

# Danger Moon

by Frederik Pohl (as by James MacCreigh)

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An A\NN/A Preservation Edition.

[Notes](#)

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STEVE TEMPLIN came out of the airlock into Hadley Dome and looked around for someone to blow off steam on. Templin was fighting mad—had been that way for three days now, ever since he was ordered to report for this mysterious mission on the Moon.

Templin stripped off his pressure suit and almost threw it at the attendant. “I’m looking for Ellen Bishop,” he growled. “Where can I find her?”

The attendant said deferentially, “Miss Bishop’s suite is on Level Nine, sir. Just below the solarium.”

“Okay,” grouched Templin, walking off.

“Just a second, sir,” the attendant called after him. “You forgot your check. And who shall I say is calling, please?”

Templin took the metal tag and jammed it in the pocket of his tunic. “Say nothing,” he advised over his shoulder. “I’m going to surprise her.”

He stared contemptuously around the ornate lobby of Hadley Dome, then, ignoring the waiting elevator, headed for the wide basalt stairway that led upstairs. With the force of gravity here on the Moon only about one sixth as powerful as on the surface of the Earth, an elevator was a particularly useless and irritating luxury. It was fit, Templin thought only for the kind of washed-out aristocrats who could afford to chase thrills for the five hundred dollars a day it cost them to live in Hadley Dome. Templin, a heavyweight on his home planet, weighed little over thirty-five pounds on the Moon. He bounded up the stairs in great soaring leaps, eight or ten steps at a time.

On the ninth level he paused, not even winded, and scowled about him. All over were the costly trappings of vast wealth. To Templin’s space-hardened mind, Hadley Dome was a festering sore-spot on the face of the Moon. He glowered at the deep-piled Oriental carpet on the floor, the lavish murals that had been painted on the spot by the world’s highest-priced artists.

Someone was coming down the long hall. Templin turned and saw a dark, solidly-built man coming toward him in the peculiar slow-motion walk that went with the Moon’s light gravity. Templin stopped him with a gesture.

“I’m looking for Ellen Bishop,” Templin repeated wearily. “Where’s her room?”

THE DARK man stopped and looked Templin over in leisurely fashion. Judging by the gem-studded belt buckler that adorned his brilliantly colored shorts, he was one of the Dome’s paying guests...which meant that he was a millionaire at the least. He said in a cold, confident voice: “Who the devil are you?”

Templin clamped his jaw down on his temper. Carefully he said, "My name is Templin. Steve Templin. If you know where Ellen Bishop's room is, tell me; otherwise skip it."

The dark man said thoughtfully, "Templin. I know that name—oh, yes. You're that crazy explorer, aren't you? The one who's always hopping off to Mercury or Venus or some other planet."

"That's right," said Templin. "Now look, for the last time—"

"What do you want to see Ellen Bishop about?" the dark man interrupted him.

Templin lost control. "Forget it," he flared. He started to walk past the dark man, but the man held out his arm and stopped him. Templin halted, standing perfectly still. "Look, mister," he said. "I've had a tough day, and you're making me mad. Take your hand off my arm."

The dark man said angrily, "By heaven, I'll have you thrown out of the Dome if you don't watch your tongue! I'm Joe Olcott!"

Templin deliberately shook the man's arm off. The dark man growled inarticulately and lunged for him.

Templin side-stepped easily. "I warned you," he said, and he brought his fist up just hard enough to make a good solid contact with the point of Olcott's jaw. Olcott grunted and, grotesquely slowly in the light gravity, he collapsed unconscious on the carpeted floor.

A gasp from behind told Templin he had an audience. He whirled; a girl in the green uniform of a maid was frozen in the doorway of one of the rooms, one hand to her mouth in an attitude of shock.

Templin saw her and relaxed, grinning. "Don't get upset about it," he told her. "He was asking for it. Now maybe *you* can tell me where Ellen Bishop's room is?"

The maid stammered, "Y-yes, sir. The corner suite, at the end of the corridor."

"Thanks."

The maid hesitated. "Did you know that that was Mr. Joseph Olcott?" she asked tentatively.

Templin nodded cheerfully. "So he told me." In a much improved frame of mind he strolled down to the door the maid had indicated. He glanced at it disapprovingly—it was carved of a single massive piece of oak, which was rare treasure on the treeless, airless moon—but shrugged and rapped it with his knuckles.

"Come in," said a girl's voice from a concealed loudspeaker beside the door, and the door itself swung open automatically. Steve walked in and discovered that he was in a well-furnished drawing room, the equal of anything on Earth.

From behind a huge desk a girl faced him. She was about twenty, hair black as the lunar night, blue eyes that would have been lovely if they had any warmth.

Templin looked around him comfortably, then took out a cigarette and put it in his lips. The chemically-treated tip of it kindled to a glow as he drew in the first long puff. "I'm Steve Templin," he said. "What do you want to see me about?"

A TRACE of a smile curved the corners of the girl's red mouth. "Sit down, Mr. Templin," she said. "I'm glad you're here."

Templin nodded and picked out the chair closest to the desk. "I'm not," he said.

“That’s hardly flattering.”

Steve Templin shrugged. “It isn’t intended to be. I went to work for your father because I liked him and because he gave me a free hand. After he died and you took over, I renewed my contract with the company because it was the only way I saw to keep on with my work on the Inner Planets. Now—I don’t know. What do you want with me here?”

Ellen Bishop sighed. “I don’t know,” she confessed. “Maybe if I knew, I wouldn’t have had to cancel your orders to go back to Mercury. All I know is that we need help here, and it looks like you’re the only one who can provide it.”

Steve asked non-comittally, “What kind of help?”

The girl hesitated. “How long have you been out of touch with what’s going on?” she countered.

“You mean while I was on Mercury? About eleven months; I just get back.”

Ellen nodded. “And has anyone told you about our—trouble here?”

Steve laughed! “Nobody told me anything,” he said flatly. “They didn’t have time, maybe. I came back from Mercury with survey charts that took me six months to make, showing where there are mineral deposits that will make anything here on the Moon look sick. All I wanted to do was turn them over to the company, pick up supplies and start out for Venus. And one of your glorified office boys was waiting for me at Denver skyport with your ether-gram, ordering me to report here. I just about had time for one real Earth meal and a bath before I caught the rocket shuttle to the Moon.”

“Well—” the girl said doubtfully. “Suppose I begin at the beginning, then. You know that my father organized this company, Terralune Projects, to develop uranium deposits here on the Moon. He raised a lot of money, set up the corporation, made plans. He even arranged to finance trips to other planets, like yours to Mercury and Venus, because doing things like that meant more to him than making money. And then he died.”

Her face shadowed. “He died,” she repeated, “and I inherited a controlling interest in Terralune. And then everything went to pot.”

A buzzer sounded on Ellen Bishop’s desk, interrupting her. She said, “Hello,” and a voice-operated switch turned on her communicator.

A man’s voice drawled, “Culver speaking. Shall I come up now?”

Ellen hesitated. Then she said, “Yes,” and flicked off the communicator. “That’s Jim Culver,” she explained. “He’ll be your assistant while you’re here.”

“That’s nice,” Templin said acidly. “Assistant to do what?”

The girl looked surprised. “Oh I didn’t tell you, did I? You’re going to manage the uranium mines at Hyginus Cleft.”

TEMPLIN OPENED his eyes wide and stared at her. “Look, Bishop,” he said, “I can’t do that. What do I know about uranium mines—or any other kind of mines?”

Before the girl could answer, the door opened. A tall, lean man drifted in, looked at Templin with mournful eyes. “Hello,” he said.

Templin nodded at him. “Get back to the question,” he reminded the girl. “What about these mines?”

I'm no miner."

The girl said, "I know you aren't. We've had three mining engineers on the project in eight weeks. Things are no better for them—in fact, things are worse; ask Culver." She waved to the lean man, who was fumbling around his pockets for a cigarette.

Culver found the cigarette and nodded confirmation. "Trouble isn't ordinary," he said briefly. "It's things that are—strange. Like machines breaking down. And tunnels caving in. And pieces of equipment being missing. Nothing that a mining engineer can handle."

"But maybe something that *you* can handle." Ellen Bishop was looking at Templin with real pleading in her eyes, the man from the Inner Planets thought. He said: "Got any ideas on who's causing it? Do you think it's just accidental? Or have you been having trouble with some other outfit, or anything of the sort?"

Ellen Bishop bit her lip. "Not real trouble," she said. "Of course, there's Joe Olcott..."

Joe Olcott. The name rang a fire-bell in Templin's mind. Olcott... yes, of course! The chunky dark man in the corridor—the one he had knocked out!

He grinned abruptly. "I met Mr. Olcott," he acknowledged. "Unpleasant character. But he didn't seem like much of a menace to me."

Ellen Bishop shrugged. "Perhaps he isn't. Oh, you hear stories about him, if you can believe them. They say he has been mixed up in a number of things that were on the other side of the law—that he has committed all sorts of crimes himself. But—I don't really believe that. Only, it seems funny that we had no trouble at all until Olcott tried to buy a controlling interest in Terralune. We turned him down—it was just a month or so after Dad died—and from then on things have gone from bad to worse."

Templin stubbed out his cigarette, thinking. Automatically his fingers went to his pocket, took out another, and he blew out a huge cloud of fresh smoke. Then he stood up.

"I think I get the story now," he said. "The missing pieces I can fill in later. You want me to take charge of the Terralune mines here on the Moon and try to get rid of this jinx, whatever it is. Well, maybe I can do it. The only question is, what do I get out of it?"

Ellen Bishop looked startled. "Get out of it? What do you mean?" she demanded. Then a scornful look came into her ice-blue eyes. "Oh, I see," she said. "Naturally, you feel that you've got us at your mercy. Well—"

Templin interrupted her. "I asked you a question," he reminded. "What do I get out of it?"

She smouldered. "Name your price," she said bitterly.

"Uh-uh." Templin shook his head. "I don't want money; I want something else."

"Something else?" she repeated in puzzlement. "What?"

Templin leaned across the desk. "I want to go back," he said. "I want a whole fleet of rocket ships to go back to Venus with me...lots of them, enough to start a colony. There's uranium on the Moon, and there are precious metals on Mercury...but on Venus there's something that's more important. There's a raw planet there, a whole world just like the Earth with trees, and jungles, and animals. And there isn't a human being on it. I want to colonize it—and I want Terralune Projects to pay the bill."

Ellen Bishop stared at him unbelievably, and a slow smile crept into her lips. She said, "I beg your pardon...Temp. All right. It's a bargain." She grasped his hand impulsively. "If you can make the uranium

mines pay out I'll see that you get your ships. And your colony. And I'll see that you can take anyone you like on the Terralune payroll along with you to get started."

"Sold," said Templin. He released her hand, wandered thoughtfully over to the huge picture window that formed one entire wall of the girl's room.

