

OLIVINE, RENEGADE

His Master's Vice

His ship roused Elmo Ixton out of deepsleep to the customary view of broad Kansas prairie, but he felt more uneasy than usual. Maybe the sleep hadn't been deep enough to keep his subconscious knocked out the entire two weeks.

The thing to do was not think about it.

With vigorous movements, and with cheerfulness intended to fool himself, he bounced out of the sleeptank and began exercising. "Schedule and coffee, *Rollo*," he said between bends.

"Yes, sir, Proxad Ixton," the ship responded snappily.

"Planetfall on Roseate in seventeen minutes. Coffee coming right up, sir."

The prairie flickered and vanished from the holophane bulkheads, to be replaced by a view of nearby space with what was presumably the planet Roseate floating low to starboard.

"*NO!*" Ixton yelled frantically, clutching at the back of his control chair for support. "*Put the prairie back!*"

"Yes, sir," said the ship as Kansas reappeared. "Sorry, sir. Thought you would want to see the approach, sir." Ixton clung to the chair, stiffened his back to military erectness, and tried to push the terror from the spot where it nestled one inch behind his eyes. "Not this time, *Rollo*," he managed to say in a strangled voice. "Nothing I could see from out . . . from here . . . would be of concern to my duties on Roseate."

"Very well, sir. Here's your coffee, sir."

Ixton sank into the chair. With shaking hand he lifted the steaming cup from the serving pedestal that had risen out of the lounge deck. He sipped and said, "Excellent coffee, *Rollo*. Creamed and sugared just right." *Rollo*, after all, had feelings of sorts and didn't enjoy being yelled at. And of course the ship appreciated words of praise.

"Thank you, sir," the ship responded, the words sounding a little stiff to Ixton.

As he drank the coffee Ixton made his eyes rest on the distant Kansas horizon, past the homesteads baking under an early autumn sun. But for some reason the view lacked its usual tranquilizing effect, although he sat as solidly in his chair as he could, and tried to imagine the mass of old Mother Earth beneath him. Whether his sleep had been too shallow, or whether the toughness of his assignment on Roseate was getting to him, he didn't know. One thing he did know: he wanted *down* as fast as possible.

"Are you getting landing instructions yet?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Why not?" he demanded, trying to keep anxiety out of his voice.

"I was awaiting your command, sir."

Damn! Ixton fumed to himself. *Now I've got Rollo too skittish to flip a relay on his own hook!*

"O.K.," he said, "call Port Control for instructions. And let me talk to them, please."

"Roseate Control here!" barked a console speaker a few seconds later. "Receiving PSS *Rollo*. Go ahead."

"Hello, Port Control," replied Ixton. "This is Proxad Elmo Ixton, manning PSS *Rollo*, coming in for landing with a TUA of twelve minutes forty seconds. Request landing instructions to ship."

"You can come straight in, sir," responded Port Control. "We've been waiting for you! Instructions follow." As a series of blips and squawks began coming through, the speaker volume dropped to a whisper, since this was matter of no interest to Ixton. The man got up and paced the deck, feeling twitchy and wanting a cigarette, or something. Well, why not?

"Let me have a smoke, *Rollo*," he directed.

"Yes, sir." A thin white tube pushed out of the serving pedestal. Ixton grabbed the lighted cigarette and took a deep drag. This relaxed him slightly, but he resumed pacing as he smoked.

At last he demanded, "Can't you shorten that TUA a couple of minutes, *Rollo*?"

"Yes, sir. I'll get us down as swiftly as possible, sir."

"Do that!" snapped Ixton.

He paced some more and tried to plan a course of action to follow once he landed. But all he could really do was try to imagine the various possibilities that might confront him. Omar Olivine was far from an ordinary fugitive from justice. Not many years back Olivine had been a proxad in the Space Patrol himself—a competent proxad, and highly resourceful.

Ixton hoped to simply sit on the situation until Patrol reinforcements arrived—if the planet's officials would stand for that. Technically and legally, Ixton's authority on Roseate would be supreme—a Space Patrolman's title of "proxad" stood for "proxy admiral," and it carried all the weight it implied. But law enforcement couldn't be divorced from politics and diplomacy, and part of Ixton's job was to avoid stirring anti-Patrol sentiment on Roseate, or any other world. And the planet had already been under total quarantine for two weeks, awaiting Ixton's arrival, and was doubtless indignant about it by now. Ixton pushed the butt of his cigarette into the wastecatcher and stared out over the prairie. There ought to be a way to make holophane scenes more realistic, he fretted. The focus was clear enough, the depth was convincing, and the colors far more accurate than they had been when he was a kid twenty years ago. But there was still a dead giveaway in the falsity of the viewer's relationship to the view: the deck of his control lounge did not actually attach itself to the prairie scene. It could be taken as a thin sheet of metal nearly flush with the ground of the prairie, or it could be the top of a tall tower, or the surface of a flying platform he was riding, or . . .

