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# BULLARD REFLECTS

by Malcolm Jameson

**Commander Bullard had a team nicely trained in a harmless sport—but it turned out he also had a team well-trained in the dangerous sport of outlaw busting!**

"Whee! Yippee! Yow!"

The crowd went crazy. Staid, gold-braided captains and commanders jumped up and down on their seats and yelled themselves hoarse. Even the admirals present dropped their dignified hand clapping for unrestrained shouting. Spacemen of all ratings tossed their hats away, hugged whoever was next to them, and behaved generally like wild men. Alan MacKay had scored his tenth successive goal!

"Castor Beans, Castor Beans—waw! waw! waw!" went the *Pollux* bleachers derisively.

"Polliwogs, Polliwogs—yah, yah, yah!" came the prompt

response from the space cruiser *Castor's* side of the arena. But it was a weak and disheartened chorus. 850 to 25 the wrong way at the end of the first half was not the sort of score to inspire a cheering section. The *Pollux's* Dazzle Dart team was mopping up—and how!

Captain Bullard of the *Pollux* was no exception to the rest. He flopped back into his seat red of face and utterly exhausted. His vocal cords had gone long since, and now he could only gasp and speak in weak whispers. Captain Ellington, commander of the mine division, leaned over and congratulated him.

"You've got the General Excellence Trophy in the bag," he said. "That is the third time in a row, isn't it? That means you keep it."

"Yes," said Bullard, feebly. "But, oh, boy, who would have dreamed of picking up a player like this MacKay! I asked for him on account of the way he handled that Jovian surrender, but I had no idea he was such a whiz at Dazzle Dart—"

Then Bullard's husky voice failed him altogether, and he turned to watch the parades between halves.

The interfleet athletic meet, held for the first time since the Jovian armistice, had been a howling success from his point of view from first to last. The hand-picked, well-trained skymen of the *Pollux* had taken every major sport. The meteor-ball contest had been a pushover; they earned over eight hundred of the possible thousand points at saltation—that grueling competition of leaping from a stand at all gravities from zero to two and a

half. They had outswum, outrun and outplayed their competitors in practically every one of the events. And now, in the most critical test of all, they had a walkaway. He had expected it, of course, but not by such a tremendous margin.

In the meantime the crowd milled and whooped on the plain at the bottom of Luna's well-dome crater Ashtaroth which was the athletic field of the great Lunar Base. Captain Bullard regained his breath and sat watching. Good boys, his, he was thinking, all of them—whether at war or at play. Then there came another touch at his elbow and Lieutenant Commander Bissel was there, aid to the commandant.

"I hate to inject a serious note into the festivities," he apologized, "but there's something hot coming in over the transether. Remember Egon Ziffler, chief of secret police of the Jovian Empire—the Torturer, they called him?"

Bullard nodded.

"He's been located, and at Titania, of all places. He appeared in a Callistan cruiser and took the place by surprise. Apparently he massacred the entire garrison in the most fiendish manner; the admiral is talking now with the sole survivor who, somehow, managed to escape to Oberon. The worst of it is he is in possession of our experimental arsenal and proving grounds—"

"Yes?" said Bullard.

"Yes. It has not been released yet, but that deadly new electron gun worked perfectly and there are hundreds of them there. With those in their hands they will be almost invulnerable. Only the screens of a star-class cruiser can resist the hand-size

model, and I doubt if those could stand up to the heavier Mark II we planned to build."

"That's bad," remarked Bullard, with a sigh. It seemed that no matter how much clean-up work they did, there was always trouble.

"Yes," agreed Bissel, soberly, "it is bad. But I'll toddle along and get the latest. By the time this is over maybe I can give you the full dope."

He slid out of the box, and Bullard turned his attention once more to the field, only now his thoughts were inside the *Pollux*, parked in her launching rack over at the sky yard. Swiftly he surveyed mentally every compartment in her, then he permitted himself to relax. He could find no fault. She was ready to soar. Just let them give the word.

By that time the playing field was empty. A whistle blew. The second half was about to begin. It seemed a useless waste of time, but the rules were unchangeable. A fleet championship game could not be conceded; it must be played out to the last second.