AT A TOUCH of his fingers the opaque covering on the window opened up like a huge iris shutter, and he was gazing out on the barren landscape of the Moon. The Dome was on the peak of Mt. Hadley, looking out on a desolate expanse of twisted, but comparatively flat, rock, bathed in a sultry dull red glow of reflected light from the Earth overhead. Beyond the plain was an awesome range of mountains, the needle sharp peaks of them picked out in brilliant sunlight as the Sun advanced slowly on them.

Culver said from behind him, "That's what they call the Sea of Serenity."

Templin chuckled. "*Mare Serenitatis*" he said. "I know. I've been here before—fourteen years ago, or so."

Ellen bishop amplified. "Didn't you know, Culver? Temp was one of Dad's crew when the old *Astra* landed here in 1957. I don't remember the exact order any more—were you the third man to step on the surface of the Moon, or the fourth?"

Templin grinned. "Third. Your father was fourth. First he sent the two United Nations delegates off to make it all nice and legal; then, being skipper of the ship, he was getting set to touch ground himself. Well, it was his privilege. But he saw me banging around the air lock—I was a green kid then—and he laughed and said, 'Go ahead, Temp,' and I didn't stop to argue." Templin sobered, and glanced at Ellen Bishop. "I've had other jobs offered me," he said, "and some of them sounded pretty good, but I turned them down. Maybe it isn't smart to tell you this, but there's nothing in the world that could make me quit the company your father founded. Even though he's dead and a debutante is running it now."

He grinned again at her, and moved toward the door. "Coming, Culver?" he asked abruptly. The tall man nodded and followed him. "So long," said Templin at the door, and closed it behind him without waiting for an answer.

THEY PUT on their pressure suits and stepped out of the lock onto the hard rock outside. Culver gestured and led the way to a small crater-hopping rocket parked a few hundred yards from the Dome. It was still eight days till sunrise, and overhead hung the wide, solemn disk of the Earth, bright enough to read by, big as a huge, drifting balloon.

Mount Hadley is thrust into the dry Sea of Serenity like an arrowhead piercing a heart. Like all the Moon's surface it is bare rock, and the tumbled mountain ranges that lie behind it are like nothing on the face of the Earth. Templin stared around curiously, remembering how it had seemed when that first adventuring flight had landed there. Then he loped over the pitted rock after Culver's swollen pressure suit.

Culver touched a key ring inset in the rocket's airlock, and the door swung open. They scrambled aboard, closed the outer door, and Culver touched a valve that flooded the lock with air. Then they opened the inner door and took off their pressure suits.

Culver said, "The Terralune mine is up at Hyginus Cleft, about four hundred miles south of here. We'll make it in twenty minutes or so."

Templin sat down in one of the bucket seats before the dual controls. Culver followed more slowly, strapping himself in before he reached for the jet control levers.

His ship was a little two-ton affair, especially designed for use on the surface of the Moon; powered with chemical fuel, instead of the giant atomics on larger ships, it could carry two persons and a few hundred pounds of cargo—and that was all.

He fed fuel to the tiny jets, paused to give the evaporators a chance to warm up, then tripped the spark contact. There was a brief sputter and a roar. As he advanced the jet lever a muffled grating sound came from underneath, and there was a peculiar jolting, swaying sensation as the rocket danced around on its tail jets for a moment before taking off.

And then they were jet-borne.

Culver swept up to a thousand feet and leveled off, heading toward a huge crater on the horizon. “My first landmark,” he explained to Templin.

Templin nodded silently, staring out at the horizon. Although the sun itself was not yet visible, from their elevation it was just below the horizon curve. As they swept over a depression in the Moon’s wrinkled surface Templin caught a glimpse of unendurable brightness where the sun was; a long, creeping tongue of flame that writhed in a slow snake curl. It was the sun’s corona—a rare sight on the Earth, but always visible on the Moon, where there was no atmosphere to play tricks and blot it out.

Culver said curiously, “I didn’t know you were one of the early Moon explorers. How come you aren’t a millionaire, like the rest of them?”

Templin shrugged. “I keep on the move,” he said ambiguously. “Yes, there were plenty of deals. I could have claimed mining rights, or signed up for lecture tours, or let some rocket-transport company pay me a fat salary for the privilege of putting my name on their board of directors. But I didn’t want it. This way, Terralune pays me pretty well for scouting around the Inner Planets for them. I just put the checks in the bank, anyhow—where I spend my time, you can’t spend your money. Money doesn’t mean anything on Venus.”

Culver nodded. His fingers danced skillfully over the jet keys as the nose of the rocket wavered a hairbreadth off course. Under control, the ship came around a couple of degrees until it was again arrowing straight for its target on the horizon, hurtling over the ancient, jagged face of the Moon.

Culver said casually, “I sort of envy you, Temp. It must be a terrific feeling to see things that no man has ever seen before. I guess that’s why I came to the Moon, looking for things like that. But heaven knows, it’s getting more like Earth—and the slums of the Earth, at that—every day. Ever since they put that Dome on Mount Hadley the place has been crummy with billionaire tourists.”

Templin nodded absently. His attention was fixed on the rear-view periscope. He frowned. “Culver,” he said. “What’s that coming up behind us?”

CULVER glanced at the scope. “Oh, that. Pleasure rocket. Looks like Joe Olcott’s ship—he’s got about the biggest space-yacht around. Only his isn’t really a pleasure ship, because he pulled some political strings and got himself a vice commander’s commission in the Security Patrol, which means that his yacht rates as an auxiliary. No guns on it, of course; but the Patrol pays his fuel bills.”

“A sweet racket,” said Templin. “But what the devil is he so close for? If he doesn’t watch out he’s going to get his nose blistered. Way he’s going now he’ll be blasting right into our rocket exhaust.”

Culver stared worriedly at the periscope. The fat bullet-shaped rocket yacht behind them was getting

bigger in the scope, little more than a mile behind them. Then he exhaled. "There he goes," said Culver. The other ship swung its nose a few degrees off to the west. It was a big fast job, burning twice as much fuel as their light crater-jumper, and it slid past them not more than a quarter of a mile away, going in the same direction.

"Joe Olcott," said Templin. "I begin to think that I'm not going to like Mr. Olcott. And I'm pretty sure he doesn't like me; his jaw will be sore for a day or two to help him remember."

Culver grinned and fumbled in his pockets for a cigarette. "He's one of the billionaire tourists I was telling you about, Temp," he said. He sucked on the cigarette, puffed out blue smoke which the air purifiers drew in. "Olcott's about the worst of the bunch, I guess. Not only is he a rich man, but he's mixed up in—Hey! What're you doing?"

Culver squawked in surprise as Templin, swearing incandescently, dove past him to get at the jet controls. Then Culver's eyes caught what Templin had seen a fraction of a second earlier. The big, bullet-shaped rocket had passed them, then come around in a wide arc, plunging head-on at their little ship at a good fifty-mile-a-minute clip.

Templin, sputtering oaths, was clawing at the controls. Under his frantic fingers their ship came slowly over...too slowly. The bullet-shaped ship, carrying twice their jets, came at them until it was a scant hundreds of yards away. Then it switched ends in a tight 10-gravity power turn. When the steering jets had brought it around the space-yacht's pilot fed full power to his main-drive jets.

And deadly, white-hot gases from the rocket exhausts came flaring at Templin and Culver.

THE LITTLE ship quivered in a death-agony. Templin, white-lipped and soundless now, did the only thing left to him. He cut every jet; the crater-jumper was tossed about in the torrent of flaming gasses from the other ship and hurled aside. The Moon's gravity drew it down and out of danger. Then Templin thrust over the main-drive jets again, checking their fall in a fierce deceleration maneuver. The impact almost blanked Culver out; for a moment dark red specks floated before his eyes. When his vision cleared, he found them settling on their jets in the middle of a five-acre rock plain that formed the center of a small crater.

Templin fought the controls until the landing-struts touched rock. Then he cut jets; the swaying, unstable motion ceased and they were grounded.

Culver shook his head dazedly. "What the devil happened?" he gasped.

"Wait!" Templin's voice was urgent. Culver looked at him in astonishment, but held his tongue. Templin sat stock-still for a second, his bearing one of extreme concentration. Then he relaxed. "Don't hear any escaping air," he reported; "I guess the hull's still in one piece." He peered through the vision port at the black star-filled sky overhead. The long trail of rocket flame from the other ship came around in a sweeping curve that circled over them twice. Then, apparently satisfied, the other pilot straightened out. The flame trail pointed straight back the way they had come as the space-yacht picked up speed. In a moment it was out of sight.

Templin smiled a chill smile. "He thinks he got us," he said. "Let him go on thinking so—for now."

"Tell me what that was all about." Culver demanded. "Two years I've been on the Moon, and nothing like this has ever happened to me before. What in heaven's name was he trying to do?"

Templin looked at him mildly. "Kill us, I should think," he said. "He came close enough to it, too."

"But why?"

Templin shrugged. “That’s what I mean to find out. It might be because he’s the man I slugged back in the Dome—but I doubt it. Or it might be because he thinks I can put Terralrne’s mine back on its feet. Wish I shared his confidence.”

He unbuckled his safety straps and stood up. “This tub got a radio?” he demanded.

Culver, still pondering over what he had said, looked at him glassily a second. “Radio? Oh—no, of course not. Ship radios don’t work on the Moon. You should know that.”

Templin grinned. “When I was here there weren’t any other ships to radio to. *Why* don’t ship radios work?”

“Not enough power. It’s not like the Earth, you know—any little one-watt affair can broadcast there, because the signals bounce off the Heaviside Layer. But you can’t radio to anything on the Moon unless you can see it, because there isn’t any Heaviside Layer to reflect radio waves, and so they only go in straight lines.”

“How about the radio at the Dome?”

Culver shrugged. “That’s a big one; that one bounces off the Earth’s Heaviside Layer. What do you want a radio for, anyhow?”

“Wanted to save time,” Templin said succinctly. “No matter. Come on, we’ve got a job of inspection to do. Put on your pressure suit.”

Culver began complying automatically. “What are we going to do?”

“Make an external inspection. Way we were being kicked around up there, I want to make sure our outside hull is okay before I take this thing up again. Let’s go look.”

THE TWO men slipped into air-tight pressure suits, sealed the helmets and stepped lightly out onto the lunar surface.

Templin skirted the base of the rocket, carefully examining every visible line and marking on the metal skin with the help of a hand-light. Then he said into his helmet radio, “Looks all right, Culver. By the way, what’s that thing over there?”

He pointed to something that gleamed, ruddily metallic, at the base of the crater wall. Culver followed the direction of his arm.

“That’s a rocket-launching site,” he said. “Good place to stay away from. It’s a hangover from the Three-Day War—you know, when the boys got the idea they could conquer Earth by blasting it with atom-rockets from the Moon.”

Templin nodded. “I remember,” he said grimly. “My home town was one of the first cities wiped out. But why is it a good place to avoid?”