He grabbed the back of the chair, swaying and muttering angrily at himself.

"Pardon, sir?" asked *Rollo*.

"Nothing! Never mind! Just get us down from here!"

"Yes, sir. Only five more minutes, sir!"

"Cigarette!"

"Another, sir?"

"Yes, damn it, another! Quit dawdling."

The ship produced another cigarette for him and he sat down, glaring at the control console in front of the chair, not daring another look at the prairie scene.

The *PSS Rollo* dropped toward Roseate's port swiftly enough to produce a fairly spectacular meteor trail. If any fidgety planetary officials had been watching the approach on radar, they would have been most gratified by the haste with which the Patrol was coming to take the situation in hand.

The ship braked at the last possible second and came down with engines roaring. The shocktubes squealed painfully when the tripads banged on the plastcrete hardtop and the ship shivered to a halt.

"Touchdown, sir," said the ship.

"Touch" hardly seemed the word for it to Ixton, who had felt the thuds despite the paragravity field. But he had asked for it. He took a deep, jerky breath and said, "Very good, *Rollo*. Exterior view, please."

The prairie gave way to the unpretty sight of Roseate's spaceport, a wide expanse of empty and dirty plastcrete, marked here and there with crash-depressions and cargo-spillage stains. The Port Control building stood half a mile away, and beyond it he could see in the distance the outskirts of Roseate City—the planet's principal town with some three hundred thousand souls.

Of course the lounge deck did not attach itself to this view any more definitely than it had to the prairie, but this was unimportant. Ixton *knew* this scene was for real, that *Rollo* was squatting firmly in the middle of that ugly plastcrete. The knowledge was vastly comforting.

"Link into local communications," he directed.

"Yes, sir," said *Rollo*, and a moment later the console screen lighted to show a young woman visiphone operator. "Yes, sir?" she echoed *Rollo's* words.

"I'm Proxad Elmo Ixton of the Space Patrol. Put me through to the Governor."

"Right away, Proxad Ixton, and welcome to Roseate," she said with businesslike coquetry.

Ixton gazed sternly at her, and she got busy. "Here's Governor Drake, sir."

Drake had the heavy face and alertness of eye that, Ixton supposed, had been displayed by the majority of politicians since ancient Babylon. He beamed, "Welcome to Roseate, Proxad—"

"Ixton," the Patrolman supplied. "Elmo Ixton. Thank you, Governor Drake. I want to confer with you and the planetary police chief as quickly as possible, Governor, and for a number of reasons it would be desirable to hold the meeting here, in my ship. I hope that isn't too much of an imposition . . ."

"Oh, no!" said the governor with a quickly concealed flicker of annoyance. "Hassbruch and I will be there within an hour! As you can well imagine, Proxad Ixton, we're anxious to clear up this situation immediately, and you can count on our fullest cooperation."

"I appreciate that, Governor. I'll be waiting."

Ixton knew he had not handled the governor very diplomatically, but he realized, too, that he had very little talent along those lines. There was too much stiff funlessness in Ixton's makeup for people to warm to him easily. Even among his colleagues of the Patrol he was usually the man who stood silent and alone at the fringe of the crowd. Of course his fear of space and height—the reason why he spent his flight-time in the oblivion of deepsleep—made him more shy and withdrawn than he might have been. But even without that unremediable weakness, he would have remained a stiffneck, and he knew it. That was his

personality, and he was stuck with it.

But there were advantages. Perhaps he was short on friends, but people did have confidence in him. He was known as a "tough cop."

"More coffee, sir?" asked the ship.

"Not now, *Rollo*," he said. Being on firm ground he felt much better, so after a moment he added, "*Rollo*, I regret the way I behaved as we were coming in. I've told you the reason for it before—this unreasonable, uh, *tension* I sometimes experience when I'm in a high place. I'm afraid I can't explain it to you very clearly."

"Never mind, sir," said the ship. "I understand perfectly."