The Castoreans came onto the field in a somewhat more cheerful frame of mind. In this half they would have the advantage. They had the offensive. Then the Polliwogs tramped in, still jubilant. There was an enormous margin to their credit. They could hardly lose.

The game, essentially, was a simple one. But it called for the utmost a man could develop in alertness, agility and dexterity. Moreover, to get the best results, there must be instant teamwork, secured by long practice, for there was scant time to interpret and act upon the sharply barked code signals that demanded various degrees of co-operation.

The elements of it were these: it was played on a court not much different in layout from that required by basketball, football or jai-alai. There were two opposite goals, set high in backstops. The goals were six-inch, black holes in which were selenium units. A semicircular wall, four feet high, guarded a forbidden area at the foot of each backstop. The quarterback of the offensive team had a flashlight—a superflashlight—which was loaded for each half with exactly one hundred ten-second flashes of light. The light was delivered in a thin pencil of one centimeter in diameter, and the inner mechanism of it was so designed that the operator could deliver it flash at a time by simply pointing it and pressing a button. But once the button was pressed, the light stayed on for a full ten seconds and then went out abruptly, counting as one serve. The idea was to cast the ray into the opposite goal hole. If the bell rang, the quarterback scored twenty-five points.

The defenders' aim was to intercept and deflect the light—into the other goal, if possible. Should they succeed, their score would be double. To effect this, they were equipped with as many slightly convex mirrors as they thought they could handle. The mirrors were not dissimilar from the type worn on the brow of a throat specialist. Players usually wore them strapped to their wrists, but stars could not only manage those, but also ones strapped at their waists and on the head as well. A good jumper

was a distinct asset to a team, and the *Pollux's* five saltatory champs had been of invaluable assistance.

They took their positions. Weems, captain of the *Castor* team, had the torch. His twenty guards were ranged about him. The Polliwogs scattered out at the other end of the court, tense and waiting. Tackling, holding or slugging was barred, but a man could drop on all fours and make an onrushing opponent stumble over him. There was no more to the game than that.

Weems maneuvered for position, then leaped unexpectedly into the air, and it was a goodly leap, as they were playing on strictly Lunar gravity. At near the top of his flight his hand darted forth and he sent a beam of light at his goal. It struck the backstop not a foot from the goal, but before the eagle-eyed Weems could shift his hand, a Polliwog player was in the air and had caught it with one of his reflectors. A twist of the wrist sent it hurtling back to the other side, a narrow miss. The source of it—Weems—was falling now, and he jerked his arm, throwing the light sharply downward, where one of his own teammates caught it and shot it up at a steep angle under the hovering Polliwog guards. A bull's-eye! And not an instant too soon, for at that moment the light went out. Twenty-five points for the attackers.

So it went—so swiftly the eye could hardly follow. Despite the fact that it was customary to fill the arena dome with humid air and spray dust in it so as to illuminate the darting beam throughout its length, it took the glance of an eagle to keep pace with it. A battery of cameras, of course, recorded the play constantly, and the selenium-cell-operated bell bonged from time to time as the light ray hit it.

The second half was full of brilliant double and triple plays, where often the quarterback would turn and flash his light directly behind him to a confederate who relayed it across the court, who in his turn shot it into a momentarily undefended goal. The ultimate score, though, was against the Castoreans. Their defeat was so decisive as to admit no quibbling.

The cheering lasted for minutes, but hardly had the final goal bell rung before Bullard was aware that the grand admiral himself had entered his box and was sitting beside him.

"Congratulations," said he, then addressed himself to serious business. "You have already heard a little of what is going on on Titania? I sent Bissel. It is a scurvy trick to recall your crew and send you out on a desperate mission at an hour like this, but there is no other ship ready. Since the armistice it seems that there has been a letdown in discipline. Can you blast off in four hours?"

"I can blast off in one hour if you'll give me an all-Moon hookup on the public-address system," said Bullard, without batting an eye. He had not only been expecting the detail, but hoping for it. Ziffler was a creature he loathed from the bottom of his heart—treacherous, cruel and unprincipled, of a breed that extermination is the only cure for.