Culver scowled. “Wild radiations. They had a plutonium pile to generate power, and in the fighting the thing got out of control and blew its top. Scattered radioactive matter for half a mile around. Most of it’s dead now, of course—these isotopes have pretty short half-lives. But the pile’s still there.”

Templin said: “And there it can stay, for all of me. Well, let’s get moving. The ship looks intact to me—if it isn’t, we’ll find out when we put the power on.”

Culver followed him into the ship’s tiny pressure chamber. When they were able to take their helmets



off he said curiously, “What’s your next move, Temp? Going to get after Olcott?”

“That I don’t know yet. One thing is for sure—that was no accident that just happened; he really wanted to blast us. And he had the stuff to do it with, too, with that baby battleship he was flying. It wasn’t his fault that we ducked and only got a little dose of the tail end of his rocket blast. . . . Get in the driver’s seat, Culver. The sooner we get to the mine, the sooner the next round starts!”

THREE HOURS later, Templin was down in the mine galleries at Hyginus Cleft, staring disgruntledly at the wreck of a Mark VII digging machine. This was Gallery Eight, richest vein of uranium ore they had found; just when the Mark VII had really begun to turn out sizeable amounts of metal there had been a shift in the rock underneath, crumbling the supports and bringing the shaft’s ceiling down to pin the machine. Now the Mark VII, looking like a giant, steel-clad bug on its glittering caterpillar treads, was just half a million dollar’s worth of junk.

Culver told him, “Tim Anson, here, was running the machine when the cave-in started; he can tell you all about it.”

Templin looked at the man Culver had indicated, a short space-suited figure whose face was hidden behind an opaque mask. The mines were worked in vacuum, of course; it would have been impossible to keep the shafts filled with air. And the dangerous radiations present in the uranium ore required a special helmet for all who stayed long within range of them—a plastic material that transmitted light and other harmless rays in only one direction; dangerous rays it did not transmit at all. Templin said, “What about it, Anson? What happened?”

The man’s voice came into his helmet radio. “There’s nothing much to tell, sir,” it said. “We opened this shaft ’bout a week ago and got some very pretty samples out of it. So we put the Mark Seven in, and I was on it when all of a sudden it began to shake. I thought the machine had gone haywire somehow, so I shut it off. But the shaking kept up, so I hopped off and beat it toward the escape corridor. And then the roof came down. Good thing I was off it, too; smashed the driver’s seat like a tin toy.”

Templin scowled. “Don’t you survey these galleries?” he demanded of Culver. “If there was a rock fault underneath, why didn’t you find out about it before you brought the Mark Seven down?”

Culver spread his hands. “Believe it or not, Temp, we surveyed. There *wasn’t* any fault.”

Templin glared at him. Before he could speak, though, a new voice said tentatively, “Mr. Templin? Message from the radio room.” It was another miner holding a sheet of thin paper in his gauntleted hand. Templin took the flimsy from him and held it up to his faceplate. In the light of the helmet lamp he read: Pilot Rocket Silvanus registry Joseph Olcott reported accident as required by Regulations. Report stated your Rocket not seen until collision almost inevitable then evasive action taken but impossible to avoid rocket exhaust striking your ship. Pilot reprimanded and cautioned. Signed: Stephens, HQ Lunadmin Tycho Crater.

Templin grinned leanly and passed the radio from Lunar Administration over to Jim Culver. “I squawked to Tycho about our little brush with Olcott,” he explained.

Culver read it quickly and his face darkened with anger. Templin said over the inter-suit radio: “Don’t get excited, Culver—I didn’t expect anything better. After all, it stood to reason that Olcott would report it as an accident. He had to, in case we survived. At least, now we know where we stand.” He glanced around the mine gallery, then frowned again. “I’ve seen enough,” he said abruptly. “Let’s go upstairs again.”

Culver nodded and they walked back to the waiting monorail ore car. They stepped in, pressed the release button and the tiny wheels spun round. The car picked up speed rapidly; half a minute later it slowed and stopped at the entrance to the shaft. They crossed an open space, then walked into the air lock of the pressurized structure where Terralune's miners lived.

IN THE office Templin stripped off his pressure suit and immediately grabbed for one of his cigarettes. Culver more slowly followed his example, then sat down facing Templin. "You've seen the picture now, Temp," he said. "Do you have any ideas on what we can do?"

Templin grimaced. "In a negative sort of way."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, up to a little while ago I had a pretty definite idea that it was Joe Olcott who was causing all our trouble. That, I figured, I could handle—in fact, you might say I was sort of looking forward to it. But, although Olcott is a rich and powerful man and all that, I don't see how he can cause earthquakes."

Culver nodded. "That's it," he said soberly. "That's not the first time it's happened, either. We've had other kinds of trouble—broken machinery, mistakes in judgement, that sort of thing. Like you, I thought Olcott might be behind it. But—well, good Lord, Temp. The Moon is an old, old planet. There isn't even any internal heat any more—it's all cooled off, and you'd think that its crust would have finally settled by this time. And yet... earthquakes keep on happening. Five of them so far."

Templin grunted and chucked away his cigarette. "Get the straw-bosses in here," he said. "Let's have ourselves a conference; maybe somebody will come up with an idea."

Culver flicked on a communicator and spoke into it briefly. He made four or five calls to different stations on the intercom set, then turned it off. "They'll all be here in about five minutes," he reported,

"Okay," said Templin. He pointed to a map on the wall behind Culver. "What's that?" he asked.

Culver turned. "That's the mine and environs, Temp. Right here—" he placed his finger on the map—"is the living quarters and administration building, where we are. Here's the entrance to the shafts. Power plant—that's where the solar collectors are. You know we pick up sunlight on parabolic mirrors, focus it on a heat exchanger and use it to generate electricity. This over here is the oxygen plant."

"You mean, we make our own oxygen?"

"Well, sort of. There's a lot of quartz on the Moon's surface, and that's silicon dioxide, as you ought to know. We electrolyze it and snatch out the oxygen."

Templin nodded. "What about this marking up on top of the map?"

Culver grinned. "That's our pride and joy here, Temp. It's an old Loonie city. Heaven knows how old—it's all run down into the ground now. Must be a million years old, maybe, but nobody knows for sure. But the Lunarians, whoever they were, really built for keeps—some of the buildings are still standing. Want to go over and take a look at it later?"

Templin hesitated. "No, not today," he said regretfully. "That's pleasure, and pleasure comes later."

There was a knock on the door. Culver yelled, "Come in," and it opened. A middle-aged, worried-looking man came in.

Culver introduced him. "Sam Bligh," he said; "Sam's our power engineer."

Templin shook hands with Bligh, then with half a dozen other men who followed him through the door. When all were gathered he stood up and spoke to them.

“My name’s Templin,” he said. “I’m going to be running this project for a while. I didn’t ask for the job, and I don’t want it, but I seem to be stuck with it. The sooner we begin producing, the sooner you’ll get rid of me.” He looked around. “Now, one at a time,” he said. “I want to hear your troubles...”

The conference lasted about an hour. Then Templin said his piece. “There’s going to be some ore brought out in the next twenty-four hours,” he said. “I don’t care what we have to do to do it, but we are going to ship at least one shipload of the stuff this week. And two shiploads next week, and three the week after, until we’re up to quota. That clear?” He looked around the room. The men in it nodded. “Okay,” he said. “Let’s get going.”

TWENTY-FOUR hours later, according to the big Terrestrial clock that hung in the ebony sky, Templin stood space-suited at the portal of the mine and watched the first monocar-load of uranium ore come out. On the ground at his feet was a flat black box, the size of an overnight bag. When the hoist crews had unloaded the glittering fragments of ore and stowed them in the hold of a freight rocket, Templin said over the radio: “Hold it up, Culver; don’t send the monorail back down. I want to take another look at Gallery Eight.”

Culver, supervising the unloading, said, “Sure, Temp; I’ll tag along with you.” He sprang lightly into the monorail. Templin, picking up the black box, followed and they braced themselves for the acceleration.

As the car picked up speed, they hurtled down the winding mine tunnels, lighted only by the headlights of the car itself. Though there was no air to carry sound, they could feel the vibration of the giant wheels on the single metal track as a deep, shuddering roar. Then the roar changed pitch as the car’s brakes were set by the braking switch at the end of the line. The car slowed and stopped.

They got off and stepped down the rough-hewn gallery to where eight workmen were half-heartedly trying to clear the rock from the pinned Mark VII digging machine.

They stopped work to look at Templin. Templin said, “Go ahead, boys; we’re just looking around.” He moved toward the Mark VII, Culver following, studying the cave-in. Gallery Eight was seven hundred feet below the surface of the Moon, which meant that, even under the light gravity conditions prevailing on the satellite, there were many millions of tons of rock over their heads.

Frowning, Templin saw that there were strain-cracks on the tunnel walls—deep, long cracks that ran from floor to ceiling. They seemed to radiate from the point where the digging machine had been pinned down.

One of the workmen drifted over, watching Templin curiously. Templin glanced at the man, then turned to Culver. “Take a look at this,” he ordered.

Culver looked indifferently. “Yeah. That’s where the rock cracked and pinned down the machine.”

“Uh-uh.” Templin shook his head. “You’ve got the cart before the horse. Those cracks *start* at the mining machine. First the machine broke through, *then* the walls cracked.”

Culver gaped at him through the transparent dome of his pressure suit. “So what?”

Templin grinned, “I don’t know yet,” he confessed; “but I aim to find out.”

He picked up the case he had been carrying, opened it. Inside was a conglomeration of instruments—dials, meters, what looked like an old-fashioned portable radio, complete with earphones. These Templin disconnected, plugging the earphone lead into a socket on his collar-plate that led to his suit radio.

Culver's eyes narrowed curiously, then his expression cleared. "Oh, I get it," he said. "That's a sound-ranging gadget. You think—"

"I think maybe there's something wrong below," Templin cut in. "As I said yesterday, it looks to me as though there's a rock fault underneath here. That machine broke through the floor of the tunnel. When you consider how light it is, here on the Moon, that means that there was one damn thin shell of rock underneath it. Or else—well, I don't know what else it could be."

Culver laughed. "You'd better start thinking of something, Temp. That floor was solid; I know, because I handled the drilling on this gallery, and I was pretty careful not to let the Mark Seven come in until I'd sound-ranged the rock myself. Look—I've got the graphs back in the office. Come back and I'll show them to you."

Templin hesitated, then shook his head. "You might have made a mistake, Culver. I—I might as well tell you, I checked up on you. I looked over the sound-ranging reports last night. According to them, it's solid rock, all right—but still and all, the Mark Seven crashed through." He bent down, flipped the starting switch on his detection device. "Anyway, this will settle the question once and for all."

INSIDE THE satchel-like instrument, an electronic oscillator began sending out a steady beat, which was picked up by a sound-reflector and beamed out in a straight line. An electric "ear" in the machine listened for echoes, timed them against the sending impulse and in that way was able to locate very accurately the distance and direction of any flaw in the rock surrounding them.

