And the cause. They would crash, for the hydrogen tubes could not be limbered up in time. And the reason for it was that Chinnery had refused to O.K. the last uranium requisition on the ground the ship had already exceeded her quarterly allowance!

Chinnery threw in the antigravity units, but they were weak and it was too late. The *Pollux* struck, at somewhere about ninety miles an hour, bounced high in the airless sky, then struck again, nose down. The lights went out, then came on. Men picked themselves up, nursing bruises, and looked at one another and the disordered compartments about them.

"Fire in all magazines!" came the startling announcement over the loud speakers, "Magazines flooded."

Bullard groaned. His non-co-operative co-operation had gone farther than he meant it to.

Pasted on the annunciator hoard in sub-CC were the captain's orders—to flood whenever any of those unconnected monitors showed! The jar of falling had brought them all down, of course, and the operator following the rule of blind obedience had done as he was told. The ship's guns were useless.

Chinnery looked sick, but he still had a grip on himself.

"Get up torpedoes," he directed. "Seeing us like this, they

may attack at any moment."

"Can't," said Fraser without making any bones of it. "No hoists working."

"What!" bleated Chinnery.

"Right. You wanted those original ones operated—for the record. Well, we did. But to do it we had to rob the real hoists of their motors. It'll take another day to get them back again."

A bell began a clamorous clanging.

"A number of men headed this way across the crater floor," sang out the lookout. "There are tanks with them, and a caterpillar gun of some kind."

"Do something, Bullard," said Chinnery in a pleading voice, turning white-faced to his young exec. "You're a resourceful fellow."

"I am at your command, captain," said Bullard stiffly. "What is it you wish me to do?"

"They are setting that gun," the lookout informed them. "It's due west of us—nearly astern, as we lie. The men on foot are deploying at the foot of the slope."

"Fit out the landing force," managed Chinnery, finding his voice after the third gulp.

"Sorry," said Bullard, "but the small-arms magazine is flooded. Our ray guns are in there, too. There are no weapons

available, unless it's the cutlery in the galley. Your order, you know—nothing ever to be left out of magazines."

The ship shuddered. There was a quick succession of staccato reports as a metallic hail beat against her armored sides. The brigands' gun was getting the range.

"The party on foot has a heat gimlet," reported the lookout. "They are working their way around to the north."

"Commence firing!" squeaked Chinnery. He was near to fainting.

"What with?" asked Fraser, having no wish to spare him.

Suddenly Chinnery got a grip on himself and straightened up. Wildly he looked around at the silent, accusing, unhelpful faces. Then he addressed Bullard.

"You win, Bullard. From the very first I recognized it would be you or me. But organized mutiny is too much. I yield—for the good of the ship. Take over. Do it your way." His voice trailed away. Then he drooped across the chart rack and vomited. "Black mutiny," he muttered, over and over again. "Black mutiny and insubordination."

Bullard's lip curled in scorn.

"What order of yours was ever refused? What threat was ever made you? And now, after you've wrecked us, you want to quit. Because you don't know what to do. You're yellow!"

Bullard glared at the cringing figure.

"But," he went on, not regarding the now persistent hail of pellets against the hull, "under your precious library of rules, you can't quit. Not while you are alive and well. The captain cannot duck his responsibility—not ever!"

"I'm a sick man," wailed Chinnery, sliding to the deck.

Bullard jerked his head toward the surgeon, Lieutenant Herilon.

"He's sick, all right," said Herilon after an examination of about one second. "Diagnosis: blue funk. Prognosis: terrible. In other words, he's unfit for duty."

"Very well, then," said Bullard. "I'll take over. But, doc, be sure that gets in the log."

The doc grinned. The ship had gotten regulation-minded, all right.

Bullard went into action like a prodded bobcat.

"Benton! Warm up those old stern tubes and get ready to shoot measured blasts.

"Harris! Break out those two heavy jacks and take 'em outside. Set one on each side of the ship and slue her around until our stern bears on that bandit gun.

"Tobelman! Wangle half a dozen of your torps out of their

brackets, stick 'em on dollies and manhandle 'em the best way you can to the rocket room.

"Carlson, you compute the ballistic. I'm firing torpedoes that way. You know the Neptune gravity, and there's a vacuum outside. Benton'll give you the pressure tables."

"The tubes are bigger than the torps," said Carlson.

"I know. Build up your torps with wire-rope grommets until they fit!"

Bullard paused for breath. Then he saw Norvick, slightly green about the gills, huddled in a corner.