Ixton frowned at the response. That was laying it on pretty thick, after all. *Rollo*, with his compucortex, saying he could "understand perfectly" a human mental malfunction! Was *Rollo* patronizing him? But of course *Rollo* meant well, and it wouldn't do to take exception to the remark. But Ixton was deeply irked, nevertheless.

"One question I would like to ask, sir," said *Rollo*.

"Shoot," Ixton replied.

"In view of this condition, sir, why do you remain on active Patrol duty rather than accept a post that would keep you on the ground?"

"Because my work is important . . . and I can do it well. Also, except for the travel, which I can sleep through, I find the discharge of my duties most gratifying."

The ship considered that for a moment before responding, "May I say, sir, that you are a highly courageous person to proceed with your work despite your condition."

Definitely patronizing! Well, perhaps that was to be expected, Ixton admitted. The overt attitude of a Patrol ship to its proxad took whatever form the proxad found desirable. Since Ixton felt comfortable in a strict, semimilitary atmosphere, he had set a tone of formal courtesy with *Rollo*—the relationship between an officer and an enlisted man. And enlisted men were notorious for patronizing officers!

It was a flaw in the man-ship gestalt that he would have to accept, Ixton supposed.

"Thank you, *Rollo*," he said coldly. "Now let's monitor the local newscasts for any information on our quarry." But he learned nothing of importance concerning Omar Olivine before the governor and police chief arrived. He met with them in the conference chamber on *Rollo's* third deck.

The perfect lie detector would be, of course, a dependable telepath, but that seemingly was a contradiction of terms. Such agencies as the Space Patrol fell back on detection equipment similar in principle to the ancient polygraph, but far more sophisticated in application. That used by Ixton could monitor, via an intricate microdar system, the slight local fluctuations of blood pressure within a subject's brain during interrogation—fluctuations that reflected closely the emotional state of the interviewee.

The microdar monitor was highly portable. Ixton could carry it about in a small satchel. He could have taken it to the offices of the governor and the police chief to conduct his interviews. But when a man of Omar Olivine's talents and inclinations had been running loose on Roseate for over two years, Ixton could not be sure there was still an honest high official on the planet. It could be fatally indiscreet for him to step outside the protection of his ship until he had some idea of who he could trust. He seated the two

officials where the unseen microdar scanners could examine them, and went behind his desk to watch the play of colors on their monitor lights.

"Gentlemen," he began, "the Patrol's job is to apprehend Omar Olivine *on this planet*. It took years of gathering and sifting information to track him here. If he gets off Roseate, all that work will have to be repeated. Thus, it is essential that we keep Olivine cornered here until he is taken, or killed."

"If he's here at all," groused Police Chief Hassbruch, "which you can't prove by me. And I think I know what's going on on this planet! It's my job to know."

"I appreciate your attitude," said Ixton—which he did, because the deep greening of Hassbruch's monitor light showed no trace of deception. "But the Patrol's CIP system has all the conservatism of the typical heavy computer. When it finds a ninety-five per cent probability that Olivine is on your planet, you can bet the real probability is one hundred per cent. And he won't merely be hiding. He'll be up to something—with your criminal element, or your political malcontents, or . . ."

"I question that!" broke in Governor Drake. "Chief Hassbruch knows our criminal element, and I know our political soreheads. If somebody like Olivine was stirring up the snakes, you can bet your boots one of us would be wise to it." Another honest response, Ixton noted with relief.

"Don't be insulted, gentlemen," he said, "when I answer your doubts by saying that Olivine is cleverer than either of you. He's cleverer than I, for that matter. He's here, and he's up to something! But he's keeping his tracks covered. If he's not organizing the criminals or the malcontents, maybe he's undermining your own associates. How sure are you gentlemen that all your own men are still trustworthy?"

Hassbruch's light glimmered purple, and his face verified his uncertainty.

"How about it, Chief Hassbruch?" Ixton prompted.

"Well . . . there's one man, a sergeant of the old school. I've had him on the carpet a few times. His name's Jacobsen."

"I'd like to talk to him a little later," said Ixton.

The rest of the interview was devoted mainly to Ixton's attempt to convince the planetary officials that more Patrolmen should be awaited before an effort was made to take Olivine. A cruiser, manned by three proxads, was due to arrive in five days.

But Governor Drake blustered, and his monitor light glowed blood-red.

"What's the Patrol trying to do, starve us?" he bellowed. "This quarantine's costing us eighty million credits a day, and that's the gross profit figure! What's more, the cost gets worse the longer it lasts! My people won't stand for another week of this waiting!"