The machine was sensitive enough to tell the difference between dry and oil-bearing strata of sand—it had been used for that work on Earth. And for it to recognize a cave in the solid rock of the Moon was child's play. So simple, and so hard to mistake, that Templin avoided the question of how the first reports, based on Culver's tests, could have been wrong. The machine could not be mistaken, Templin knew. Could the men who operated it have been treacherous?

Templin pointed the reflector of the instrument at the rock under the trapped Mark VII and reached for the control that would permit him to listen in on the tell-tale echoes from below.

Culver, watching Templin idly, saw the abrupt beginnings of a commotion behind him. The eight workmen who were clustered around the Mark VII suddenly dropped their tools and began to stampede toward them, puffy arms waving wildly and soundlessly.

"What the devil!" ejaculated Culver. Templin glanced up.

Then they felt it, too. Through the soles of their metal-shod feet they felt a growing vibration in the rock. Something was happening—something bad. They paused a second, then the workmen in their panicky flight came within range of their suit radios and they heard the words, "*Cave-in!*"

Templin straightened up. Ominously, the cracks in the wall were widening; there was a shuddering uneasiness in the feel of the rock floor beneath them that could mean only one thing. Somehow, the rock-slide that had wrecked the Mark VII earlier was being repeated. Somewhere beneath their feet a hole in the rock was being filled—and it might well be their bodies that would fill it.

Cursing, Templin jumped aside to let the panic-stricken workmen dash by. Then, half-dragging the

paralyzed Culver, he leaped for the monorail car to the surface. They were the last ones on, and they were just barely in time. The stampeding miners had touched the starting lever, and the monorail began to pick up speed under them as they scrambled aboard.

Looking dazedly behind as the monorail sped upward, Templin saw the roof of the tunnel shiver crazily, then drop down, obliterating the wrecked Mark VII from sight. Luckily, the cave-in spread no farther, but it was a frightful spectacle, that soundless, gigantic fall of rock.

And all the more so because, just as the roof came down on the digging machine, Templin saw a figure in pressure suit and opaque miner's helmet dash from the back of the machine to a sheltering cranny in the gallery wall. The man was trapped; even if there had been a way to stop the monorail and go back for a rescue try, there was no way of getting to him, through the thousands of cubic yards of rock that fell between, in time to save a life...

UP IN THE office, Templin was a caged tiger, raging as he paced back and forth. His stride was a ludicrous slow-motion shamble in the light gravity, but there was nothing ludicrous about his livid face.

He stopped and whirled on Culver. "Eight men down in that pit—and only seven of them got out! One of our men killed—half a million dollars worth of equipment buried—and why? Because some fool okayed the digging of a shaft directly over an underground cave!"

Culver shifted uncomfortably. "Wait a second, Temp," he begged. "I swear to you, there wasn't any cave there! Take a look at the sound-ranger graphs yourself."

Templin dragged in viciously on a cigarette. He exhaled a sharply cut-off plume of smoke, and when he answered his voice was under control again. "You're right enough, Culver," he said. "I've looked at the things. Only—there *was* a cave there, or else the miner wouldn't have fallen through. And how do you explain that?"

The door to the office opened and the personnel clerk stuck a worried head in. "I checked the rosters, Mr. Templin," he said.

Templin's jaw tensed in anticipation. "Who was missing?" he asked.

"That's the trouble, sir; no one is missing!"

"What!" Templin stared. "Look, Henkins, don't talk through your hat. There were eight miners down in that pit. Only seven came out. I *saw* one of them left behind, and there isn't a doubt in the world that he's still there dead. Who is it?"

The clerk said defensively, "I'm sorry, Mr. Templin. There are four men in the powerplant, five guards patrolling the shaft and area and two men on liberty at Tycho City. Every one of them is checked and accounted for. Everybody else is right here in the building." He went on hastily, before Templin could explode: "But I took the liberty of talking to one of the miners who was down there with you, Mr. Templin. Like you, he said there were eight of them. But one man, he said, wasn't part of the regular crew. He didn't know who the odd man was. In fact—" Henkins hesitated—"he thought it was *you!*"

"Me? Oh, for the good Lord's sake!" Templin glared disgustedly. "Look, Henkins, I don't care what your friend says—that man was part of the regular crew. At least he was a miner from this project—he had an opaque miner's helmet on; I saw it myself. You find out who he was, and don't come back here until you know."

"Yes, Mr. Templin," said Henkins despairingly, and he closed the door gently behind him.

Templin threw away his cigarette. "I would give five years' pay," he said moodily, "to be back on Mercury now. There I didn't have any troubles. All I had to worry about was keeping from falling into lava pits, and staying within sight of the ship."

Culver leaned back against the steel wall of the office. "Sounds fun," he said.

A buzzer sounded. Warily Templin spoke into the teletone on his desk. "Hello, hello," he growled.

The voice that came out was the worried voice of Sam Bligh. It said, "Trouble, Templin. Something's happened to our energy reserves. The power leads are short-circuited. Can't tell what caused it yet—but it looks like sabotage."

THE GIANT parabolic mirrors were motionless as Culver and Templin approached them, pointed straight at the wide disk of the Earth hanging overhead. The two men glanced at them in passing, and hastened on to the low-roofed power building. Bligh was waiting for them inside. With a sweep of his arm he indicated the row of power meters that banked the wall.

"Look!" he said. "Every power pack we had in reserve—out. There isn't a watt of power in the project, except what's in the operating condensers." Templin followed the direction of his gesture, and saw that the needle on each meter rested against the "zero" pin.

"What happened?" Templin demanded.

Bligh shrugged helplessly. "See for yourself," he said. He pointed to a window looking down on the generating equipment buried beneath the power shack itself. "Those square contraptions on the right are the mercury-laminate power packs. The leads go from the generators to them; then we tap the packs for power as we need it. Somehow the leads were cut about five minutes ago. Right there."

Templin saw where the heavy insulated cables had been chopped off just at the mixing box that led to the packs. He looked at it for a long moment, eyes grim. "Sabotage. You're right, Bligh—that couldn't be an accident. Who was in here?"

Bligh shook his head. "No one—as far as I know. I saw no one. But there wasn't any special guard; there never is, here. Anyone in the project could have come in and done it."

Culver cut in, "How long will the power in the condenser last?"

"At our normal rate of use—half a day; if we conserve it—a week. By then the sun will be high enough so that the mirrors will be working again."

"Working again?" repeated Templin. "But the generators are working now, aren't they?"

Bligh hesitated. "Well—yes, but there isn't enough energy available to make much difference. The Moon takes twenty-eight days to revolve, you know—that means we have fourteen days of sunshine. That's when we get our power. At 'night'—when the sun's on the other side—we turn the mirrors on the Earth and pick up some reflected light, but it isn't enough to help very much."

Templin's face was gaunt in concentration. He said, "Order the project to cut down on power. Stretch out our reserves as much as you can, Bligh. Culver—get a crew ready on one of the freight rockets."

Culver raised his brows. "Where are we going, Temp?"

Templin said, "We're going to get some more power!"

CULVER SAID tightly over Templin's shoulder, "You realize, of course, that this is going to get us in serious trouble with the Security Patrol if they find out about it."

"We'll try to keep that from happening," said Templin. "Now don't bother me for a minute." His hands raced over the controls of the lumbering freight rocket. Underneath them lay the five-acre crater where they had crash-landed the day before after Olcott's attack. Templin killed the forward motion of the rocket with the nose jet, brought the nose up and set the ship down gently on the thundering fire of its tail rockets.

"Secure," he reported. "Are the crew in pressure suits? Good. Get them to work."

Culver sighed despondently and hurried off, shouting orders to the crew. Templin eased himself into his own suit. A hundred yards away lay the abandoned rocket-launching sites that had devastated a score of cities in the Three-Day War. Templin stepped out of the airlock and hastened after the group of pressure-suited men who were already investigating the ruined installation.

Culver waved to him. His voice over the radio was still disgusted as he said, "There's the pile, Temp; this is your last chance to back out of this crazy idea."

"We can't back out," Templin told him; "we need power. We can generate power with our own uranium, if we take this atomic pile back with us and start it up again. Maybe it's illegal, but it's the only way we can keep the mine going for the next week—and I'm taking the chance."

"Okay," said Culver. He gave orders to the men, who began to take the ten-year-old piece of equipment apart. In their ray-proof miners' suits, they were in no danger from the feeble radioactivity still left after the pile had exploded. But Templin was, and so was Culver; their suits were the lighter surface kind, and they had to keep their distance from the pile itself.

A nuclear-fission pile is an elaborate and clumsy piece of apparatus; it consists of many hundreds of cubes of graphite containing tiny pieces of uranium, stacked together, brick on brick, in the shape of a top. There are cadmium control-strips for checking the speed of the nuclear reaction, delicate instruments that keep tabs on what goes on inside the structure, heavy-metal neutron shields and gamma-ray barriers and enough other items to stock a warehouse.

Looking it over, Culver grumbled: "How the devil can we get that heap of junk into the rocket?"

"We'll get it in," promised Templin. He bent down clumsily to pick up a rock, crumbled it in his gauntleted fist. It was like chalk. "Soft," he said. "Burned up by atomic radiation."

Culver nodded inside his helmet. "Happened when the pile blew up, during the War."

"No. It's like this all over the Moon, as you ought to know by now." Templin tossed the powdered rock away and brushed it off his space-gauntlets. "There's something for you to figure out, Culver. I remember reading about it years ago, how the whole surface of the Moon shows that it must have been drenched with atomic rays a couple of thousand years ago. The shape of the craters—the fact that the surface air is all gone—the big cracks in the surface—it all adds up to show that there must have been a terrific atomic explosion here once."

He glanced again at where the miners were disassembling the pile. "I kind of think," he said slowly, "that that accounts for a lot of things here on the Moon. For one thing, it might explain what became of the Loonies, after they built their cities—and disappeared."

Culver said, "You mean that you think the Loonies had atomic power? And—and blew up the Moon with it?"

Templin shrugged, the gesture invisible inside the pressure suit. “Your guess,” he said, “is as good as mine. Meanwhile... here comes the first load of graphite bricks. Let’s give them a hand stowing it in the rocket.”

ONCE THE JOB of setting up the stolen plutonium pile was complete, Templin began to feel as though he could see daylight ahead. There was a moment of hysterical tension when the pile first began to operate with uranium taken from the mine—a split-second of nervous fear as the cadmium safety rods were slowly withdrawn and the atomic fires within the pile began to kindle—but the safety controls still worked perfectly, and Templin drew a great breath of relief. An atomic explosion was bad enough anywhere... but here, in the works of a uranium mine where the ground was honeycombed with veins of raw atomic explosive, it was a thing to produce nightmares.



After two days of operation the power-packs were being charged again and the mine was back in full-scale operation. Culver, seated in the office and looking at the day’s production report, gloated to Templin, “Looks like we’re in the clear now, Temp. Two hundred and fifty kilos of uranium in twenty-four hours—if we can keep that up for a month, maybe Terralune will begin to make some money on this place.”

