



JULES VERNE'S TOMBSTONE AT AMIENS  
PORTRAYING HIS IMMORTALITY

# AMAZING STORIES

## Scientific Fiction

Vol. 6

December, 1931

No. 9

### In Our Next Issue

**POWER**, by Harl Vincent. The destiny of the world depends largely upon power. Man is only a weakling. The falls of Niagara are a giant. And to those who possess and control this thing called power belongs unlimited possibilities for autocratic control of their fellow beings. The days of wind-mills and water-mills are gone. And there is hardly any assurance that our new and latest forms are going to remain forever the best. Our well-known author, for instance, who is definitely interested in the science of electric power, offers some astonishingly interesting possibilities for a certain substitute of our present-day power-making history of the future.

**TUMITHAK OF THE CORRIDORS**, by Charles R. Tanner. It is not necessarily cowardice that makes a people retreat further and further from an enemy which has ruthlessly brought complete destruction and death to thousands. It is sensible caution that comes with experience. But always there is someone—in generations far removed, perhaps—who dares to risk all in an effort to release his people, from the bonds of such enslaving fears. (Crowded out of December issue.)

**THE PLANET OF THE DOUBLE SUN**, by Neil R. Jones. Here is another sequel relating the extraordinary adventures of Professor Jameson, who first started his voyage in a ship of his own construction, in which he was placed in suspended animation and was later rescued when his ship was found, and was at first mistaken for a satellite. Very much more exciting even than its two predecessors.

**THE INEVITABLE CONFLICT**, by Paul H. Lovering. (A Serial in two parts) Part II. In old times the nations of the world were usually ruled by men. Yet there were some ruling Queens. Queen Elizabeth, for instance, governed with an iron hand. And every now and then some woman would be known to do her part in settling the destinies of nations. Now there is a growing tendency to place women on an equal footing with men in the fields of politics. Who can tell how far-reaching these tendencies may become? In the concluding chapters our author tells us.

And other unusual science fiction

### In Our December Issue

#### The Inevitable Conflict

(A Serial in two parts) Part I

By Paul H. Lovering..... 776  
Illustrated by Morcy

#### Pirates of Space

By B. X. Barry..... 799  
Illustrated by Morcy

#### Sky Cops

By Harl Vincent and Chas. Roy Cox..... 818  
Illustrated by Morcy

#### Trial by Television

By Fred Kennedy..... 828  
Illustrated by Morcy

#### What Happened to Professor Stockley P

By E. M. Scott..... 836  
Illustrated by Morcy

#### The Blattids

By Morrison Colladay..... 844  
Illustrated by Morcy

#### The Interplanetary Blues (A Poem)

By Charles Cloukey..... 853

#### What Do You Know?

(Science Questionnaire)..... 853

In the Realm of Books ..... 855

Discussions ..... 855

### Our Cover

this month depicts a scene from the story entitled, "The Inevitable Conflict," by Paul H. Lovering, in which Mowbray's hastily rigged-up machines and his trained men, with the aid of the women from the "Legion," do justice to the faith of Mowbray in a terrific battle for the continued independence of the United States of America, from the Mongolian Empire. Part I published in this issue.

Cover illustration by Morcy

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# Sky Cops

By Harl Vincent and Chas. Roy Cox

Illustration by MOREY

**T**HE life of a patrol sergeant of the Interplanetary Police is no sweet song—any way you look at it. Dangers there are aplenty; long hours of grueling labor; lonesome, monotonous patrols in the blackness of outer space. Often there is death lurking out there in the heavens; occasionally, too, the grim spectre is met near the surface of one of the inhabited planets, Mars, Venus or Terra. But there are compensations—sometimes. Much growling and complaining is to be heard in the rank and file of the I. P., but you never hear of one of them quitting his job. "Once a sky cop, always a sky cop," is their time-honored boast.

Michael Aloysius Dooley, (God help you if you ever called him anything but "Mike"), was a patrol sergeant attached to Station T-9, the ninth I. P. base outside the atmosphere of Terra. Fourteen years he had been on the force, with never a black mark against him. Cited for bravery a dozen times and inordinately proud of the tiny medals he wore hidden beneath the lapels of his coat, Mike still had not advanced beyond the rank of sergeant. That was one of the contributing causes to his periodic outbreaks of growling.

Out-here, ninety thousand miles from his terrestrial home, all days and nights were much the same. The huge sphere that was Station T-9 was always in sunlight—one side of it at least. That was something, too, for three of the terrestrial stations were always in the shadow of the body they guarded. Gloomy jobs they had at those bases! Mike always said he'd quit in a minute if they ever tried to transfer him to one of the dark stations. Darn tootin' he would!

The tiny scout ship that Mike used when on duty was his first and only love. He knew as much about its internal mechanisms as did his mechanic, Joe Tripp, and much of his own time was spent in polishing and lubricating its many parts. For that matter, Mike knew as much about the entire system and workings of the I. P. as any man connected with it; he was like that, thorough, painstaking, studious. He openly boasted that the "Shooting Star," as he called his scout ship, was the fastest in the service. Proved it, too, on more than one occasion. One particular race to the moon was a matter of history, which Mike did in thirty-six minutes flat, at a time when the distance was well over a quarter of a million miles, beat his nearest rival by eight minutes

on that trip, since when his bets had not been covered.

Tonight—it was night by the station chronometer, though the circular window of Mikes' air-lock faced almost directly toward the blinding orb of the sun—he was especially grouchy. Alone in the air-lock which housed the *Shooting Star*, he was going over the hull plates of the little vessel to make sure no joints had been sprung during that last encounter with one of the black smuggling ships of Venus. Satisfied that all was well, he patted the curved side of his beloved vessel and strolled to the window to look around while he nursed his grouch.