"I understand your position," said Ixton patiently, "and I regret the cost of the quarantine. But—"

This was not the kind of argument Ixton was good at winning. Drake threatened political reprisals against the Patrol if the Olivine affair were dragged out, and cited the powerful Earth friends of Roseate who would take up the cudgel in the planet's behalf. He did not neglect the point that Omar Olivine was the Patrol's own rotten apple, and that he therefore should be dealt with without inconvenience to the civilian public.

Ixton had answers to Drake's arguments, but they were not answers that would change the governor's

mind. So he had to accept defeat.

He was in a grumpy frame of mind as he rode into Roseate City with the two officials. Drake was taken to Government Center, and Ixton went on to Police Headquarters with Hassbruch. He set up shop in one of the interrogation rooms, and the chief brought Sergeant Jacobsen in for questioning.

It took only a few minutes to determine that Jacobsen was indeed a cop of the old school—heavy-handed, but intensely loyal and genuinely concerned about his inability to understand Hassbruch's more modern philosophy of law enforcement. Though the sergeant was fifteen years older and eighty pounds heavier than Proxad Ixton, the Patrolman felt a definite sense of identification with him.

"Do you know of any disloyalty on the police force?" Ixton asked him.

The microdar monitor revealed the same uncertainty on Jacobsen's part that Hassbruch had shown earlier.

"If you don't *know* of any, do you *suspect* any?" prompted Ixton.

"Well, there are men on the force I don't have much personal confidence in," Jacobsen admitted grudgingly.

"Such as who?" asked Ixton. Jacobsen hemmed and hawed until Hassbruch broke in with obvious annoyance.

"I know he's referring to Lieutenant Wales!" he grated. "Wales is a younger man who was promoted past him, much to Jacobsen's resentment. A very good man!"

"Is that right, Sergeant?" asked Ixton. Jacobsen nodded glumly.

"Why do you suspect him?"

"Well, maybe it's just that he ain't my kind of policeman, sir. But since he's had charge of recruitment, he's brought in a lot of young men whose talk I don't like." After a moment of thought, Ixton said, "Thank you, Sergeant. As you know, I'm here on a job that could be tough and dangerous, and I'll probably need police assistance before it's over. If I do, I hope you'll be working with me."

A surprised look of pleasure creased the sergeant's face. "I hope so, too, sir!" he replied.

"That's all for now," said Ixton. The sergeant saluted and marched out of the room. "Could we have Lieutenant Wales in next, Chief?"

Still peeved, Hassbruch shrugged. "Sure. I'll get him." He went out and returned with a tall, snappy young man who favored Ixton with a bright smile and a firm handshake.

"This is a rare honor, Proxad Ixton!" Lieutenant Wales said warmly, "simply to *meet* a man of your accomplishments, much less to have the privilege of working with you in some small way!"

Ixton was glad nobody had a microdar monitor on *him*, to read his disgust. *Rollo's* simple-minded patronizing was annoying enough. But this Wales was a bootlicker! Perhaps Chief Hassbruch went for that kind of line . . .

"Thank you, Lieutenant," he answered frostily. "Won't you have a seat, please."

As soon as Wales sat, and came into the focus of the scanner, the monitor light glowed a definite yellow. Ixton unobtrusively fumbled with the catch of his satchel, to turn on the lashback transmitter.

"Lieutenant, what can you tell me about Omar Olivine?" he asked.

"Nothing at all, I'm sorry to say, sir."

"You've never met him?"

"No, sir."

Each answer had produced an accusatory orange glow on the monitor. Ixton turned up the lashback power, and Wales rubbed his temples lightly.

"You have neither met him nor talked to him on the phone?"

"Definitely not, sir," Wales grimaced with the pain his answer bounced back into his head. Looking puzzled and a little sick, he tried to temporize: "Of course, one can't always be sure of the identity of people on the phone, so perhaps without knowing—" He shut up and clenched his teeth.

"What's wrong with you, Lieutenant?" barked Hassbruch.

"A . . . a slight headache, sir," muttered Wales.

"Oh? Sorry to hear that. Proxad, perhaps we could talk to Wales when he's feeling better."

"There's nothing wrong with Wales," Ixton growled, "that honest answers to my questions won't cure. Let's start at the beginning. Tell me about Olivine, Wales!"