Within five minutes Bullard was making his appeal to his skymen.

"On the double!" were his last words, and he slammed down the transmitter.

The burned and looted fortress of Caliban lay directly under. Bullard pushed his navigator aside and took the controls himself. He set the antigravs at half strength and slowly lost altitude, constantly searching. At last he found them. There was a parked cruiser of the *Dernfug* class, and a horde of men camped outside alongside it. Phosphorescent flares burned, and he saw they were celebrating. Kegs of the type used as containers for the potent *snahger* liquor rolled all about, and the thickest of the rioting throng were gathered about others yet upright.

"The ship, first," said Bullard, grimly, and his gunnery officer—Fraser—said only, "Aye, aye, sir."

The searing, blinding beam of incredible power leaped downward, played a moment on the cruiser, then flickered out. On the ground there was left only a mass of running molted metal, sputtering a valedictory of brilliant sparks.

"Cease firing!" was Bullard's next crisp order. "The grand admiral wants them brought in alive, if possible." He reached for the antigrav control and pushed the deflectors on hard swing.

The *Pollux* came down a mile away to an easy landing on the dark plain. The people in her could plainly see the floodlamps of the rollicking bandits and the sharp reflections that glinted on the smooth terrain between. There was nothing to impede the progress of the landing force.

But by the time the landing force was ready for its trip, the lookout reported a new development. A party of men was

approaching, and they were stretching their arms over their heads in gesture of surrender. A close scrutiny of them could discover no arms worth worrying about. The new electron projectors were said to be quite heavy, each requiring two men to carry and operate. Any less potent weapon the veterans of the *Pollux* could deal with, and deal with well.

"Find out who they are and what is their proposition," ordered Bullard. "If it sounds reasonable, let three in for a parley. No more. He is full of slimy tricks, that Ziffler. I wouldn't trust his words under any circumstances."

It was not Ziffler, but Skul Drosno, former vice premier, of the Jovian regime, together with two high aids. They wanted to arrange terms of surrender, they said. Their story was that they had revolted against the atrocities of Ziffler and had him a prisoner in their camp. They would trade him—trussed up as he was—for personal immunity and a general pardon for their followers. They would willingly submit to trial, knowing now how they had been hoodwinked.

"Let them in." said Bullard, though he was still a trifle doubtful. "I will talk with them."

Skul Drosno began his appeal. Bullard recognized it at once as rank sophistry, but he continued to listen. Then, to his astonishment, Drosno suddenly slumped in his chair. His eyes were crossed to a painful degree, and his hands wavered uncertainly in the air. The next moment he pitched forward onto the deck and sprawled, apparently unconscious. One of his aids looked sick, and staggered to his feet, weaving about ridiculously.

"What an act!" thought Bullard, and sprang to his own feet, alert. He shot a glance to his side and saw that his executive, Moore, who had been with him, was an inert heap. And at that moment things began to blur before his own eyes. His knees wobbled, and he heard a harsh, metallic ringing in his ears. He fought for air, then choked. The floor plates rushed upward and struck him squarely in the face. After that Bullard remembered no more.

The next voice he heard was the high-pitched cackling of the unspeakable Ziffler.

"Can such things be!" crowed the vile Callistan. "A great personage, no less. I find as my prisoner the inimitable, the invincible, the incorruptible Bullard—hero of the nine planets!"

Bullard opened his eyes, ignoring the pounding in the back of his head. He was seated in a chair, strapped hand and foot, and the swaggering ex-police chief who had terrorized the Jovian satellites was standing before him, exulting.

"Perhaps he is not so invincible," pursued his tormentor, calmly lighting a cigarette and seating himself. "We have never seen him outside his formidable *Pollux*. But now that he is in our hands, I am curious to see how good he is. Hagstund! Come here!"

A big brute of a former convict strode forward.

"What do you say? Shall we have a little sport? Why not put

these men in spacesuits and turn them loose for twenty-four hours? Then we can have a hunt. This man, in particular, has a gr-r-reat reputation for cleverness. Let's see what he can do on a barren and resourceless planet. We have counted them, so we know their numbers. I will give a prize, prizes. Ten thousand sols for this one, to whoever brings him down. Another ten thousand for the last man of the lot and another five for the next to the last. It'll be good fun, eh?"