For a time, he gazed silently into the velvet blackness of space with its myriad jewels of clear, brilliant light. Tiring of this, he turned to the viewing screen of the ultra-telescope, manipulating its controls to sweep the heavens in a wide arc. He paused when the orb of Venus swung into view, focused it sharply, bringing its surface close and scanning the visible portion for signs of untoward activity. There were none. A touch of the control blurred the planet's image, and he swung the searching ray of the instrument in another direction, caught the dim outlines of that unnamed monster of space, which was the wonder and the nemesis of the I. P. and of the entire system of space navigation.

Further readjustment of the controls brought to view a white blob of matter that seemed something entirely apart from and foreign to the ordinary sights of the heavens. The milky monster of space! A great mass of raw protoplasm, it seemed, writhing in perpetual agonies of tormented motion. At times, flattening to an enormous disc, it seemed almost limitless in width, thousands of miles across. At others, it was a wriggling serpent, its length immeasurable. Always it stretched forth waving tentacles of its mysterious composition, reaching, twining, grasping for whatever might come within its reach. Dreadful energies emanated from its bulk, energies that attracted metallic objects from many miles away, should any such approach it. Woe be to the space ship that came close! Mike shuddered in contemplation of the mystery, as he switched off the power and turned again to the window.

A giant space liner swept into view, paused alongside for a few minutes. Mike amused himself trying to decode the message its turret blinker flashed to the station; but it was secret stuff, and he could only guess

***E**VEN in these days of gangster wars and unexpected and mysterious murders, there are those on the police force who find their jobs dreadfully monotonous. For these men a new and unquestionably exciting life must open up with the establishment of "Sky Cops." Patrolling the air—perhaps even some day interstellar space—will offer plenty of opportunity to adventurous souls who must have excitement to live. That's what there is plenty of in this story—excitement.*



*The black liner was straightening out, now. She had stopped rolling, and great shuddering vibrations transmitted over the steel cables told them she was fighting with all her power to help.*

at its import. Then the huge bulk of the cigar-shaped liner drifted away, and with quick acceleration, drove into the blackness and vanished from view.

Mike turned from the window, stared at his reflection in the mirror over the wash-stand. A mighty honest pair of brown eyes looked back from the glass, wide-set beneath a high forehead that ended where it should, in a thick crop of curly, chestnut hair. Glad he wasn't a baldy like Joe Tripp, anyway! Smile wrinkles showed in the bronzed, leathery countenance, but there were grim lines, too; lines that had dug themselves in as time went on and his record of performances lengthened. Just now he screwed his features into a grimace and voiced his disgust with everything in general.

"Helluva life!" he jeered, stripping off his dungarees and preparing to clean up. "Got myself all steamed up when Cap Larrick was bumped off a year ago, but a lotta good it did me. Thought I'd get his job, sure as shootin', an' they ship in this slick guy, Brown. Even then I thought he was just a fill-in, and I'd soon get what was comin' to me for fourteen years o' hard work. But not the I. P. Brown must have a drag somewhere. Reckon he'll be here for the rest of his life. Nice fat chance for me!"

Mike kicked his greasy clothing into a corner and stretched to his full six feet three. He knew he was as hard as iron. There wasn't a man in the station who could match him with the gloves or on the mat. The new Captain was the easiest of the lot, too.

"Hey, Mike!" came the voice of his mechanic from the inner door, "what's wrong with you? Aren't you ever going to get any sleep?"

"Sure now, I am that," grinned Mike. "Right away, too. What are you doing around so early?"

"Had enough. I've slept five hours since our last trick."

"Go on with your kiddin', you old son-of-a-gun. Always a bear for the hay, eh?" Mike made a grab for the skinny little mechanic, swung him from his feet to an undignified position atop the steel locker.

"Cut that out now!" growled Joe, climbing from his perch. "You big bum! Always tryin' to show how strong you are. I'm not kiddin', either. You gotta hit the hay. You're slated on the big board for the three o'clock patrol."

"Who's teamin' up with me?"

"Brownie himself!"

"Damn!" said Mike, fervently.

Joe grinned delightedly as he ducked the friendly punch aimed at his midsection. Captain Brown had entered the air-lock and was watching them with an amused smile.

"Hello, Cap," grunted Mike, saluting.

"How are you, Sergeant?"

Twenty pounds lighter than Mike and two inches shorter, the Captain still was a fine figure of a man. He wore the uniform of his rank with a dignity that was unmatched by any other office of the force. His keen gray eyes seemed to bore into Mike's very soul and to read his thoughts and feelings. Joe took the occasion to sneak out of the room.

"Did you know," asked the Captain, "that you are slated for the three o'clock patrol with me?"

"Yes. Joe told me."

"Better turn in then. We'll both need sleep. We're going after Rolenski tonight."

"We're what?" demanded Mike. "Say that again!" "Fact," reiterated Brown. "We're going after Rolenski tonight."

Mike brightened visibly. This Rolenski was the most notorious bandit of the solar system, a smuggler of radium and a tough baby if there ever was one.

"Had a heliogram from Headquarters," continued the Captain. "Said that his flagship is leaving the base on the other side of the moon tonight and will land a couple of million dollars worth of radium on Terra."

"Where?" snapped Mike. "Didja get all the dope, Cap? Just where he'll land, I mean."

"Arizona. Out on the desert. Don't worry about it. Go get your sleep now and be ready at a quarter of three. I'll have the map, and everything."

"Worry, hell!" exploded Mike. "I'm tickled pink. I always did want to lock horns with that bozo!"

Captain Brown smiled enigmatically at the sergeant's enthusiasm as he led the way to their cabins.

MIKE was in the mess hall five minutes ahead of time. His eyes glistened in anticipation. Another patrol had just come in, Ferris and his mechanic. They looked all shot.

"Where you guys been?" asked Mike, helping himself to a generous portion of the stew.

"Terra," said Ferris. "Scouting around in the desert. Rotten night down there, brother."

"Yeah? What you looking for in the desert?" Mike was careful not to speak of his own knowledge. The I. P. was strict that way.

"All I know is that Cap told us to keep a sharp lookout for a space ship with five green lights up top. Found it, too."

"Bring it in?" snapped Mike.