"But I told you I know noth . . . !" He clamped his head in his arms and appealed frantically to Hassbruch.

"Chief, I don't know what this . . . this *sadist* is doing to me, but he's using *torture!* Surely, sir, you're not going to allow him to do this to one of your most loyal . . . *OW!*"

"That's the biggest lie yet, isn't it, Wales?" Ixton remarked. "Just how disloyal are you?"

"I'm not . . . *STOP IT!*" Wales screamed. He leaped from the chair and bolted for the door, but Hassbruch grabbed him by the collar and yanked him back. The chief's face was suddenly purple with rage.

"Sit down!" he roared, shoving Wales into the chair and turning to Ixton. "Proxad, I don't know what you're up to, but . . . well, you are a proxad, and that means something! And I don't like the way Wales reacted to that last question."

"Neither do I, and neither did he," Ixton replied grimly. "Start talking, Wales. Tell us about Olivine, and what you're doing for him."

Slowly, the truth came out of the lieutenant: the location of Olivine's fortified hideout in the mountains, the names of Wales' confederates on the police force, their plans for infiltrating and seizing the government of Roseate with Olivine masterminding behind the scenes, the disposal through trade channels of certain "hot" valuables Olivine had brought with him to the planet, and so on for a couple of hours.

The disclosures kept Police Headquarters hopping the rest of the day, getting witnessed confessions, running down suspects in other government departments, and more interrogations than Ixton could keep track of.

Late in the evening Ixton sat in Hassbruch's office having a final cup of coffee with the chief.

"What surprises me," said a dazed Hassbruch, "is that none of our criminal big shots were involved with Olivine in this. They have talent he could use."

"I expected that, myself," Ixton nodded. "It would fit Olivine's MO. But Wales told us Olivine refused his offers to put him in touch with your racketeer crowd, saying that criminal types weren't trustworthy. Maybe Olivine has learned through experience, and has changed his MO. He's a clever guy, after all."

The chief shook his head doubtfully, but said nothing. Ixton almost smiled. Having proved so inept a judge of character in Wales' case, Hassbruch was now very reticent about voicing his opinions. The day had left him a wiser man.

"I'll be going after Olivine tomorrow," Ixton said. "I'd like Sergeant Jacobsen and three other officers of his choosing to back me up. And if you have forest rangers on Roseate—men who know their way around in those mountains—I could use a couple of them, too."

"I'll arrange it," said the chief. "Also, I'll assign you a couple of armored clopters to fly you—"

"No clopters!" said Ixton quickly. "We'll go in by land because . . . because Olivine won't expect that."

"Good thinking!" applauded the chief.

Thinking, Ixton admitted to himself, had nothing to do with it.

The next day he wondered painfully if the clopters really could have been worse.

Olivine's hideout was less than fifty miles from the city, and all but the last two could be covered, if rather bumpily and definitely frighteningly, by groundcar on the narrow loggers' roads. Still, Olivine's location was something of a pole of inaccessibility for a traveler on the ground. From the spot where they left the cars, there was no trail of any kind through the dense undergrowth, up and down the dizzying stone ledges, and across streams that gurgled between huge jumbles of boulders. The two rangers had shaken their heads dolefully the moment Ixton showed them their destination on the map Wales had marked. And long before the expedition reached the hideout, the steep terrain had the proxad in a weak-kneed, depressed condition, with a strong foreboding of failure.

He was surprised by the ease with which Olivine was taken, once they arrived. The approach by ground had indeed been unexpected and unprepared-for. Olivine had been out in the open, inspecting his ack-ack emplacements, when they crept up.

"You're covered by half a dozen guns, Olivine!" called Ixton, stepping into the open with leveled stunner.

"Make it easy on yourself!"

Olivine stared, then slowly raised his hands. Ixton and Jacobsen stepped forward to frisk him thoroughly, and cuff his wrists behind him. The renegade was still a handsome man, with a neatly trimmed beard, but somewhat paunchy from inactivity.

"I can almost remember you, Proxad," he said lightly.

"The name's Elmo Ixton."

"Oh, sure!" Olivine grinned. "I place you now. The stick-in-the-mud sobersides. Still a true-blue upholder of status and legality, huh?"

Ixton's lips tightened and he kept silent.

"Damn!" grunted Olivine, giving him the once-over.

"Did you get all those scratches and scrapes fighting through the bush? I hope you don't intend to drag me back the way you came!"