Templin blew smoke at the white metal ceiling. “Don’t count your dividends before they’re passed,” he advised. “The Mark VII is still out of operation—we won’t be able to start any new shafts until we get a replacement for it, so our production is limited to what we can get out of Gallery Eight. And besides—we took care of our power problem for the time being, all right, but what about taking care of the man who caused it?”

“Man who caused it?” repeated Culver.

“Yeah. Remember what Bligh said—that was sabotage. The leads were short-circuited deliberately.”

“Oh.” Culver’s face fell. “We never found out who the missing miner was, either,” he remembered. “Do you—”

THE TELEPHONE buzzed, interrupting him. When Templin answered, the voice that came out of the box was crisply efficient. “This is Lieutenant Carmer,” it said. “Stand by for security check.”

“Security check?” said Templin. “What the devil is that?”

The voice laughed grimly. “Tell you in just a moment,” it promised. “Stand by. I’m on my way up.”

The telephone clicked off. Templin faced Culver. “Well?” he demanded. “What is this?”

Culver said placatingly, “It’s just a formality, Temp—at least, it always has been. The Security Patrol sends an officer around every month or so to every outpost on the Moon. All they do is ask a few questions and look to see if you’ve got any war-rocket launching equipment set up. The idea is to make sure that nobody installs rocket projectors to shoot at Earth with, as they did in the Three-Day War.”

“Oh? And what about our plutonium pile?”

Culver said sorrowfully, “That bothers me, a little. But I don’t think we need to worry, because we’ve got the thing in a cave and so far they’ve never looked in the caves.”

“Well,” said Templin, “all right. There’s nothing we can do about it now, anyhow.” He sat down at his desk and awaited his callers.



It only took a minute for the lieutenant to reach the office. But when the door opened Templin sat bolt upright, hardly believing his eyes.

The first man in was a trim, military-looking youth with lieutenant's bars on his shoulders. And following him, wearing the twin jets of a Security Patrol vice-commander, was the dark, heavy-set man with whom Templin had tangled in Hadley Dome, and whose ship had attacked them on the flight to the mine. Joe Olcott!

THE LIEUTENANT closed the door behind his superior officer and marched up to Templin. He dropped an ethergram form on Templin's desk. "My inspection orders," he said crisply. "Better look them over and see they're all right. I take it that you're the new boss around here."

Templin took his eyes off Olcott with difficulty. To the lieutenant he said non-committally, "I run the mine, yes. Name's Templin. This is Jim Culver, works superintendent."

The lieutenant relaxed a shade. "We've met," he acknowledged, nodding to Culver. "I'm Lieutenant Carmer, and this is Commander Olcott."

Templin said drily, "I've met Mr. Olcott. Twice—although somewhat informally."

Olcott growled, "Never mind that; we're here on business."

"What sort of business?"

The lieutenant said hesitantly, "There has been a complaint made against you, Mr. Templin—a report of a violation of security regulations."

"Violation? What violation?" Templin reached casually for another cigarette as he spoke, but his senses were alert. This was the man with whom he had had trouble twice before; it looked like a third dose was in the offing.

Cramer looked at Joe Olcott before he spoke. "Plutonium, Mr. Templin," he said.

Culver coughed spasmodically. Templin said, "I see. Well, of course you can't take any chances, Lieutenant. Absurd as it is, you'd better investigate the report." To Culver he said: "Go up to the quarters and pick out two guides for them, Culver. They'll want to see our whole layout here; maybe you'd better go along too."

Culver nodded, his face full of trouble. "Okay, Temp," he said dismally, and went out.

Templin picked up the ether-grammed orders and read them carefully, stalling for time. They said nothing but what he already knew; they were typical military orders authorizing a party of two officers to inspect the Terralune Projects mine at Hyginus Cleft. He put it down carefully.

He got up. "Excuse me for a while," he said. "Culver will take care of you, and I've got a load of ore coming out to check. If you have any questions, I'll see you before you leave."

Olcott guffawed abruptly. "You bet you will," he sniggered, but he caught Templin's mild eyes and the laughter went out of him. "Go ahead," he said. "We'll see you, all right."

Templin took his time about leaving. At the door he said, "There are cigarettes on the desk; help yourselves." Then he closed the door gently behind him. . . and at once was galvanized into action. He raced to the metal climbing pole to the quarters on the upper level, swarmed up it at top speed and

bounded down the galleyway, looking for Culver. He found Culver and two miners coming out of one of the rooms; he stopped them, took Culver aside.

“I need half an hour,” he said. “Can you keep them away from the pile that long? After that—I’ll be ready.”

Culver said hesitantly, “I guess so. But what’s the deal, Temp?”

“You’ll find out,” Templin promised. “Get going!”

TEMPLIN took three men and got them into pressure suits in a hurry. They didn’t even take time to pump air out of the pressure chamber; as soon as the inner door was sealed, Templin slammed down the emergency release and the outer door popped open. The four of them were almost blasted out of the lock by the sudden rush of air under normal pressure expanding into the vacuum outside. It was a waste of precious oxygen—but Templin was in a hurry.

The stars outside were incandescent pin-points in the ebony sky. Off to the west the tops of the mountains were blinding bright in the sun, but it was still night at the mine and the huge Earth hung in the sky overhead.

They leaped across the jagged rock, heading toward the abandoned shaft in which lay the plutonium pile Templin had stolen. As they passed the gleaming mirrors of the solar-energy collectors Templin glanced at them and swore to himself. Without the pile’s power to recharge their power-packs they were dependent on the feeble trickle of Earthshine for all their power—far less than the elaborate power-thirsty equipment of the mine needed. But there was no help for it. Perhaps, when Olcott and the security lieutenant had gone, they could revive the pile again and resume mining operations; until then, there would be no power, and mining operations would stop.

Hastily he set two of the men to digging up and rechanneling the leads to the power dome. Templin and the other man scuttled down into the yawning black shaft.

In the darting light of his helmet lamp he stared around, calculating the risks for the job in hand. The pile had to be concealed; the only way to conceal it was to blast the mouth of the tunnel shut. The pile itself was made of sturdy stuff; of course, with its ray-proof shielding and solid construction. But certainly operation of the pile would have to stop while Olcott and the lieutenant were in the vicinity, for the tiny portable Geiger counters they carried would surely detect the presence of a working atomic pile, no matter how thick and thorough the shielding.

And once a plutonium pile was stopped, it took hours to coax the nuclear reaction back to life. Any attempt to do it in a hurry would mean—atomic explosion.

Templin signaled to the workman, not daring to use his radio, and the two of them tackled the cadmium-metal dampers that protruded from the squat bulk of the pile. Thrust in as far as they would go, they soaked up the flow of neutrons; slowing down the atomic reaction until, like a forest fire cooled by cascading rain, the raging atomic fires flickered and went out. The reaction was stopped. The spinning gas-turbines of the heat-exchanger slowed and halted; the current generator stopped revolving. The atomic pile was dead.

On the surface, Templin knew, the current supply for the whole mining area was being shifted to the solar-energy reserves. The lights would flicker a little; then, as the automatic selector switches tapped the power packs, they would go back on—a little dimmer, no doubt.

Templin groaned regretfully and gestured to the other miner, who was throwing a heavy sheet-metal

hook over the exposed moving parts of the generator. They hurried up and out to the surface.

Templin pulled a detonation-bomb from the cluster he had hung at his waist and, carefully gauging the distance, tossed it down the shaft. It struck a wall, rolled a dozen yards.

Then Templin flung himself away from the mouth of the shaft, dragging the other man with him. The bomb went off.

There was a flare of light and through the soles of their spacemen's boots they felt the vibration, but there was no sound. Templin saw a flat area of rock bulge noiselessly upward, then collapse. The entrance was sealed.

Grim-faced, Templin turned to await the coming of the inspection party. He had done all that could be done.

A MINER, apparently one of the two who had been relocating the power leads, was standing nearby. Templin said curtly into the radio, "If you're finished, get back to the quarters." The man hesitated, then waved and moved slowly off.

Looking at the lights of the mine buildings, Templin could see that they were less bright now than before. Around the buildings small clusters of tinier lights were moving—the helmet lamps of pressure-suited men.

Looking close, Templin saw that three of the smaller lights were coming toward him—Culver, Olcott and the security lieutenant, he was sure. He gestured to his helper to keep out of sight and, in great swooping strides, he bounded toward the three lights.

As he got closer he could see them fairly clearly in the reddish light reflected from Earth overhead. They were the three he had expected, sure enough; they wore the clear, transparent helmets of surface Moon-dwellers, not the cloudy ray-opaque shields of the miners. He greeted them through his radio as casually as he could. "Find any plutonium?" he inquired amiably.

Even in the dim light he could see Olcott's face contort in a snarl.

"You know damn well we didn't," said Olcott. "But I know it's here; if I didn't have to be in Hadley Dome in two hours I'd stay right here until I found it!"

Templin spread his hands. "Next time, bring your lunch," he said.

The lieutenant spoke up. "We felt blasting going on, Templin," he said. "What was it?"

"Opening a shaft," Templin explained carefully; "we're in the mining business here, you know."

Olcott said, "Never mind that. Where are you getting your power?"

Templin looked at him curiously. "Solar radiation," he said. "Where else?"

"Liar!" spat Olcott. "You know that your sun-generators broke down! You don't have enough reserves to carry you through the night—" He broke off as he caught Templin's eye.

"Yes," said Templin softly, "I know we don't have enough reserves. But tell me, how did *you* know it?"

Olcott hesitated. Then, aggressively, "We—the Security Patrol has its ways of finding things out," he said. "Anyway, that doesn't matter. I've been tracing your power lines out from the mine; if they end in solar generators, I'll admit we were wrong. I'm betting they end in a plutonium pile."

Templin nodded. "Fair enough," he said. "Let's follow the lines."

OCOTT'S rage when they came to the banks of light-gathering mirrors and photocells knew no bounds. "What the devil, Templin," he raged. "What are you trying to put over on us? Look at your power gauges—you haven't enough juice left there to electrocute a fly! Your reserves are way down—the only intake is a couple of hundred amps from the reflected Earthshine—and you're trying to make us think you run the whole mine on it!"

Templin shrugged. "We're very economical of power," he said. "Go around turning lights out after us, and that sort of thing."

The lieutenant had the misfortune to chuckle. Olcott turned on him, anger shining on his face. Templin stood back to watch the fireworks. Then...Olcott seemed, all of a sudden, to calm down.

He glanced at one of the miners, who had come up to join them, then at Templin. He pointed to the spot where Templin had just touched off the blast concealing the pile.

"What's over there?" he demanded triumphantly.

Templin froze. "Over where?" he stalled; but he knew it was a waste of time.

"Under that blasted rock," crowed Olcott. "You know what I'm talking about! Where you just blasted in the tunnel over your contraband plute pile!"