"No. Our orders were to report position only. We've got it, on a map the Captain gave us."

"Good work, Ferris," commended the Captain, as he came in and took his place at the head of the table. "Let's have a look at it."

Ferris handed over the map, and Brown scanned it closely. Mike watched him expectantly.

"Well, Mike, we're all set, as soon as we finish our chow." The captain tossed the map to the sergeant, who forgot to eat as he examined its markings.

"Lousy weather down there!" said Ferris.

"We should worry!" grunted Mike, as he resumed eating with much gusto.

Captain Brown laughed. When he was like this, Mike almost admired him. But sometimes he just looked and looked and didn't say a word. These were the times Mike disliked him most, and somehow he was suspicious of him, too. Didn't know why, but he was. Tonight though, everything was jake, and he was glad they were going out together.

Quickly the meal was finished, and the two men made for the berth of the *Shooting Star*.

In the hull of the great sphere that was Station T-9 there were twelve compartments which connected with outer space. Perfect air-locks these were, each with hermetically sealed inner and outer doors and each holding a space ship ready for instant launching. Of the twelve, all excepting one were scouting ships similar to the *Shooting Star*. The twelfth vessel was a cruiser that carried a hundred men and exceptionally heavy armament.

Mike carefully sealed the inner door of the air-lock as they entered. The nose of the *Shooting Star* was against the forward and outer door of the compartment, where its operating levers engaged with the opening mechanisms of the heavy hinged cover which separated them from the vacuum of outer space. He followed the captain into the vessel and there sealed its miniature air-lock before opening the valve which allowed the air to escape from the launching compartment. With the oxygen generators of the little vessel functioning, the hiss of escaping air from its enclosing air-lock worried them not at all.

With the turn of another lever the outer door opened and a brilliant image of the heavens sprang into view in the periscope screen of the *Shooting Star*. Far below them shone the huge green orb of the world they were to visit—Terra. It seemed to fill the heavens at this distance. Mike experienced a sudden pang of homesickness. Long time since he'd had a furlough!

The gravity screens were denaturalized and the *Shooting Star* dropped like a plummet into the depths that terminated at the great uprushing globe that was Terra. Full power on the attractors now and acceleration was terrific. Mike was impatient. At this rate, the ninety thousand miles that separated them from the mother planet would be covered in fifteen minutes, only about half the time it would take them to get down safely through the air that surrounded the earth. That part of the trip could not be speeded up, though. Nature had taken care of the matter of atmospheric friction and no efforts of the scientists had been effective in minimizing it to any great extent.

"Here, Mike," said the captain, extending a flask, "have a drink. You'll need it."

"What you got?"

"Chulco."

Mike never had tasted the fiery distillate of the Martian herb. A few times he had tried the impotent light wines doled out by the terrestrial government. But this Chulco stuff! He's heard of its power.

"Okay, Cap," he growled, "if you say so." But when he tipped up the ornamental container, he was careful not to allow too much of its bitter contents to drain down his throat.

The tiny potion burned his innards with a sudden, overpowering force. Then its effect was gone; his head was clearer than before. He dropped the *Shooting Star* into the earth's atmosphere at a speed that sent her internal temperature to the danger point.

"Never said much to you, Cap," he said, "but I reckon you've guessed how I feel about things. They hurt: a lot, too. Sore'n hell at you for a while."

"That's all right, Mike. Things'll be easier for you after tonight."

The vessel was slipping into the lower levels of Terra's air traffic, encircling the globe at better than a thousand miles an hour. The refrigerating system was being taxed to the utmost, but daylight was fast disappearing as they traveled eastward over the Pacific Ocean. Lower California slipped away beneath them. They followed the Gila River for a few minutes.

Captain Brown opened the ports and soon the hot breath of the desert assailed them. Howling winds drove the fine sands in pelting surges that reached them even at their altitude of more than a thousand feet. Mike was scanning the area with many references to the map.

"There they are, Cap!" he breathed, finally.

Five tiny green lights beckoned to them, five lights in a line that could mean only the topside lights of the vessel they were after.

"Drop alongside," ordered the captain. "We don't want to arouse them."

"Aw," grumbled Mike. "Let's rip 'em open with the disintegrator."

"Not yet. Hold everything until we have a look."

"But that's Rolenski's ship, Cap." Mike spat disgustedly. "You said so yourself."

"I know. Keep your shirt on, though. Maybe we can take him alive."

So Mike circled into the driving wind and dropped the *Shooting Star* to a sweet landing. Something didn't seem quite right to him, but who was he, to question his captain?

It was a tough night on the surface. Mike held tight to his service pistol as they fought their way to the slim vessel that loomed through the swirling sands. One light showed; a circular hatch was open at the side of the vessel. The ship wasn't much larger than the *Shooting Star*.

Suddenly a brilliant beam of blue-white light bathed them in its blinding radiance.

"What the hell?" exclaimed Mike.

A squat, husky figure stepped into the line of vision.

"Put down your pistol!" hissed the captain.

Something was funny here—damn funny. The more he saw of it the less Mike liked it.

"Who's this guy?" demanded the stranger, looking straight at Brown. "We can't have too many in on this deal."

"In on what deal?" snapped Mike, stopping just behind his captain.

"He's all right, Roly." The captain was speaking, and his voice dropped to a whisper. Mike couldn't quite get the rest of it and the grip on the pistol butt tightened.

"What're you guys pullin' off?" he snarled.

The bright glow of a hand flash blinded him. Somebody laughed.

"Everything's okay, Mike," explained the captain. "Just leave this to me. This is Rolenski himself. Never saw you before, so he's a bit wary. Just stick to me, buddy. I gave you a phony line tonight about this smuggling business. Truth is, the whole outfit at T-9's been in on it before, and you'll find Roly damned liberal. Just keep your trap shut and you'll get yours, too."

Speechless, Mike watched as the husky stranger counted off a sheaf of thousand dollar bills. Twenty grand! Cripes—it took a flock of dough to keep Brownie quiet, at that!