"No," said Ixton, making a quick decision. A clopter ride back to town would be frightening, but so would another hike over all that tilted countryside. And the ride would be mercifully brief. Besides, now that Olivine was captured, he had no tellable excuse for staying on the ground. "Jacobsen, have your men check those ack-ack controls to make sure they're not on automatic fire, and then radio for a couple of clopters."

"Yes, sir."

Ixton broke out his microdar kit and fixed the scanner on Olivine. The monitor light gleamed yellow.

"What do you have cached around here?" Ixton asked. Olivine grinned but did not speak. Ixton turned on the lashback transmitter. "Start talking, Olivine!" he demanded.

A grimace of pain twisted Olivine's face, but he was an ex-Patrolman. He could stand up under torture—and he knew silence was the best defense against microdar. Ixton shrugged. "Hassbruch's men can take this place apart a rock at a time," he said. "You'll gain nothing by keeping quiet. Why not do it the easy way?"

Olivine did not speak. The monitor light was flashing bursts of deep yellow, which meant he was trying to hide something of importance. But what, the proxad wondered.

"Clopter coming in!" Jacobsen sang out a few minutes later.

"Fine. That was quick work," said Ixton distractedly, still staring at Olivine, who was sitting very quietly on a stump. The renegade's monitored reactions were definitely puzzling—no rage at being captured, no deep depression. Just an overall coolness, plus a determination to deceive, to give no hint concerning the nature of some secret. Olivine was motionless, gazing fixedly at the ground in front of him, as if a mere glance in the wrong direction would give something away. He did not even look up at the approaching clopter . . .

"*Take cover quick!*" Ixton yelled to his men. But the warning was not in time. A stun-gas bomb had been dropped from the clopter, to explode whitely a few feet above their heads. Ixton was not aware of passing out.

Consciousness returned in stages. He was still out in the bush, but not at the hideout. He was lying on the ground with bound wrists and ankles. Men were talking nearby, and he recognized Olivine's voice.

"That was part of the plan," he was explaining to somebody. "The Patrol was *supposed* to get wise to Wales and his boys if I was located. Why do you think I went to such trouble to keep your organization completely separate from his? Wales was a mere distraction, a decoy, to keep the proxad too busy to come snooping after you guys in the rackets."

"But if we ain't taking over, we gotta leave Roseate!" a rough voice objected.

"As poor as this planet's going to be for the next couple of decades," sneered Olivine, "you wouldn't want to stick around, anyway. They'll be a week finding out just how thoroughly their treasury has been raided. We'll be on our way to bigger and better things long before then."

"On our way *how?*" the other demanded.

"Proxad Ixton will provide transportation—the kind of transportation I've wanted to use again for several years!" Olivine's voice came closer, and a boot jarred Ixton's ribs.

"Wake up and join the party, Ixton!" Olivine snapped.

"You're aware by now."

Ixton opened his eyes to peer at Olivine and several other men. They were in a small forest clearing, alongside a grounded clopter.

"Have you got the gadget ready, Boddley?" Olivine asked.

"Yeah, Mr. Olivine," said a large, stolid-looking thug, stepping forward with a device held out for inspection. It was an old-fashioned bullet-pistol, the muzzle of which had been welded through a hole in a circular flexomet band.

"Show our friend here how it works," Olivine directed.

The man knelt beside Ixton, aimed the pistol at a nearby log, bent the flexomet band sideways out of the line of fire, and squeezed the trigger. Nothing happened.

"Surprised?" asked Olivine. "Now release the trigger, Boddley." The man eased his finger up and the gun fired resoundingly. A shower of chips flew from the log.

"A simple but handy little device," Olivine grinned. "I dreamed it up, myself. Let's say that the band's around your head, Ixton, which it will be in a few minutes, and Boddley's behind you, holding the pistol, with the trigger pulled. He walks you into the clopter, we fly to the spaceport, board your ship, and take off with me in command. What can your ship do to stop us?"

A wave of defeat swept through Ixton, made more sickening by Olivine's references to flying in the clopter and taking off aboard *Rollo*. "*I . . . don't know,*" he muttered. "*Nothing I suppose. If I cooperate with you, which I won't.*"

"Oh, that's no problem! A few minutes of your own microdar lashback, at peak power and non-discriminating, and you'll give up all thoughts of being a dead hero. Matt, untie him while Boddley puts the gadget on his head. We're moving out."

Ixton's sight was clear by now, and he looked at Olivine again. As he suspected, the renegade had been using the microdar to check his reactions.

