

L. RON HUBBARD



*The
Lieutenant
Takes
the Sky*

GALAXY
P R E S E N T S

Chapter One

IT was dark in the prison; too dark to see the rats that fought for breadcrumbs before the door. Aiming by sound alone, Mike Malloy threw a savage shoe. There was a squeak of protest and the hurried patter of the retreat.

“Why the hell did I do that?” said Mike to himself. “I can’t eat the stuff.”

He groped for his shoe across the pave worn smooth by centuries of polishing by the restless condemned. At last he sat back in the corner, the straw damp beneath him, and put his shoe on again.

The rats came forth anew, but with more caution. Soon, reassured, they were battling over the crumbs again.

“You guys are lucky,” said Mike Malloy. “If there was some way I could reincarnate in reverse to a rat and go out under that door . . .” He sighed deeply and was silent. But the place was too still, and he hid his creeps by speaking anew. “Rats, I’ll give you some advice. Never sock a colonel, no matter how badly he needs it. And for that matter, rats, never sock a lieutenant colonel. And I might add that it is also unlucky to swab a deck with a general’s aide. It gets his clothes dirty and he doesn’t like it.”

With this caution he subsided.



*"Rats, I'll give you some advice. Never sock a colonel,
no matter how badly he needs it."*

A sound came throbbing into the cell; a plane droned high in the Moroccan blue. It brought melancholy to Mike Malloy. It was the sound of freedom, the sound of excitement and clean sun on flashing wings.

“If I had it to do all over again,” he sighed, “I . . . hell, there’s no use to lie about it. I’d sock the colonel and the lieutenant colonel and his aide just the same.”

The rats grew quiet at the sound of his voice and then fell to on the banquet once more.

“Let that be a lesson to you,” said Mike. “Don’t lie, always be honest and upright, thank God for your blessings, and check your engine before you take off. Never argue with your superiors and be a good soldier in all things, and someday,” he said impressively, “someday you’ll be where I am. That, my furry friends, is the secret of success. Once I was a private . . .”

Boot beats sounded in the corridor and Mike, though he had no hope, sat alertly listening. Arms grounded with a rhythmic thud and a key grated.

A corporal, looking satanic, lifted his lantern to the height of his head and studied the cell, trying to locate Mike.

Mike got up. He bowed courteously. “Gentlemen, you honor me. Come in by all means, and have some crumbs with the rest of the rats.”

“*Sacré nom d’un cochon . . .*” sputtered the corporal.

“I didn’t call you pigs,” said Mike. “I said ‘rats.’ Come, my good fellow. The general has, of course, sent for me to extend his apologies.”

The corporal blinked rapidly. “*M’sieu le capitaine*, you astound me! How is it that you knew?”

Mike found that it was his turn to blink, and he did so. “You mean . . . ?” he gaped.

“Why, but yes. The general is very urgently requesting your presence immediately. But I cannot understand how you . . .”

“Huh,” said Mike, “there’s a catch to this someplace. Last time I heard from the army, I was outward bound to a penal battalion. How come the sudden change of heart?”

“*M’sieu le capitaine*, I am but a corporal of the armies of France. The policy of generals—”

“What?” said Mike. “They don’t consult you? But come, my favorite rodent, lead me forward—though I’m not sure but what it would be smarter to stay where I am.”

He stepped into the files and the corporal barked commands and they moved off.



Mike Malloy