"Now, Roly," said the captain, "beat it."

In a flash Mike was at the entrance of the strange space ship. He peered through its air-lock into the control cabin. Evidently Rolenski was alone. Mike blocked the way of the stranger as he endeavored to enter the vessel.

"Not so fast, big boy!" he snarled.

A pair of handcuffs flashed bright in his hands. A sharp click, and one wrist was encased.

"Mike!" shouted Captain Brown, "what the hell are you tryin' to do? Didn't I tell you that we're friends, and that everything's fixed?"

Mike was too busy to answer. This Rolenski was like an eel. He squirmed and fought with the fury of a

caged animal. His free hand caught Mike a blow on the temple that momentarily had him groggy. Then the fireworks began.

"You will, will you?" grunted Mike. "Not this time, baby. There!"

With each jerked-out word he let fly a fist, a fist like a ham. Not for a second did he relinquish his hold on the free end of the bracelets. Brownie was closing in, but Mike wasn't worried about him. That little matter could wait. Snack! Right on the button! That was the last one the squat smuggler needed. He rocked on his heels, slumped to the ground without a moan. There was another click as his free wrist was cuffed.

"Now, damn you," snarled Mike, as he turned to meet the rush of his superior, "we'll finish this business."

But a shrill signal from the *Shooting Star* brought them both up short in their tracks.

"The etherphone!" gasped Cap. "I'll answer it."

"Like hell you will. I'll answer it myself." Mike's right flashed forth once more and the captain measured his length beside the still form of the bandit.

A moment later the victorious sergeant was in the control cabin of his own ship. Headquarters was calling! Cripes! Another ship caught in the milky monster of the heavens! He was to report at once at T-9. But that crew there, were they trustworthy? Cap had said they were all in on this deal of Rolenski's. Well, by God, he'd go back and run this expedition himself. Maybe get fired, but what of it?

He tumbled from the outer hatch of the *Shooting Star* just in time to see that Cap was helping Rolenski into the entrance of his own vessel.

"Hey you!" he yelled. "As you were. You're both prisoners. D'you understand that?" He sprang towards them.

Brown dropped his burden unceremoniously, met the infuriated sergeant half way. His right found an opening, landed fresh on Mike's eye, which rapidly assumed the hue and proportions of a "shiner." It infuriated the sergeant, who swung his left from his shoe tops, caught Brown on the side of the head. He went down, but not out. As he staggered to his feet, he fumbled for his pistol. Mike's hand sought his own. If that was what the skunk wanted, he'd shoot it out with him. But no, he couldn't kill the captain. It just wasn't in the book. Deliberately he aimed low and Brown came down under the shock of the heavy slug as it struck him in the leg. His hands were up now and he was calling for mercy. Mercy! Why, the snake deserved to get it through the guts where it'd do him some good!

What to do? G. H. Q. was calling for the *Shooting Star*. Cap Brown was supposed to command the big cruiser of T-9 on this treacherous trip out into the skies. People, perhaps hundreds of them, were in danger of their lives out there. A horrible death awaited them if their ship could not be dragged from the clutches of that awful monster that lay between the orbits of Venus and Terra. What to do? Cap was crying over there. Damn baby! Suddenly Mike walked over and unlocked Rolenski's hands.

"We'll settle this later," snarled Mike.

First he threw Rolenski in through the air-lock of his own ship, then Cap Brown, who was holding his knee and moaning with pain, after him.

"Damn swine?" raged Mike. "Got to let you go—for now. The I. P. has one duty more important than

bringing in smugglers and traitors. Lives first! There's a ship out there in space, being sucked into the milky monster! You know what that means, Cap? Y'oughta be there yourself to run the cruiser when she goes out. But you won't be! I'm going to do it. And believe me, I'll get you two birds later, if I have to scout the whole damn solar system. Now beat it!"

He slammed the outer cover of Rolenski's air lock and raced for the *Shooting Star*. A quick glance into the mirror showed an eye that was badly swollen and discolored, but still functioning. That would have to wait. There was a job to be done. He yanked his vessel into the air, started the return journey.

Station T-9 was ablaze with light when he reached it, but all compartment covers were closed excepting his own. The *Shooting Star* slipped into her berth with the ease that only an expert pilot can secure. In a moment the outer cover was closed and Mike's manometer showed that air pressure was filling the compartment. He tumbled into the outer space, while there was still not more than fifteen inches of mercury showing on the column. But a quick gasp filled his lungs with the rare air and he tore at the bolts of the inner door with one hand, his pistol in the other.

The entire force awaited him in the corridor. Joe Tripp was there, and Ferris, Trank, Davis—the whole bunch.

"Where's Cap?" asked Joe.

"Never mind Cap!" roared Mike. They all thought he had suddenly gone haywire, but he was waving that pistol in a determined manner. "Into the cruiser, all of you!" he barked. "I'm in charge of this trip. The first guy that interferes gets it in the middle and I don't mean maybe. Get going, now!"

"Easy, Mike," whispered Joe. "What's wrong with you?"

"Shut up!" snapped the sergeant. "What I said goes for you, too!"

He prodded his friend with the muzzle of his automatic. A swell bunch of buddies he had! In with the biggest crook in the universe! Well, they'd go straight for one job, anyway. He'd see to that.

"But Mike," persisted Joe, "what's it all about?"

The cruiser was out in the blackness of space, now, her crew sullen but tractable under the menace of Mike's weapon. On, on they drove, straight for the sun's flaming orb.

"You know what's the matter," grated Mike. "It's that damn Rolenski. Cap told me. Every mother's son of you is in on the rotten deal. Knew he was landing a flock of radium tonight and letting him get away with it."

"Aw, Mike, you're crazy. Brownie's a damn liar. You ought to know your own pals better than that." His tone was sincere, and the sergeant regarded him thoughtfully.

They were at the disc of the detectoscope. The operator searched the heavens astern for signs of reinforcements. The cruisers from T-3 and T-7 should be with them. G. H. Q. was calling again—heliographing now—and asking for their position. Then, there in the disc, they saw the T-3 cruiser, not a thousand miles away.