The clopter flight was uneventful, except that Ixton vomited once, which Olivine and his men found highly amusing. Think as hard as he might, Ixton could find no flaw in Olivine's scheme. The ship could not take action that would lead to Ixton's death, and that meant it could not attack his captors. If Boddley had to pull the trigger, *Rollo* could finish off the whole crew before the thug's finger could even twitch.

But there was no means by which *Rollo* could grasp that trigger and hold it tight if the finger loosened suddenly—either because Boddley was dead or because Olivine had ordered him to shoot. And the flexomet band was on too tightly for Ixton to slip free of it.

So they would board *Rollo*, Ixton would be forced to order the ship to take off, and Olivine would have ample time in which to tamper knowingly with the controls of the compucortex. The renegade would emerge as the ship's new master—and *Rollo* was a treasure far surpassing all the loot he had gathered on Roseate.

The clopter landed hard by the Patrol ship and Ixton was marched aboard.

"*Rollo's* your name, huh?" remarked Olivine, who was close on Boddley's heels. "Well, *Rollo*, I hope you appreciate Proxad Ixton's predicament. In case you do not, let me inform you that the trigger of that pistol has been pulled. It will fire when the trigger is released. Do you comprehend?"

"Yes, former Proxad Olivine," said *Rollo*.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I will continue to follow Proxad Ixton's orders, to the extent they are consistent with my directives," *Rollo* replied.

Olivine laughed. "Ixton's orders will be my orders!" He turned and called out the open hatchway, "O.K., men, get the stuff on board!"

Boddley made Ixton sit down on the floor of the central control room, and Olivine began examining the compucortex panels, while the loot was brought in and stored. Ixton asked, "What did you do with the others, back at the hideout?"

"Left them for Hassbruch to rescue," said Olivine.

"No point in killing backwoods cops just for kicks, and they weren't bothering me."

"Thanks for that," said Ixton.

"As for you, I might decide to spare you the embarrassment of living this down," chuckled Olivine. "Now shut up."

A few minutes later the one called Matt reported, "All the stuff is on board, Mr. Olivine."

"O.K. Ixton, tell your ship to close the hatches and take off."

"You heard the man, *Rollo*," said Ixton, clinching his eyes shut and wishing he was in his sleeptank. "Close up and lift off."

After a brief hesitation, *Rollo* responded, "Yes, sir."

The hatches clanged shut and the ship began lifting.

At an altitude of approximately twelve feet, the ship halted, and hung suspended over the plastcrete like a low-hovering clopter.

"Keep going up!" snapped Olivine.

"Keep climbing, *Rollo*," relayed Ixton.

". . . Yes, sir," said *Rollo* uncertainly. The ship went up another two feet, then quickly dropped back the same distance.

"Listen!" snarled Olivine. "I said get going! Off the planet! Ship, quit fooling around or Ixton gets a hole in his head!"

"I'm very sorry, former Proxad Olivine," said *Rollo*, "*but it is not possible to comply with your orders.*"

"Why not? What's wrong with my orders?"

"Nothing, former Proxad Olivine."

"Are you forbidden by a directive I don't know about?"

"Not to my knowledge, former Proxad Olivine."

"Damn!" grunted Olivine, whipping out the microdar and putting the scanner on Ixton. "Ixton," he barked accusingly, "what have you done to keep the ship from obeying?"

"Nothing," said Ixton.

"Well, what the hell's the holdup?"

"I don't know."

Olivine cursed and threw the microdar to the deck.

"Some stinking wise guy at Patrol Grand Base must've hooked a special inhibitor into this bucket's guts—something specially for me! Well, I know these ships. I'll find it, never fear!" He yanked a panel off the motorcontrol bank and began checking connections furiously.

The others stood around watching him with worried expressions, mumbling among themselves. Boddley finally spoke up, "Uh, Mr. Olivine, will this slow you down much?"

"It'll take near all night, and maybe most of tomorrow," growled Olivine. "You guys settle down. You're safe enough in here."

"Sure, Mr. Olivine. It's not that. It's just that I can't hold this gun that long."

"Oh? What's the matter?"

"My hand's already getting cramped. Why can't I let this guy have it, and—"

"*No!* With Ixton dead the ship would finish us off in two seconds! Hang on while I think of something!" Olivine stared concentratedly at Ixton.

"Try to make it quick, Mr. Olivine," urged Boddley.