"You—captain's yeoman! Grab your notebook and get busy." Bullard's voice was harsh and his eye was hard. "I want you to put down every breach of the regulations that happens from now on. Begin with the one—whatever its number is—that says you can't divert engineering material to the use of the ordnance department. And mind you, if you miss a single one, you're up for a court!"

"Yes, sir," whimpered the amazed ship's writer, but he dragged out his bulky notebook.

The lookout was reporting again.

"Those men are about halfway up the hill now. They have some other machine with them—can't make it out."

"Fraser!" shouted Bullard. "How long will it take you to convert that big exhaust blower in the topside fin to a centrifugal

machine gun? Do you know what kind of an animal that is?"

"Yes, sir. I do. About five shakes of a lamb's lail!"

"Get at it. Only do it in four."

"Aye, aye, sir. But ammunition?"

"There are three or four tons of assorted ball bearings in storeroom D-60. I'll see that you get 'em."

In a couple of minutes Bullard ceased bellowing orders. He wiped his eyes and shook his head. He was beginning to feel queer, sickly sensations. Of a sudden a dread came over him that at any moment he would cave in. He took a deep breath, but it did no good. Then he noticed his hands were trembling.

"The radiations are getting bad, sir," reported the doctor. "Several men have caved in already. I'm administering *suprene*, but it does not seem to be very effective."

Bullard knew then what had gone wrong with him.

"Don't waste time with that stuff," he said impatiently. "Serve out a slug of *joola-joola* all around."

"There's none on board," said Herilon. "I tried—"

"The hell there isn't! There's gallons of it. Just ask Carrick, or Tobelman, or—"

Herilon had gone, on the jump.

The ship shook. That time it was from her own recoil. Carlson had shot his first torpedo from the stern rocket tubes. There was a moment's wait for the spot, then a second one went.

"That group's through," reported Carlson gleefully a moment later. "Boy! What a mess those torps do make!"

"Help Fraser with the other crowd."

Ten minutes later, fortified by a double shot of *joola-joola*, Bullard watched the terrible execution on the downslope to starboard. First there was the singing whine as the high-speed motor worked up to velocity, then the rattle as the hopperful of ball bearings fell against the swift-revolving vanes. Then, under the wide-flung hail of that super-colossal blunderbuss, the oncoming pirates crumpled. Their mystery machine stood a moment later alone and untended in the midst of their piled-up corpses.

"That seems to be all of them," said Bullard. "Tell Benton to stand by to pull out of this hole with the old rockets. We'll get more uranium as soon as we get to base."

Admiral Mike Dongan lifted his eyebrows at the mass of paper Bullard laid before him. Old Captain Mike, after his promotion, had been sent to the outer zone as force commander. So it was to him, in Tethys Advanced Base, that Bullard reported.

"But—" puzzled the old man. Bullard had never gone in

heavily for paper work when he knew him on the *Pollux*.

"That first stack," explained Bullard, "are the accumulated charges against me up to the moment I took temporary command—"

"Bosh," said Admiral Mike Dongan, glancing over the topmost sheet. He dumped the lot in the wastebasket.

"The other stack lists the things I did wrong to get the old *Pollux* out of the hole. I never knew until—"

"Really?" said Captain Mike, more attentive. He slid open a drawer of his desk and carefully laid the damning documents inside. "These are more to the point. I want to forward these to the control board." He shut the drawer, then locked it.

Bullard did not know exactly what reaction those papers were going to bring, but certainly he had not anticipated *that*. It was disconcerting.

"You see," said Admiral Mike, studying the curling smoke from his cigar, "I have been authorized to prepare another volume of the Regulations—"

Bullard winced.

"—to be entitled 'Instructions for Procedure in Extraordinary Emergencies'"—the admiral kept tugging at another drawer—"umph ... and this ... umph ... is just the sort of thing we want for it."

By then the old man had the drawer open, and out of it he

fished a gleaming crystal beaker half filled with the aromatic forbidden juice of Mars. He filled two glasses with the violet liqueur.

"Of course, before Captain Chinnery was put on the retired list this morning, he did submit quite a lengthy list of your ... er ... *derelections*, I believe he called them—"

"Yes?" said Bullard, on tenderhooks.

"Here's to 'em," said the admiral, hoisting his glass, and admiring the delicate color, he took a sip.

"But fourteen charges and God knows how many specifications—"

"Nobody gives a damn," said the admiral with great decision. "You got the bandits, didn't you—all of 'em? You brought the *Pollux* in, didn't you? What the hell! Drink hearty, boy—you've got my old job. You're skipper of the *Pollux* now!"

THE END.

[The end of *White Mutiny* by Malcolm Jameson]