"I don't know," said Mike doubtfully. "Maybe I'm nuts, but I saw this Rolenski slip twenty grand to the captain. They offered to let me in along with the rest of you. Said I'd be taken care of, too."

"What'd you say?"

"You know damn well what I said. I pinched 'em both."

Another message was coming through from G. H. Q. The T-7 cruiser had been called off the job; not working right. A flash on the infra-red ray receiver showed a strange call. It was from the foundering vessel; they had given up hope. A hundred and ninety passengers on board, they reported.

"Boy, this is a tough job!" exclaimed Mike. "Hope we're in time!"

"Sure we are," assured Joe. "But Mike, lay off the suspicions of the outfit, will you?"

Joe looked at him so pleadingly that it seemed ludicrous all at once. Mike laughed suddenly; boisterously. Darned if he didn't believe the lad.

"Guess I was wrong, Joe," he admitted. "Cap's the crook, and a liar, too. Tried to rope me in by saying the whole crew is in on the deal. Cripes! I'll bet they're plenty sore at me!"

"Naw," grinned the overjoyed mechanic. "They're just hurt and puzzled. They'd go through the sun's corona for you, Mike. Think you could have bulldozed 'em single-handed if they wouldn't? Or if they really were crooks?"

Mike smiled broadly now. Pretty good old universe after all! He felt much better, squeezed Joe's arm.

"Go tell 'em I'm sorry," he whispered. "But I'm still boss of the outfit just the same, see?"

"Sure Mike!"

Joe was gone in a flash. The detectoscope operator grinned understandingly.

The T-3 cruiser was alongside now, and both vessels were accelerating to the limit of human endurance. G. H. Q. was calling again, and asking for personal conversation with Captain Brown. Mike winked at the heliograph operator and ordered him to report the captain ill and himself in charge. Approval came instantly from G. H. Q. Mike was sitting on top of the world, though millions of miles from it.

"Every man jack of the outfit is tickled pink," averred Joe, as he returned to the control room. "Told 'em all, and they'll all stick by you."

Joe was examining Mike's eye.

"Cap have anything to do with that?" he asked.

"He had everything to do with it," said Mike, ruefully.

"No foolin'! What'd you do to him?"

"Plenty. But I'll tell you about that later. We're getting in close, now. Here's the monster in the screen. Look!"

They were at the forward periscope. A weaving mass of silvery whiteness could be seen near the centering lines on the bright disc. The imperiled liner was there, too, a sleek, black shape that carried no topside markings. A Venerian vessel, undoubtedly.

The milky monster of space was something that struck terror to all voyagers who sighted it. A vast island of sickly whiteness that swung in a sluggish orbit between Venus and Terra. An unexplained phenomenon—alive it seemed to be—that had accounted for several of the great interplanetarian liners. Sucked them in, that's what it did! Reached out with long slimy arms, not unlike an octopus, and with terrible energies that drew the victims to its clammy bosom willy-nilly. No one could keep track of its movements, either. Orbit changed

from time to time, unaccountably. The cream of the scientific talent of three planets had given up the problem of solving its mysterious nature. Of the many vessels known to have been drawn into its influence, only one had escaped. But that did not alter the present situation. The effort must be made.

An operator's voice came in over the etherphone from the imperiled liner. Panic-stricken, he was. The vessel, he reported, was doomed. They had full repulsion on; anti-gravity energy and all propulsion energy as well; but all to no avail. Steadily they were being drawn closer to the monster that now loomed so close in the screen of the cruiser's periscope.

Mike took the controls and signalled the cruiser from T-3 to stand by. He noted that the mysterious energies of the monster already were gripping his vessel. They were swinging in toward its menacing bulk with ever-increasing speed. The black ship from Venus was turning over slowly as the conflict of its own energies wrenched frame and hull plates.

The sun was eclipsed by the monster now, but its light showed through in eerie streaks that seemed to light up with the fires of the hot lava pools of Mercury. Great tentacles oozed forth from its billowing surface and writhed in apparent eagerness to engulf the prey that was now so close. In the control room of the cruiser, strange pranks were played by orange brush discharges induced by the energies emanating from the mass. Every knob and lever glowed with the awesome light and Mike found the energy control handwheel growing warm in his hands.

He was discussing the situation now with Captain Presser of the T-3 crew. They were in desperate straits themselves. As quickly as he could do so, with any regard for safety at all, Mike maneuvered the cruiser to a point near the black liner which was rolling and twisting in the grip of the energies of the milky monster. Captain Presser's ship was standing by nobly, and both vessels were using full gravity repulsion to maintain safe distance from that terrible attracting power.

Two huge metal cups were drifting from the side of the T-9 cruiser now; their cables were quickly snapped taut as they were drawn toward the writhing sea of whiteness. The motors sang as the cables slipped rapidly through their hermetically sealed hull tubes.

"Easy now, Dooley," came the voice of Captain Presser from the etherphone. "When you get them in contact with the liner, apply the juice gradually or they'll rip off the hull plates."

"Yeah, I know," said Mike. "If we can't pull her we'll try and hold her, while you go after those nearest tentacles with the disintegrating ray. All ready now!"

Two miles of cable had been paid out and the cups that now seemed so tiny at the ends of the two slender lines were wavering near the hull of the black liner. Mike was watching through the telescope as he gave word for the application of the energy. He saw the cups draw together due to their mutual attraction. Then they were clamped to the side of the twisting vessel. Once, twice, the cables wrapped around the rolling hull, then came a tug that shook the cruiser from stem to stern.

"Give her the works!" called Mike. "Pull!"

Back in the power room the bell clanged as Joe relayed the order and the engineer ran up his generators to full power. Mightily the cruiser strained.