Templin, dazed and incredulous, stumbled back a step. How had Olcott stumbled on the secret? Templin could have sworn that a moment ago Olcott was completely in the dark—and yet—

Olcott snarled to the lieutenant, "Arrest that man! He's got a plutonium pile going in violation of security regulations!"

Hesitantly the lieutenant looked at his superior officer, then at Templin. He stepped tentatively toward Templin, arm outstretched to grab him...

Templin took a lightning-swift split-second to make up his mind, then he acted. He was between the other three men and the mine buildings. Beyond them was the Moon, millions of square miles of desolation. It was his only chance.

Templin plunged through the group, catching them by surprise and scattering them like giant slow-motion ninepins. Leaning far forward to get the maximum thrust and speed from his feet, he raced ahead, spanning twenty-foot pits and crevasses, heading for a crater edge where the rocks were particularly jagged and contorted. He was a hundred yards away, and going fast, before the three men could recover from their astonishment.

Then the first explosion blossomed soundlessly on a jagged precipice to his right.

It was the lieutenant's rocket pistol, for Olcott had none of his own—but Templin knew that it was the fat man's hand that was firing at him. Templin zigzagged frantically. Soundless explosions burst around him, but Olcott's aim was poor, and he wasn't touched.

Then Templin was behind the crater wall. He crashed into a rock outcrop with a jolt that sent him reeling and made him fear, for a second, that he had punctured the air-tightness of his helmet. But he hurried on, ran lightly for a hundred yards parallel to the wall, found a jet-black shadow at the base of a monolith of rock and crouched there, waiting.

There was no hiss of escaping air; his suit was still intact. After a moment he saw the lights of two men

crossing the crater wall. They bobbed around for long minutes, searching for Templin. But there was too much of the Moon, too many sheltering hollows and impenetrable darknesses. After a bit they turned and went back toward the mine.

Templin gave them an extra five minutes for good measure. Then he cautiously crawled out of his hiding place and peered over the ridge.

No one was in sight, all the way to the mine buildings. He watched the lights of the buildings for a while, his face drawn with worry. The events of the last few moments had happened too rapidly to give him a chance to realize how bad a spot he was in. Now it was all coming to him. He had made a desperate gamble when he took the plutonium pile—and lost.

He stood there for several minutes, thinking out his position and what he had to do.

Then he saw something that gave him an answer to one of his problems, at least.

There was a sudden swelling burst of ruddy light that bloomed beyond the mine buildings, in the flat place where rocket ships landed. It got brighter, became white, then rose and lengthened into a sharp-pointed plume that climbed toward the tiny, bright stars overhead. It was the drive-jet off a rocket, taking off. Templin watched the flame level off, hurtle along at top speed in the direction of Tycho Crater.

It was the jet that had brought Olcott and the lieutenant, Templin was sure. They were going—but they would be back.

He hadn't much time. And he had a lot to do.

TAKING NO chances Templin kept in the cover of the jagged rocks as he approached the dome. A few hundred yards from it he saw a pressure-suited figure moving toward him. He stood motionless in indecision for a moment, until he saw that the helmet on the figure was milkily opaque. A miner's helmet.

Templin stood up and beckoned to the figure. When it was within a few yards he said, "Have the Security Patrol officers gone?"

The miner stopped. Templin was conscious of invisible eyes regarding him through the one-way vision of the helmet. Then he heard a voice say: "Oh, it's you, Templin. I was wondering where you were."

Templin thought that there was something curious about the voice—not an accent, but a definite peculiarity of speech that he couldn't recognize. Almost as though the man were speaking a foreign language—

Templin glanced toward the dome and dismissed the thought. Someone was coming toward them; he had to make sure of his ground. He asked, "That rocket I saw—was that the Security Patrol? Have they both gone?"

"Yes."

"Fine!" Templin exulted. "Where's Culver, then?"

The figure in the space-suit gestured. Templin, following the pointing arm, saw the man who was coming toward them. "Thanks," he said, and raced to meet Culver, who was quartering off toward the power plant. Templin intercepted him only a short distance from the main building.

"Culver," he said urgently, "come into the dome. I've not got much time, so I've got to move fast. When Olcott and—He broke off, staring. Culver was looking at him, his expression visibly puzzled even in the twilight, his mouth moving but no sound coming over the radio.

“What’s the matter?” Templin demanded. Culver just stared. “Ahh,” growled Templin, “your radio is broken. Come on!” He half-dragged Culver the remaining short distance to the dome. They climbed into the airlock, Templin closed the outer pressure doors and touched the valve that flooded the chamber with air. Before they were out of the lock Templin had his helmet off, was motioning to Culver to do likewise.

“What the devil was the matter with your radio?” he demanded.

“Nothing,” said Culver in surprise. “It’s yours that doesn’t work.”

“Well—never mind. Anyway, what happened to Olcott?”

“Took off for Tycho. Gone for a posse to hunt for you, I guess.”

“Why didn’t they radio for help?”

Culver grinned a little self-consciously. “That was me,” he explained. “I—I told them we didn’t have enough juice to run the radio. They didn’t like it, but there wasn’t anything they could do. We don’t have very much power, and that’s a fact.”

Templin laughed. “Good boy,” he said. “All right. Here’s what I want to do. Olcott said he was going to Hadley Dome. I want to be there when he gets there. I think it’s time for a showdown.”

Culver looked forlorn, but all he said was, “I’ll get a rocket ready.” He went to the teletone in the anteroom, gave orders to the ground crew of the rockets. To Templin he said, “Let’s go outside.”

Templin nodded and got ready to put his helmet back on. As he was lifting it over his head something caught his eye.

“What the devil!” he said. “Hey, Culver. Take a look.”

Culver looked. At the base of the helmet was a metal lug to which was fastened one of the radio leads. But the lug was snapped off clean; bright metal showed where it had connected with the helmet itself. The radio was broken.

Culver said in self-satisfaction, “Told you so, Temp; it was broken before, when I tried to talk to you outside.”

Templin said thoughtfully, “Maybe so. Might have broken when I ran into that rock out at the crater—no! It couldn’t have been broken. I was talking to a miner over it just before I met you.”

“What miner?”

Templin stared at him. “Why, the one who left the building just before you did.”

Culver shook his head. “Look, Temp,” he said. “I had all hands in here when Olcott and the lieutenant took off. And I was the first one out of the place afterwards. There wasn’t any miner.”

TEMPLIN STOOD rooted in astonishment for a moment. Then he blinked. “I talked to *somebody*,” he growled. “Listen, I’ve got twenty minutes or so before I have to take off. Let’s go out and take a look for this miner!”

Culver answered by reaching for a suit. Templin picked another helmet with radio tap intact and put it on; they trotted into the pressure lock and let themselves out the other side.

Templin waved. “That’s where I saw him.” But there was no sign of the “miner”.

Templin led off toward where the pressure-suited figure had seemed to be heading, out toward the old Loonie city. They scoured the jagged Moonscape, separating to the limit of their radio-contact range, investigating every peak and crater.

Then Culver's voice crackled in Templin's ear. "Look out there!" it said. "At the base of that rock pyramid!"

Templin looked. His heart gave a bound. Something was moving, something that glistened metallicly and jogged in erratic fashion across the rock, going away from them.

"That's it!" said Templin. "It's heading toward the Loonie city. Come on—maybe we can head him off!"

The thing went out of sight behind an outcropping of rock, and Templin and Culver raced toward it. It was a good quarter mile away, right at the fringe of the Loonie city itself. It took them precious minutes to get there, more minutes before they found what they sought.

Then Templin saw it, lying on the naked rock. "Culver!" he whooped. "Got it!"

They approached cautiously. The figure lay motionless, face down at the entrance to one of the deserted moon warrens.

Templin snarled angrily, "Okay, whoever you are! Get up and start answering questions!"

There was no movement from the figure. After a second Culver leaned over to inspect it, then glanced puzzledly at Templin. "Dead?" he ventured.

Templin scowled and thrust a foot under the space-suit, heaved on it to roll it over.

To his surprise, the force of his thrust sent the thing flying into the air like a football at the kick. Its lightness was incredible. They stared at it open-mouthed as it floated in a high parabola. As it came down they raced to it, picked it up.

The helmet fell off as they were handling it. Culver gasped in wonder.

There was no one in the suit!

Templin said, "Good lord, Culver, he—he took the suit off! But there isn't any air. He would have died!"

Culver nodded soberly. "Temp," he said in an awed voice, "just *what* do you suppose was wearing that suit?"

TEMPLIN jockeyed the little jet-ship down to a stem landing at the entrance to Hadley Dome, so close to the Dome itself that the pressure-chamber attendant met him with a glare. But one look at Templin's steel-hard face toned down the glare, and all the man said, very mildly, was, "You were a little close to the Dome, sir. Might cause an accident."

Templin looked at him frigidly. "If anything happens to this rathole," he said, "it won't be an accident. Out of my way."

He mounted the wide basalt stair to Level Nine and pounded Ellen Bishop's door. A timid maid

peeped out at Templin and said: “Miss Bishop is upstairs in the game room, sir. Shall I call her on the Dome phone and tell her you’re here?”

“Tell her myself,” said Templin. He spun around and climbed the remaining flight of stairs to the top of Hadley Dome.

He was in a marble-paved chamber where a gentle fountain danced a slow watery waltz. To his right was Hadley Dome’s tiny observatory, where small telescopes watched the face of the Earth day and night. Directly ahead lay the game room, chief attraction of Hadley Dome for its wealthy patrons and a source of large-scale revenue to the billionaire syndicate that owned the Dome.

For Earthly laws did not exist on Hadley Dome; the simple military code that governed the Moon enforced the common law, and certain security regulations...and nothing else. Crimes of violence came under the jurisdiction of the international Security Patrol, but there was no law regulating drugs, alcohol, morals—or gambling. And it was for gambling in particular that the Dome had become famous.

Templin hesitated at the threshold of the game room and stared around for Ellen Bishop. Contemptuously, his eyes roved over the clustered knots of thrill-seekers. There were fewer than fifty persons in the room, yet he could see that gigantic sums of money were changing hands. At the roulette table nearest him a lean, tired-looking croupier was raking in glittering chips of synthetic diamond and ruby. Each chip was worth a hundred dollars or more... and there were scores of chips in the pile.

Templin took his eyes off the sight to peer around for Olcott. The man was not in the room, and Templin mentally thanked his gods.

But at the far end, standing with her back to the play and looking out a window on the blinding vista of sun-tortured rock that was the Sea of Serenity, was Ellen Bishop, all alone.

Templin walked up behind her, gently touched her on the shoulder. The girl started and spun round like a released torsion coil.

“Templin!” she gasped. “You startled me.”

Templin chuckled comfortably. “Sorry,” he said. “Have you seen Olcott?”

“Why, no. I don’t think he’s in the Dome. But, Temp—what is the trouble at Hyginus? Culver radioed that the Security Patrol was after you for something! What is it?”