Ziffler took a swig of *snahger* and delivered himself of an elaborate wink. Bullard did not believe for a moment he was drunk. Ziffler was too clever a scoundrel for that. It was a gesture meant to raise false hopes. Bullard knew all too well what the wastes of Titania were. He had been there before. Except for the port of Caliban, the arsenal and a few scattered stations which no doubt had been plundered by now, there was nothing but bleak, frozen plains, broken by rugged meteor craters.

"Swell, chief," agreed the henchman. "What about the ship?"

"Leave her lie as she is. They'll not send another for days. I don't want you baboons monkeying around inside her. Let's give these guys a run, then we'll get down to business. There's plenty of time."

Rough hands pulled Bullard to his feet, and at the point of one of the new and deadly electron guns they made him put an ordinary spacesuits. As the mists cleared away in his throbbing head, he saw that he was in a large hall, and that other men and officers of his crew were being similarly treated.

"Oh, by the way," remarked Ziffler, offhandedly. "They say I am unkind. I'll save you one bit of mental torture. What got you down was our new hypnotic dust. It's very clever, really. Powder a coat with it, for example, then expose it to air. It vaporizes and puts everyone to sleep. My emissaries went out, too—naturally. All but one, that is, who had been heavily doped with an antidote beforehand. He survived long enough to open the door for us, then, unfortunately, died. It was regrettable, but in my business I find it necessary to do such things."

Bullard said not a word. He was ready. The outlook was black, but he had seen other outlooks that were quite as black.

"I'll be seeing you, Ziffler," he said, and hoped it was not mere braggadocio. Ziffler had a reputation for sadism, but not for courage. There was the bare chance that that single psychological shot in the dark might in time be digested and unsettle him. "Let's go. I prefer anything to your presence."

"Yeah?" said Ziffler, but he beckoned to his strong-arm squad.

The entire crew of the *Pollux* was there. They were pushed out through the portal of the dome in squads of four and told to get going. Bullard was let out last of all. Their captors promised tauntingly that they had a full Earth day before pursuit.

"Stay together, men," called Bullard into his helmet microphone, the moment the portal closed behind him. "All officers come up close to me."

The light on Titania is dim, even in full daytime. But it was good enough for his officers to read the swift manipulations of his fingers. Their skipper was using the sign language all trained Space Guards men used when they feared their words might be overheard.

"Poleward from here." Bullard told them, "some thirty miles, is a meteorite crater. For several years we have maintained a secret laboratory there and it is possible that these ruffians have not discovered it. That will be our destination. Under this gravity we should reach it within a few hours, though I am uncertain of its exact direction. Have the men spread out and hunt. There should be flares there, and the first man in should light one. The last time I visited the place it had a staff of eight or ten scientists, and an excellent interplanetary radio. They may have weapons, but at least we can flash an alarm."

Rapidly waved arms acknowledged, and the Polliwogs dispersed in the semidarkness.

It was Lieutenant Alan MacKay who reached the spot first. He had trouble in finding a flare, but eventually he found one and lit it. The laboratory was a shambles. The vandals had found the place, despite his captain's hopes to the contrary, and turned it upside down. The bodies of the physicists and chemists lay all about, and the unhappy director's corpse was discovered nailed to the wall, crucifix style. Torn papers, broken glass and tangled wire littered the floor. The radio had been smashed almost out of recognition. MacKay, a newcomer to the service, shuddered, but he carried out his orders.

Bullard arrived shortly after, and his face was not pretty to

see as he viewed the wreckage. Now he regretted the flare. *They* undoubtedly had seen it, too. He had hoped to warn these people, send a message to the System in general, then have his forces scatter. A few of them might have hoped to survive the ruthless man hunt that was to follow.

But the situation was changed, and since any alternative seemed as hopeless as any other, he let the flare continue to burn. By keeping together, some resistance might be improvised. While he was waiting for the stragglers to come up, he busied himself with reassembling the torn pages of the notebooks and journals strewn about the floor.