The black liner was straightening out, now. She had stopped rolling, and great shuddering vibrations transmitted over the steel cables told them she was fighting with all her power to help. Still the distance indicator showed they were losing ground. The speed of the black liner in her plunge toward the monster had been greatly reduced, but still the distance between them was decreasing. Slowly, ever so slowly it seemed to Mike, the two ships were drawn together. But still they were moving in toward that grim certainty of annihilation that lay in the horrid breast of the milky monster.

Dozens of slender tentacles now reached for the liner, their weaving actions ceasing as they stretched to their full length. A matter of seconds now and their tips would contact. Mike thought of the high explosive charge that lay in the magnetic tube forward. He turned the nose of the cruiser slightly and sighted along the slender direction finder of the weapon.

The liner was turning now, under the influence of the cruiser's movements. The cables still held taut, but the change in position was communicated to the black vessel. The trip of the magnetic gun was blistering his fingers, but Mike had lost all consciousness of pain. He pulled it quickly when the cross-hairs of the telescopic sight were where he wanted them, just missing the hull of the black liner. He dimly realized that there was a recoil.

His vision was obscured by the spouting whiteness of a tremendous upheaval in the white mass below the liner. For a moment he thought their cables had snapped. The needle of the distance indicator was moving forward now; they were drawing away from the monster. The liner was safe. He could see it dangling at the end of the cables, firmly held by the magnetic anchors.

"Good work, Dooley!" Presser's voice came to him through the etherphone speaker. But he gave it little heed, for suddenly the indicator swung back, showed him they had gained almost nothing. They were actually slipping back again, now.

The surface of the monster contorted violently, writhing spasmodically with the expanding and contracting motions of a swimming jelly-fish. Mike could see the crater he had blown in the nasty white thing filling in rapidly. What unnatural energies it held! He was thinking of the old law of the mutual attraction of bodies. Directly as the product of their masses—inversely as the square of the distance between them. But this thing! No natural law could be applied to its forces. It was alive—viciously, eternally alive! The heat in the control cabin was sickening him. He saw from the corner of his eye that Joe had slumped weakly to the floor and was breathing with difficulty.

"Presser!" he called into the etherphone. "Give it a taste of the ray!"

Mike was seeing hazily through a blood red film that covered his eyes. The cabin was filled with flickering lights, set up by the radiant energies of the monster. It was incredible that such a thing could be! But here it was and they were fighting it, desperately and hopelessly. The ribs of the cruiser creaked under the abnormal strains.

He tried to communicate with the liner, but got no response. Evidently her apparatus was paralyzed—etherphone, infra-red ray, heliograph and all. Presser was driving his vessel in closer, now. He'd be caught, too, if he wasn't careful. The square of the distance!

A thin beam of dazzling light shot forth from the nose of Presser's ship; contacted with the heaving billows of white below the liner. It traced a smoking black line as it traveled forward and back over the writhing milkiness. A muddy pool appeared and the whiteness receded with twisting streamers of its material flung far from the surface. Octopus arms waving wildly and reaching out into the vacuum. They'd get 'em yet! All three of the puny, man-made vessels eventually would be drawn in. Drawn in and crushed. These squirming feelers would creep through the torn hull plates and ooze along the passages, reaching for and absorbing their helpless bodies. The disintegration ray was hopelessly inadequate.

Presser had fired another high explosive into the monster, and for a minute they made progress; drew slightly farther away from its seething surface. Then they were slipping back again, slowly, but inexorably. Someone was stumbling across the cabin floor, cursing horribly. Mike heard him fall to the floor plates. He knew his crew had been, for the most part, overcome by radiations. He was almost as certain of the fate of the crew in Presser's vessel, as he watched their maneuverings through the thick glass of the forward ports.

Then, just as everything seemed lost, a slim shape darted swiftly across his line of vision and headed for the maelstrom of whiteness. A tiny ship it was, not unlike and scarcely larger than an I. P. scout vessel. Five green lights in a line showed topside.

"Rolenski!" said Mike, aloud. "What the devil is he doing here?"

In amazement he followed the movements of the little ship as it rushed in and cut between the black liner and the boiling surface of the monster, a brilliant fan-ray of red trailing astern.

"The heat ray!" gasped Mike. "He's got a heat ray generator!"

The red ray seared the surface of the monster with devastating effect. Its tentacles subsided at the point of contact, some of them vanishing in complete dissolution. A space was cleared away beneath the liner, a large area that blackened and charred rapidly. Presser joined in with his D-ray, and the fury of the combined attack was making itself felt. Mike hurled another shell from the magnetic gun, adding to the destruction.

"Presser," he called into the etherphone, "come alongside and drop your cables. We'll be able to pull her out, together."

"It's too late." Presser's voice was very weak. "We're lost, all of us!"

"Lost, hell!" snapped Mike. "Can't you see that little ship out there rippin' the guts out o' the monster? Snap into it!"

He held his breath waiting for the reply. Lot of nerve he had speaking like that to Captain Presser, when he was only a flying sergeant. But he knew that Presser was weakening and needed to be bolstered up. His own head was clearing rapidly.

"Okay, Dooley." Presser's voice came meekly, barely more than a whisper.

The T-3 cruiser lurched into a change of direction, came alongside. Mike felt sorry for her commander. He'd been pretty close to those awful radiations down there.

"Attaboy!" he called into the etherphone. "How're you holding out?"



"Crew's mostly down," said Presser, "but I think we'll make it."

Mike saw the magnetic anchors drift from Presser's ship. Swiftly they dropped toward the hull of the black liner; took hold hesitantly, though, as if the controlling operator was uncertain in his movements. A jar that shook his own vessel told Mike the strain had been relieved by an additional pull.

"Not too fast, now, Presser," he cautioned.

But the etherphone was dead. There was no reply. Barely accomplishing his purpose, Presser had succumbed.

The extra pull was helping a lot. Mike knew his full power was on, and could do nothing except to reassure himself that the control was in its maximum position. The needle of the distance indicator hesitated and stopped its motion. The forces were exactly in balance.

Then down below the tiny ship with the green lights circled again, spraying the awfulness with its fan-ray. Mike was filled with admiration for the stranger's courage. Yet he had sworn to get him, and get him he would. Afterwards.