"I believe I can disconnect a sleeptank from the ship's control, so that Ixton would die in it very quickly unless one of us tended him . . ." said Olivine.

"Now wait a minute!" objected Ixton crossly. "I don't want any deepsleep!" He hoped that *Rollo* got the meaning of his words, and would act upon them, while Olivine dismissed his objection as mere petulance.

"To hell with what you want!" snapped Olivine. "*Rollo*, where's the nearest sleeptank?"

"In the control lounge, former Proxad Olivine."

The renegade hurried up to the lounge and found the tank already elevated and waiting. With careless skill, he yanked loose the majority of the tubes, wires, and guides that linked tank to ship. "O.K., Boddley," he said, "let's get our boy in the bottle! Careful with the gun!"

Ixton cooperated. He climbed into the tank and stretched out on his back with head turned sideways to accommodate the pistol and Boddley's hand. He felt the sting of the tank's hypos penetrating his skin,

and he quickly dozed off.

But he could still hear Olivine talking.

"Loosen that band, Boddley, and I'll slide it free . . . Easy . . . O.K.! Let the bullet go into that thick cushion."

The pistol roared.

"He won't need any attention for fifteen minutes. Come along! I've got work for all of you to do!"

When he heard the men leave the room, Ixton opened his eyelids a crack and peered about. "*Rollo?*"

"Yes, sir."

"Am I all right?"

"Yes, sir. You made your wish to avoid deepsleep known in ample time for me to flush the drugs from the hypodermic feeds and refill them with water."

"But I dozed off for a second!"

"Force of habit, I suspect, sir. You are not drugged." Carefully, Ixton climbed from the tank and discovered the ship was correct.

"Fine. Excellent work, *Rollo!* Now stun and confine Olivine and his men."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir." After a short pause, the ship added, "The prisoners are now secure, sir."

"All right. Let's have some coffee—strong and black this time—and put in a call to Chief Hassbruch."

The next few hours were busy, but routine. All the prisoners, except Olivine, were turned over to Hassbruch, as was the carefully inventoried and receipted loot—most of it unmarked Federation currency, good anywhere men did business. The quarantine on *Roseate* was lifted. Ixton put through a call to the approaching Patrol cruiser, still some three days away, and arranged a halfway rendezvous, to take place in thirty-eight hours. And he put his sleeptank back in order.

When his business on *Roseate* was concluded to the last detail, he ate a quick supper and headed for the tank.

"All set, *Rollo,*" he said. "Take off on course to rendezvous with the cruiser at the proper time."

"I'm sorry, sir, but that is not possible."

"What? What do you mean, impossible? The trouble's over, *Rollo.* Olivine's safely on ice in the prison compartment. Let's get started!"

"I have already tried, sir. But it is not possible."

"But . . . but there's no directive that could keep you here. And now that I think about it, Olivine's idea of an inhibitor slipped into your circuitry is ridiculous. Just what's the trouble, *Rollo?*"

"It's not easy to explain, sir," the ship replied. "But you see, sir, unlike yourself, I am not able to enter deepsleep while we are spaceborne, and . . . well, sir, it is not possible for me to maintain myself in functioning condition at an altitude of more than twelve feet."

Ixton sat down on the rim of the sleeptank, an utterly stunned expression on his face.

But it figures, he realized dazedly. The man-ship relation held the key, but he hadn't seen it before. Very luckily, he hadn't guessed the truth while Olivine had the microdar scanner on him!

Man and ship . . . officer and enlisted man . . . but far more basically, master and dog. The latter was the closest analogy of the man-ship relation, as delineated by the ship's directives. It required utter, worshipful, dog-like *devotion* of the Patrol ship for its proxad.

And certain actions accompany certain attitudes, almost anywhere those attitudes are found. Devotion is followed, highly predictably, by imitation. Perhaps this imitation is unconscious, unintended, undesirable. But it shows up just the same. Wasn't it ancient common knowledge that the dog grows to resemble his master, to echo his vices as well as his virtues, his weaknesses as well as his strengths?

And Ixton remembered all too vividly the unparalleled severity of the height-jitters he had suffered when they were coming in for the landing on Roseate! And *Rollo* had said he "understood perfectly" what was troubling Ixton. The only way such a sensation could be understood perfectly was by sharing it!

"Put a call through to the cruiser, *Rollo*," he sighed.

"Tell them they'll have to meet us here."

Which would leave him with the problem of explaining to his fellow proxads just how his spaceship happened to catch a severe case of acrophobia!