Much of them dealt with routine analysis, but on a page written in red ink and numbered "97" he found a fragment that brought him to eager attention.

Unlike most meteorites, the one that made this crater failed to disintegrate upon impact—or rather, not all of it disintegrated. We have discovered a number of fragments, slightly curved, that indicate it was stratified, and that the stratum of radius, of about thirty meters and of one and a fraction inches in thickness, simply broke into bits instead of molecules. In the storehouse in the crater bottom there are more than a hundred of these fragments, running up to as high as twenty centimeters across. They are of a jadelike substance, subject to abrasion by ordinary methods and can be drilled by steel drills, and are not hard

and ultradense as might have been expected. The curious thing about these fragments is that they defy X-ray analysis. For some odd reason they wreck every tube that is brought to bear upon them. They backfire, so to speak. Can it be that—

The page was at an end. Bullard sought frantically for page 98, but he could not find it. He called the trusty Benton.

"Take a gang of men and go down and search the crater. You ought to find a storehouse and in it a bunch of junky-looking rock fragments that look like jade. If you do, bring a flock of them up here. Quick!"

To the others standing around, he said:

"Clear out the wreckage in the workshop and see if those breast drills can be made to work. Strip the boots off of those dead men and cut them up into straps. As soon as you have done that, take off your own and cut them up, too. We haven't got time to lose."

Presently Lieutenant Benton came back, and a number of men were with him. They all bore armfuls of slightly curved pieces of a moss-colored, glasslike substance. Each was fairly large, but all had irregular and jagged edges. Bullard examined one hurriedly, hefting it critically.

"Get MacKay up here—quickly," he barked, suddenly. Then he wheeled on Benton. "Take all of these and drill two pairs of holes through each—here and here"—and he showed him. "Then

affix straps, just as you would to those mirrors you use in the Dazzle Dart game."

Benton looked at him wonderingly, but he had learned a long time before to put his trust in his remarkable commander. He piled the shiny fragments of meteor stuff together and went out to call in his men.

Bullard felt better. What he was about to attempt was a wild gamble, but it was immeasurably better than waiting like a sheep for the slaughter or fleeing hopelessly across the cold wastes of Titania. He was very thankful, too, that on the occasion of his last visit to that satellite he had cut the governor general's party and ball and visited this secluded laboratory instead. For the day he had been there was shortly after the experiments described on the isolated page he now held in his hand. At that time nothing had been definitely determined as to the structure of the mysterious crystalline substance salvaged from the crater, but he recalled the speculations of the now dead scientists concerning it.

Lieutenant MacKay reported.

"Yes, sir?"

"Tell Commander Moore to have all the members of the Dazzle Dart team report to you here at once, and that means the men on the second team and the scrubs as well. Tell him to have everyone else find pits in the crater bottom and take shelter there until further orders. Clear?"

The ruffians of the Ziffler gang did not play entirely fair, as was to be expected. They beat the gun by several hours. It was Benton, in charge of the lookout, who sighted the mob advancing across the plain. They were in fairly close formation, as if by direction finders or some other means they already knew that the *Pollux* men were not scattered, but together at the so-called "Mystery Crater."

"Take stations," ordered Bullard, crisply. He was standing in the semidarkness on the crater rim, some distance away from the damaged laboratory. To the right and left of him his victorious Dazzle Dart team were lying behind the irregular parapet made by the crater wall.

"Benton!" he called. "Scatter your squad both ways from me. When that gang of hoodlums is halfway up the hill, let 'em have your flame-gun blast. Then duck and beat it for the bottom of the crater and hide out until I call 'all clear.'"

Benton had found eight old flame guns in a work shed. They had been obsolete as fighting weapons for many years, but could deliver a nasty burn.

Captain Bullard had another look at the advancing hunting party. He saw that they had brought along a number of the new electron guns and were beginning to struggle up to the talus with them. The yelling mob reached a sort of ledge and waited for the guns to be brought up. A jeering voice, louder than the rest, called up:

"Will you come down and take it, you lice, or do we have to come up there and get you?"

"Now!" said Bullard softly into his microphone.