The indicator needle was wavering now. Would it advance or recede? Crazy he cast about for some means of increasing the pull against the monster's might. Only a little now and the trick would be done! Frantically he tugged at the reloading mechanism of the magnetic gun. Again and again he pressed its trip and watched as the high explosive tore gaping wounds in the sea of white. A swift glance at the needle again. Thank God, they were receding now! It was the end—victory. Mike's senses deserted him.

ONLY for a few moments was his mind a blank. He fought desperately to come out of it, gripping the hot controls with the tenacity of a drowning man. He forced his lids open and shook his head to clear it. God,—they had won! The distance from the monster was widening rapidly, six thousand miles a minute, Presser's ship was reeling drunkenly at the ends of her dangling cables. Still with the anchors glued to the black liner's hull, but entirely out of control. Have to be careful now and not snap those cables.

He tried the etherphone—all the means of communication—but there was no reply, either from the black liner or from the cruiser from Station T-3. The tiny vessel, Mike noted in the detectoscope disc, which had been of so much help, was drawing away from the monster and approaching him. As he came up, Captain Brown's voice reached him through the ether.

"Mike," he called, cautiously, "are you there?"

"Yeah, I'm here," growled Mike. "I'll be here 'til we land this liner, you damn traitor, but I'll be on your trail as soon as I've had a minute's rest. I gotta thank you for helping us out just now, but I warn you. I'll get you and your crooked partner if it's the last thing I ever do."

"Do you know what ship this is you just rescued, Mike?"

"How the hell should I know?" demanded the sergeant. "No top markin'!"

"Then listen a minute," Cap's voice was wheedling. "You're towing Rolenski's flagship. There's millions in radium aboard. He'll take—"

"He'll take nothin'," cut in Mike. "No wonder you two birds were so damn helpful. An' if you think you'll

take the ship away from me, try an' do it, that's all. You'll go to the hoosegow along with the rest of the scum."

Imagine Cap having the nerve to try something like that. Mike was raging. But Cap's wheedling voice was coming in again on the etherphone. The little vessel with the green lights was very close now.

"Keep your shirt on, Mike," he pleaded. "Rolenski says he'll cut you in for a full third of the swag if you'll release the liner. Listen to reason, man; you'll be independently wealthy. The I. P. don't know anything about it, or whose ship it is."

Joe Tripp was stirring into consciousness where he lay on the floorplates. He was awakened to the full by the roar of rage turned loose by Mike. He sat up suddenly and watched the big fellow as he ran to the operating panel of the stun-ray. The quick whine of a high-speed generator rose to shrill pitch and was gone above the limit of audibility.

Mike sighted along another tube and jerked a lever. A vicious stream of violet light shot forth from the nose of the cruiser and struck fair against the hull of the tiny vessel of the green top lights.

"There, damn you!" grated Mike. "Guess that'll fix you, you double-crossin' skunk! You and Rolenski. We've got the whole dirty gang of you, now!"

The little ship drifted helplessly and the etherphone ceased operating. All mechanisms on the small vessel had been paralyzed by the ray, as had its occupants. It was an instrument that was used by the I. P. only in extreme emergencies. Mike felt this was the time, if ever, to make use of it.

Swiftly he maneuvered the cruiser so that it made contact with the hull of the little ship at the point where a magnetically-operated grappling mechanism was attached. He pressed a button and the small ship was prisoner to the large one, riding its hull like a parasite fish to its host.

Joe smiled weakly in approval.

"Been going places and doing things while I've been out, eh, big boy?" he said. "What's it all about?"

"Just you wait, buddy," grinned Mike. "The fire-works are coming. Get busy now and see if you can bring the rest of the crew around."

NOW that they were millions of miles away from the awful radiations of the monster, Mike noted signs of returning consciousness on Presser's cruiser. She was under control again.

The black liner had been reeled in close, and was being towed by the cruiser from T-9. The etherphone was busy between the two I. P. vessels, but still no response was obtainable from the rescued liner. Evidently she was completely crippled; possibly her entire crew had been killed. At any rate, the supply of radium was aboard, and Rolenski was where he could not get hold of it.

Mike was jubilant, but he begged Presser not to report to G. H. Q. until they reached the station and had all prisoners under lock and key. Presser would have agreed to anything just then, for he gave full credit to Mike for the success of the entire expedition.

It was a quick trip to Station T-9, but much labor awaited them when they arrived. Many of the members of the crews of both ships were still very sick men from their experience. There was the problem of landing the

crippled liner in the great receiving lock of the station and of putting her entire crew of cutthroats under arrest should they be found alive.

Eventually the landing was made successfully, and the outer hatches of the huge receiving lock were closed. Air was admitted to the inner chamber and the crews of the I. P. vessels emerged through their manholes.

The main receiving lock was a great domed chamber where half a dozen of the cruisers or three of the largest liners might be accommodated. Its interior was brilliantly lighted and the air seemed fresh and sweet to the exhausted men who disembarked.

Mike wasted no time in dragging Captain Brown and Rolenski from their little ship. Both had recovered somewhat from the effects of the sun-rays, but were still groggy when they were handcuffed together. They offered no resistance, standing meekly by while the crews of the I. P. ships broke into the main manhole of the black vessel.

One by one the surly outlaws were brought into the light by Presser's and Mike's men, and disarmed. A tough lot they were. None of them had suffered seriously from the grueling experience with the milky monster, but they knew when they were caught, and seemed ready to face the music.

"Now," said Mike, "when the entire hundred and ninety were herded together, 'we'll communicate with G. H. Q. Fine lot we've got here, Presser, with the big chief, himself, thrown in for good measure."

"You mean Rolenski?" asked Presser. "Where is he, Dooley?"

"Here!" Mike jerked roughly at the stocky man who was handcuffed to Captain Brown.

Presser advanced toward him, pulled his cap from over his eyes.

"You, Rolenski?" he exclaimed. He moved his head from side to side, peered into the smuggler chief's face from all angles. "Why, seems to me I've seen you before."