“Plenty of trouble,” Templin admitted soberly. “And I only know one way out of it; Look, Ellen—don’t ask questions right now; there are too many people around here, with too many ears. And I want you to do something.”

He glanced around the room, selected a dice table that had a good view of the door. “Let’s risk a few dollars,” he suggested. “I have a feeling that this is my lucky night!”

TEMPLIN played cautiously, for the stakes were too high for any man on a salary to afford. But by carefully betting against the dice and controlling the impulse to pyramid his winnings, he managed to stay a few chips ahead of the game.

Ellen, scorning to play, was fuming beside him. She said in a vicious whisper, “Temp, this is the most idiotic thing I ever heard of! Don’t you know that the Patrol is after you? Olcott comes here every night; if he sees you—it’s all up!”

Templin grinned. “Patience,” he said. “I know what I’m doing. Give you six to five that the man doesn’t make his eight.”



Ellen tossed her head. “Too bad,” said Templin. “I would have won.” The dice passed to Templin; he made one point, picked up his winnings, threw another and sevens out. He sighed and waited expectantly for the man beside him to bet.

Then—he saw what he was waiting for.

Joe Olcott appeared briefly in the door of the gambling salon. Templin spotted him at once and carefully took the opportunity to light a cigarette, screening most of his down-turned face with his hand. But it was an unnecessary precaution; Olcott was looking for someone else, a chubby little servile-looking man, who trotted up to him as soon as the big man appeared in the door. There was a brief whispered conversation, then Olcott and the chubby one disappeared.

Templin waited thirty seconds after they left. “I knew it,” he exulted. “Olcott said he was coming back here—and I know why! Come on, Ellen—I want to see where he’s going.”

Ellen stuttered protest but Templin dragged her out. They followed the other two into the hall and saw that the elevator indicator showed that the cage was on its way down. “They’re on it,” said Templin. “Come on—stairs are faster.” He led the complaining girl down the long basalt stairways at a precipitous pace. She was exhausted, and even Templin was breathing hard, when they rounded the landing to come to the last flight of stairs. He slowed down abruptly, and they carefully peeked into the lobby of Hadley Dome before coming into sight.

Olcott’s chubby companion had parted from him, was disappearing down a long corridor that led to the Dome’s radio room. Olcott himself was putting on a pressure suit, preparatory to going outside.

Templin halted, concealed by the high balustrade of the stair. He nodded sharply, to himself. “This is it, Ellen,” he said to the girl. “Something has been going on—something so fantastic that I hardly dare speak of it, far beyond anything we’ve dreamed of. But I think I know what it is...and the way Olcott is acting makes me surer of it every minute.”

“What are you talking about?” demanded the girl.

Templin laughed. “You’ll see,” he promised. “Meanwhile, Olcott’s on his way to a certain place that I want very much to see. I’m going after him; you stay here.”

Ellen Bishop stamped a foot. “I’m going along!” she said.

Templin shook his head. “Uh-uh. You’re not—that’s final. When this is over I’ll be working for you again—but right now I’m the boss. And you’re staying here.”

HE LEFT her fuming and went out through the pressure chamber, hastily tugging on the suit he had reclaimed from the attendant. Templin had barely sealed the helmet when the outer door opened, and vacuum sucked at him.

He blinked painfully, staggered by the shock, as he stepped out into the blinding fierce sun. In the days that had passed since last Templin was at Hadley Dome, the Moon’s slow circling of the Earth had brought the Dome into direct sunlight, agonizingly bright—hot enough to warm the icy rock far above the boiling point of water overnight. The helmet of his suit, even stopped down as far as the polarizing device would go, still could not keep out enough of that raging radiation to make it really comfortable. But after a few moments the worst of it passed, and he could see again.

Templin stared around for Olcott, confident that he wouldn’t see him...and he did not. Olcott was not among the ships parked outside the Dome. Olcott was out of sight around the Dome’s bulk; Templin followed and stared out over the heat-sodden Sea of Serenity.

Olcott's figure, bloated and forbidding-looking in the pressure suit, was bounding clumsily down the long slope of Mount Hadley, going in the general direction of a small crater, miles off across the tortured rocky Sea. Templin stared at the crater thoughtfully for a second. Then he remembered its name.

"Linne," he said underneath his breath. "Yes!" With a sudden upsurge at the heart he recalled the story of Linne Crater—site of one of the biggest and least-dilapidated Lunarian cities—the so-called "Vanishing Crater" of the Nineteenth Century.

Templin nodded soberly to himself, but wasted no more time in contemplation. Already Olcott was almost out of sight, his bloated figure visible only when he leaped over a crevasse or surmounted a plateau. It would be easy enough to lose him in this jagged, sun-drenched waste, Templin knew...so he hurried after the other man.

Templin remembered the story of Linne, always an enigma to Moon-gazers. It was Linne that, little more than a century before, had been reported by Earthly astronomers as having disappeared...then, a few years later in 1870, it had been discovered again in the low-power telescopes of the period—but with important changes in its shape.

What—Templin wondered abstractly—did those changes in its shape mean?



Obviously, Linne was their goal. It lay directly ahead in the path Olcott had taken, a good thirty miles away—across the roughest, most impassable kind of terrain that existed anywhere in the universe men traversed. A good three-day hike on Earth, it was only about an hour's time away on foot, on the light-gravitated surface of the Moon. But it would be an hour of sustained, strenuous exertion, and Templin gave all his concentration to the task of getting there.

A mile farther on, Templin glanced up as he cleared a hundred-foot-deep crevasse. Olcott's figure was nowhere to be seen.

Templin halted, a frown on his lean face. The fat man couldn't have reached the shelter of Linne crater yet—or could he? Had Linne been a wrong guess, after all—was Olcott's destination some place between?

Templin shrugged. Certainly Olcott was out of sight; it behooved Templin to get moving, to try to catch up.

He put his full strength into a powerful leg-thrust that sent him hurtling across a ravine and down into a shallow depression on the other side of it. As he balanced himself for the next leap...

Disaster struck.

OUT OF THE corner of his eye, Templin saw a flicker of motion. A sprawling, spread-eagled figure in a pressure suit was sailing down on him from the lee of a small crater nearby; and from one of the outstretched hands glittered a brilliant, diamond-like reflection of sunlight on steel.

It was a spaceman's knife...and the man who bore it, Templin knew, was Olcott.

Templin writhed aside and out of the way of the knife, but the flailing legs of Olcott caught him and knocked him down. Templin rolled like a ball, landed on his feet facing the other man. Olcott's face behind the clouded semi-opacity of the helmet was contorted in hatred, and the long knife in his hand was a murderous instrument as he leaped toward Templin again.

Templin paused a moment, irresolute. Olcott didn't have a gun with him, he saw; if Templin chose, he

could take to his heels and Olcott wouldn't have a chance in the world of catching him. But something within Templin would never let him run from a battle. . . with scarcely a second's hesitation, he grabbed for the dirk at his own belt and faced his antagonist. If it was fight that Olcott was after, he would give it to the man.

The two closed warily, eyes alert for the slightest weakness on the other's part. Strange, deadly battle, these two humans on the seared face of the Moon! In an age of fantastic technological advance, it was to the knife, after all, that humanity had returned for killing. For nothing could be more deadly than a single tiny rent made by one of these razor-sharp space knives in the puffed pressure suit of an enemy. At the tiniest slit the air would flood out, quick as bomb-flash, and the body of the man inside would burst in horrid soundless explosion as the pressures within it sought to expand into the vacuum.

Olcott drove a wicked thrust at Templin's mid-section, which the bigger man parried with his steel space-gauntlet. He dodged and let the chunky killer jerk free. Templin's mind was clear, not masked by blinding rage: he would kill Olcott if he had to, yes—but, if possible, Templin would somehow disarm the other and keep him alive.

Olcott feinted to the left, sidestepped and came in with a shoulder-high lunge. Templin shifted lightly away, then seized his chance; he ducked, dived inside Olcott's murderous thrust, drove against him with the solid shoulder of his pressure suit. The heavy-set man puffed soundlessly, the wind knocked out of him, as he spun away from the blow. Templin followed up with a sledgehammer blow to the forearm; the knife flew out of Olcott's hand, and Templin pounced.

He bore the other man down by sheer weight and impact, knelt on his chest, knife pressed against the bulge of the pressure suit just where it joined the collar. With his free hand he flicked on his helmet radio and said, "Give up, Olcott. You're licked and you know it."

Olcott's face was strained and suddenly as pale as the disk of the Moon itself. He licked his lips. "All—all right," he croaked. "Take that knife away, for the love of heaven!"

Templin looked at him searchingly, then nodded and stood up.

"Get up," he ordered. Olcott sullenly pushed himself up on one arm. Then, abruptly, a flash of pain streaked across his face. "My leg!" he groaned. "Damn you, Templin, you've broken it!"

Templin frowned and moved toward him cautiously. He bent to look at the leg, but in the shrouding bulkiness of the air-filled pressure suit there was no way for him to tell if Olcott was lying. He said, "Try and get up."

Olcott winced and shook his head. "I can't," he said. "It's broken."

Templin bent closer, suspiciously. "Looks all right to me—" he started to say. Then he realized his mistake—but too late to do him any good.

Olcott's other leg came up with the swiftness of a striking snake, drew back and lashed out in a vicious kick that caught Templin full in the ribs, sent him hurtling helplessly a dozen yards back. He wind-milled his arms, trying to regain his balance. . . but he had no chance, for at once the ground slid away from under him as he reeled backward into the yawning 500-foot crevasse, and down!

LITHE AS a cat, Templin twisted his body around in space to land on his feet. The fall was agonizingly slow, but he still possessed all the mass, if not the weight, of his two hundred pound body, and if he struck on his helmet it would mean death.

He landed feet-first. The impact was bone-shattering, but his space-trained leg muscles had time to

flex and cushion the shock. As it was, he blacked out for a moment, and came to again to looking up into a blinding sun overhead that silhouetted the head and shoulders of Olcott, peering down at him.

They looked at each other for a long moment. Then Templin heard the crackle of Olcott's voice in his helmet, and realized with a start that his radio was still working. "A hero," jeered Olcott. "Following after me single-handed. Sorry I couldn't let you come along with me."

Templin was silent.

"I'd like to ask you questions," Olcott continued, "but right now I haven't got time; I've got some urgent affairs to take care of."

"In Linne," said Templin. "I know. Go ahead, Olcott. I'll see you there."

Olcott's figure was quite motionless for a second. Then. "No," he said, "I don't think you will." And his head disappeared over the lip of the crevasse.



Templin had just time enough to wonder what Olcott was up to... when he found out.

A giant, jagged boulder, came hurtling down in slow motion from the edge of the chasm.

Slowly as it fell, Templin had just time enough to get out of its way before it struck. It landed with a shattering vibration that he felt through the soles of his feet, sending up splinters of jagged rock that splattered off his helmet and pressure suit. And it was followed by another, and a third, coming down like a giant deadly hail in slow motion.