Eight feeble heat machines spat their ruddy blasts, then went out with a jerk as their operators let go of them and slid down the inner wall to safety. It was well that Bullard had foreseen the reply they would get for the counterblast came almost instantaneously. A score of bright stars flamed out downhill and from them thin streams of almost invisible violet fire lashed upward and played along the crater rim. The rock sprang into incandescence and inches of it melted and flowed as bubbling, sparkling slag down the slope, where it quickly dulled to red and congealed.

"Now?" asked MacKay, anxiously. He was crouched beside the skipper.

"Not yet. Wait until they are closer."

The assault went on for a moment, then stopped. Bullard took a cautious peep and saw the Callistans had resumed their climb.

"What's the dirtiest thing you can call a Callistan?" whispered Bullard, grinning unseen in the dark. "You know the lingo."

"*Froahbortlen*," replied MacKay without hesitation. The Callistan language was rich in epithets, but that one was the most comprehensive and unequivocal ever coined in any language. Even a depraved criminal of the lowest grade would resent it.

"Invite them up," said Bullard, grimly. "When they answer, do your stuff."

"On your toes, men," MacKay warned his teammates. Then he opened his mike wide and issued his sizzling, triple-barreled, insulting invitation.

Bullard involuntarily caught his breath. The die was cast. For an instant one of the qualms of uncertainty that rarely came to him held him in its grip. Was he right, or would they fail? Which side would be the victims of the massacre about to begin? Well, in a couple of seconds he would know.

The properties of the strange meteor substance was still unknown. It stopped Gamma and other hard rays. It wrecked the X-ray tubes focused upon it. How could that be, unless it also possessed that long-hunted, but never found, property of being able to deflect and reflect the high-pressure beams?

MacKay's helmet still vibrated with the last vile words of his superb taunt when the answering salvo of electric fire came. But that time there was more than inert rock to receive it. A row of alert young men stood on the crest, and a weird-looking crew they were. Glistening bits of rock were strapped to their wrists, to their foreheads, their belts, and even their ankles. In an instant they were leaping, dancing and twisting like mad dervishes, deftly parrying every violet pencil that struck above the rock at their feet. The devastating power was being hurled back whence it came.

The ruffians must have been amazed at the swift return of fire from men they thought to be totally disarmed, but they hung on doggedly for a few seconds more. Then their fire ceased altogether, and all that the observers on the rim could see was a few scared survivors scrambling: down the way they had come.

"Too bad we haven't a weapon," sighed Bullard. "We could make a clean sweep."

He whipped out a flashlight and strode down to the ledge. There were many of the abandoned electron guns standing about on tripods, or overturned by the fleeing gangsters. Something soft gave under Bullard's boot. He played his light along the ground and saw a sight that under other circumstances would have been revolting. Loose hands and feet, attached to charred stumps of arm or leg, were strewn widely. Other and less readily identifiable fragments of disintegrated humanity lay among them. Ziffler's strong-arm squad, once the terror of the outer planets, had been dispersed in the fullest sense of the word.

Bullard turned on his amplifier.

"O.K., Moore. Round up the men and bring them down. We're going back."

The trek back across the icy waste seemed infinitely shorter and easier than it had on the outward journey. Men's hearts were light now, and not leaden as before. To the Polliwogs, the knowledge they had lost their ship had been as dispiriting as the seeming certainty of their impending doom. Now all that was changed. A mile ahead of them lay the *Pollux*, just as they had left her.

The search for Ziffler and the stragglers took some time, but they found them, cowering and whimpering behind a boulder.

"Iron them well and throw them into the brig," snapped Bullard, and went into his ship.

He grabbed a signal pad and wrote a brief report.

A little later the grand admiral at Lunar Base stretched out his hand for the flimsy bit of yellow paper his orderly had brought him. He read it, then read it again. He frowned a little and scratched his head.

"Has Bullard gone highbrow on us, or what the hell?" he asked, tossing the message over to Bissel. Bissel picked it up and read:

After reflection, the enemy succumbed.

BULLARD.

THE END.

[The end of *Bullard Reflects* by Malcolm Jameson]