"Guess you have, Captain Presser," smiled the heavy-set man from between lips that were still swollen from his encounter with Mike in the desert. "But before we discuss things, it might be a good idea to take these bracelets off me and put them on that tall fellow over there—the sixth one from this end."

Mike's brain was in a whirl. He didn't get it at all.

But the tall fellow indicated by the stranger, realizing that he had been exposed in his true colors, galvanized into action, dropped swiftly to the floor and was crawling from amongst his fellow prisoners. Pandemonium broke loose in the receiving lock.

The real Rolenski was out from the ring of guards now, and they dared not fire on him for fear of endangering members of their own force who were all around. In an instant he was at the open door of one of the scout air-locks.

One chance in a million and he had taken it! No wonder they called him the iron-nerved smuggler! It was inconceivable that he should get away with it, but there he was, scrambling through the circular opening. A dozen automatics spoke in unison. But Rolenski was inside and the cover was swinging home. Once he clamped it, he'd be able to get away in the scout ship that was waiting inside.

Mike was across the intervening space in a bound. Struggling with the king of crooks for control of that

swinging door! Powerful hands gripped him and hauled him through. His head struck a hard object and he fell to the floor. Hazily it came to him that the door was clanging to its seat. Rolenski was bolting it from the inside. Then Mike dragged himself to his knees, grabbed the man's legs with desperate clutch, endeavoring to trip him up. He was in for the battle of his life.

The suddenness of the happening left consternation among the officers of the I. P. who had been shut out by the slamming of the air-lock door. There was nothing they could do—in time. The thick steel wall and the thicker door would resist anything save acetylene torches or fusing beams. That would take too long.

Not a sound could be heard from within the air-lock. There were chuckles of enjoyment from the prisoners, but the guards were keeping them in check. It was bad enough that their leader had gotten away.

In Mike's weakened condition he'd be no match for the lanky giant he had followed. A blow from a wrench, a stiff uppercut probably, and he'd be out. Rolenski had a clear path for his getaway—and in a vessel of the I. P.!

"Sergeant Ferris!" boomed Captain Brown, who was first to recover from the general astonishment, "Into your ship—quick! After him!"

Ferris dashed for his own air-lock, but halted in surprise as he saw that the door which had so recently closed, was opening. It swung wide and a limp figure was pushed through to fall heavily to the floor of the receiving lock. It was Rolenski. What a man Mike Dooley was!

Still able to walk, the sergeant dragged himself through the air-lock after the vanquished smuggler chief and staggered across the floor. With a stiffening of his body and a jerky motion of his right arm, he saluted Captain Brown. Mike was battered almost beyond recognition.

"Got him, Cap!" he muttered.

Captain Presser, of T-3 caught him as he fell.

**H**OURS later, Mike awakened in a snowy cot of the dispensary of Station T-9. He turned his head, wonderingly, stared straight into the smiling eyes of Cap Brown, who lay on the next cot. Astride a stool, between them, sat Captain Presser.

"Captain Brown," said Mike, penitently, "I'm sorry about the bullet in your leg. But what could I do? You hand me a line of coke, and maul hell outa me besides. How come? For cripes sake, tell me."

Brown laughed, winked broadly at the stocky stranger who had stamped into the room while Mike was talking.

"Suppose," suggested the newcomer, "you let me tell you."

"Say," interrupted Presser, "I know you now. You're Colonel Roland. I haven't seen you for ten years. What are you doing here?"

"Several things," smiled the Colonel. "But this haul is just as big a surprise to me as it is to the rest of you. I didn't come here to nab Rolenski, but to get certain information. I'll have to hand it to you, Mike!" He held out his hand. "You're the——"

"Then you're not sore," said Mike, grasping the outstretched hand, "over that beating I gave you?"

"You're darn right I'm sore," grinned the Colonel, "in every spot you hit me. But I'm not angry, if that's what you mean."

"Well I'll be damned!" said Mike, fervently.

Captain Brown chuckled, but it turned to a groan as he moved his position. That leg was getting mighty stiff and sore.

"How'd you know," demanded Mike, suddenly, "that was the smuggler's ship out there?"

"Picked up a message in their code," explained Roland, "after you left us flat. G. H. Q. didn't know it, for we had the only decoder on my ship that was set for their particular code."

Mike raised himself, to lean on the elbow, seemed to become aware, for the first time that his hands were tightly wrapped in smelly bandages.

"What happened to the gang?" he asked.

"All locked up—for keeps. Rolenski is in the prison hospital with four broken ribs and a fractured skull, not to mention a smashed nose and an ear that will forever resemble a pancake. What'd you hit him with?"

"Everything I had," laughed Mike. "But for cripes sake, go on and tell me about this deal you and Cap pulled—"

"Oh, that," interrupted the Colonel, "was for the good of the service. We had to do it—orders from G. H. Q."

"You mean," snapped Mike, "you did it deliberately—to see if I could be bought off?"

"Of course," said Roland. "Headquarters sent me out here for that very purpose, to give you the supreme test for loyalty and integrity, and find out whether you're fit to be in the service. The stage was carefully set, then you were brought on and not only allowed to see Captain Brown taking money, but invited to share in it. Had you done so, we would have known you were unfit—"

"Seems to me," burst out Mike, suddenly chagrined that he had not suspected the trap, "that you could find better use for your time than gallivantin' around over the universe tryin' to make suckers out of flyers."

"When there are promotions to be made," smiled Roland, "*somebody* in the I. P. has to do it. And there was a job open, a big one, something that required the best man in the service. There's a new department being organized—Bureau of Supervisory Control—jurisdiction over all liners in transit. You're Major Dooley, now, Mike, in charge of the new department."

"Who, me?" blustered Mike.

"You," said Roland. "Headquarters confirmed the appointment as soon as they received the report made by Captain Brown and myself. Congratulations!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Mike. "Cripes, but ain't this a great life, bein' a sky cop?"

THE END