Then Olcott's head reappeared, to see what the results of his handiwork has been.

Templin, crouched against a boulder just like the ones that had rained down, had sense enough to play dead. He stared up at Olcott with murder in his heart, disciplining himself, forcing himself not to move. For a long moment Olcott looked down.

Then Templin saw an astonishing thing.

Against the far wall of the crevasse, just below Olcott's head, a flare of light burst out, and almost at once a second, a few yards away.

Templin could see Olcott leap in astonishment, jerk upright and stare in the direction of Hadley Dome.

Someone was shooting a rocket pistol at Olcott. But whom?

Whoever the person was, he was a friend in need to Steve Templin. Olcott scrambled erect and disappeared; Templin waited cautiously for a long moment, but he didn't come back. Templin's unknown friend had driven the other man off, forced him to flee in the direction of the Loonie city at Linne Crater.

Templin, hardly believing in his luck, stood up. For several seconds he stood staring at the lip of the cleft, waiting to see what would happen.

A moment later a new helmet poked over the side of the chasm nearest Hadley Dome. Templin peered up in astonishment. It looked like—

It was.

The voice in his helmet was entirely familiar. "Oh, Temp, you utter idiot," it said despairingly. "Are you all right?"

It was Ellen Bishop. “Bless your heart,” said Templin feelingly. “Of course I’m all right. Stand by to give me a hand—I’m coming up!”

IT WASN’T easy, but Templin finally managed to scramble out of the crevasse—after loping nearly half a mile along the bottom of it, to where the sides were less precipitous. Ellen Bishop, following his progress from above, was there to meet him as he clambered over the edge.

Remembering the genuine anxiety in her voice as it had come over the radio, he peered curiously at her face; but behind the shading helmet it was hard to read expressions. He smiled.

“You win another Girl Scout merit badge,” he observed. “Whatever made you show up in the nick of time like that?”

Ellen’s face colored slightly. “I was watching you,” she said defiantly. “There’s a spotting telescope in the Observatory at Hadley Dome and—well, I was worried about you. I went up and watched. I saw Olcott stop and look around, and then hide...so I figured out that he’d seen you. It looked like an ambush. And of course, you were such a big fool that you didn’t take a rocket gun along with you.”

“Couldn’t afford to,” Templin apologized. “Olcott’s still in the Security Patrol—I didn’t want to be caught following him with a gun tucked in my belt. Besides, he didn’t have one himself.”

“He had something,” Ellen said. “Or did you just go down in that crevasse to look for edelweiss?”

Templin coughed. “Well,” he said ambiguously. “As long as you’re here, you might as well come the rest of the way.” He craned his neck in the direction of the Loonie city, mockingly near now. Olcott was not in sight.

“Come on,” he ordered. “Keep out of trouble, though. Olcott went a little too far when he jumped me. He can’t turn back any more...and that means he’s desperate.”

The girl nodded. Side by side they drove on toward the solitary crater of Linne, alone in the middle of the Mare Serenitatis. Once Templin thought he saw Olcott’s figure on top of a peak, watching them. But it didn’t reappear, and he decided he had been mistaken...

They loped into the ancient city of the long-dead lunar race, Templin in the lead but the girl only a hair’s-breadth behind. In the shadow of a giant ruined tower Templin gestured, and they came to a stop.

He switched off the transmitter of his helmet radio, motioned to the girl to do the same. When, somewhat puzzled, she obeyed, he leaned close to her, touching helmets.

“Keep your radio off!” he yelled, and the vibration carried his voice from his helmet to hers. “This is where Olcott’s outfit hides out, whoever they are. If they hear our radios it’ll be trouble.”

ELLEN NODDED, and the two of them advanced down the broad street of the ravished Lunarian metropolis. Glancing at the shattered buildings all about them, Templin found his mind dwelling on the peculiar tragedy of the Moon’s former inhabitants, who had risen from the animal, developed a massive civilization...and seen it wiped out into nothingness.

Ellen shuddered and moved closer to Templin. He understood her feeling; even to him, the city seemed haunted. The light of the giant sun that hung overhead was blinding; yet he found himself

becoming jittery, seeing strange imaginary shapes that twisted and contorted in the utterly black shadows cast by the ruined walls. They circled a shattered Coliseum, looking warily into every crevice, when Templin felt Ellen's gauntleted hand on his shoulder. He looked at her and touched helmets. Her face was worried. "Someone's watching us, Temp," she said positively, her voice metallic as it was transmitted by the helmets. "I feel eyes."

"Where?"

"How do I know? In that big round building we just passed, I think. It feels exactly as if they keep going around and around the building at the same time we do, always staying on the far side from us."

Templin considered. "Let's look," he said. "You go one way, I'll go the other. We'll meet on the other side."

"Oh, Temp!"

"Don't be frightened, Ellen. You have your gun—and I can take care of myself with my space knife."

Her lip trembled. "All right," she said. Templin watched her start off. She had drawn the gun and was holding it ready as she walked.

Templin went clockwise around the building, moving slowly and carefully, his hand always poised near the dirk at his belt. Almost anything might be lurking in the cavernous hollows in these old buildings. Olcott, he felt quite sure, *was* lurking somewhere nearby—and so were his mysterious friends. Templin stepped over a fallen carved pillar—strange ornamentation of curious serpentine beasts and almost-human figures straining toward the sky was on it—and froze as he thought he saw a flicker of motion out of the corner of his eye. But it was not repeated, and after a moment he went on.

He was clear back to his starting point before he realized that Ellen had disappeared.

TEMPLIN SWORE in the silence. There was no doubt about it. He had travelled completely around the circular building, and Ellen was gone.

He hesitated a second, feeling the forces of mystery gathering about him as they had about Ellen, then grimly dismissed the fantasy from his mind. There had to be a way of finding Ellen again... and at once.

His mind coldly alert, he circled the ancient Lunarian structure once more. Ellen was not in sight.

Templin stood still, thinking it over. Cautiously he retraced his tracks, eyes fixed on the soft Lunarian rock beneath him.

Fifteen yards away, he saw the marks of a scuffle on the ray-charred rock. Heavy space boots had been dragged there, making deep, protesting scars. Ellen.

Templin swore soundlessly and loosened his space knife in its scabbard. He stared up at the ruined Loonie temple. A crumbled arch was before him; inside the structure it disappeared into ultimate blackness. There was a curving corridor, heading downward in a wide spiral. He could see a dozen yards into it... then darkness obliterated his vision.

Templin shrugged and grinned tightly to himself. It looked so very much like a giant rat-trap. Foolish, to go into unknown danger on the chance that Ellen was there—but it was the foolish sort of risk he had always been willing to take.

He snapped on his helmet lamp and stepped boldly in.

Down he went, and down. The corridor was roughly circular in section, slightly flattened underfoot and ornamented with ancient carvings. Templin flashed his light on them curiously as he passed. They were a repetition of the weirdly yearning figures he had seen on the columns outside—lean, tenuous manlike things, arms stretched to the sky. Curious, how like they were to human beings, Templin thought. Except for the leanness of them, and the outsize eyes on the pearshaped head, they could almost have been men.

Templin grimaced at them and went on.

He had walked about a mile in the broad, downward spiral when he saw lights ahead.

Instinctively he snapped off his helmet lamp, stood motionless in the darkness, waiting to see if he had been noticed. But the lights, whatever they were, did not move; he waited for long minutes, and nothing came toward him. Obviously he had not been seen.

Templin cautiously moved up toward them, watching carefully. They were too bright for helmet lamps, he thought; and too still. But what other lights could be down here in this airless cavern under the Moon? He crept up behind a rock overhang and peered out.

“Good Lord!” Stunned, Templin spoke aloud, and the words echoed inside his helmet. For now he could see clearly—and what he saw was unbelievable.

There were figures moving before the lights. A stocky figure of a man in a pressure suit that Templin knew to be Olcott, and others. And the other figures were—not human!

TEMPLIN stepped out in the open to see more clearly. Abruptly some atavistic sense made the hair on his neck prickle with sudden warning of danger—but it came too late. Templin whirled around, suddenly conscious of his peril. Figures were behind him, menacing figures that he could not recognize in the darkness, closing in on him. He grabbed instinctively for his space knife, but before he had it clear of its scabbard they were on him, bowling him over with the force and speed of their silent attack. He fell heavily, with them on top of him.

He struggled, writhing frantically, but there were too many of them. They held him down; he felt hands running over him, plucking his space knife from its scabbard. Then he felt himself being picked up by a dozen hands and carried face down toward the lights.

Templin made his mind relax and consider, fighting to overcome his rage at being taken so by surprise. He thought desperately of ruses for escape...

Then anger was driven out of his mind. He heard a thin, shrill whistle of escaping air within his helmet. It meant only one thing...his suit had been pierced in the struggle, and his precious air was leaking into the void outside.

He made a supreme, convulsive effort and managed to free one arm, but it was recaptured immediately and he was helpless. Templin groaned internally. He was a dead man, he knew—dead as surely as though the heart had been cut from his body. For his suit was leaking air and there was no way to stop it, no nearby pressure-dome into which to flee, nothing to do but die.

Templin resigned himself for death; he relaxed, allowing his captors to carry him along at a swift, jogging trot. His mind was strangely calm, now that death was so near. For anxiety and fright come only from uncertainty... and there was no more uncertainty... in Templin's mind.

He felt his captors drop him ungently on a rock floor. They were close to the lights now, he realized...

The hiss of air in his ears was gone. And he was still alive. Templin dazedly comprehended a miracle, for the air in his helmet and suit had leaked out until, somehow, it had established a balance. And that meant—

“Air!” He said it aloud, and the word was a prayer of thanksgiving. It was no less than a miracle that there should be air here, under the surface of the Moon—a miracle for which Templin was deeply and personally grateful.

Someone laughed above him. He scrambled to his feet uncertainly, looking up. It was Olcott, pressure-suited but holding his helmet in his hand, laughing at him.

Olcott nodded in grim humor. “Yes,” he said, his voice coming thinly to Templin through his own helmet, “it’s air all right. But it won’t matter to you, because you aren’t going to live to enjoy it. My friends here will take care of that!”

Olcott jerked a thumb toward the lights. Templin followed with his eyes.

The lights were crude, old-fashioned electrics, grouped in front of a pit that descended into the floor of the cavern. And beyond the lights, standing in a stoic, silent group, were a dozen lean figures, big-eyed, big-headed, wearing brief loin-cloths of some mineral material that glistened in the illumination.

Templin stared. For they were not human, those figures. They were—the lean, questing figures that were carved in the ancient Lunarian stone.

TEMPLIN FORCED himself to turn to Olcott. He glanced at those who had captured him, half-expecting that they would be more of the ancient, supposedly extinct Lunarians. But again he was surprised, for the half-dozen men behind him were as human as himself, though pale and curiously flabby-looking. They wore shredded rags of cloth that seemed to Templin to be the remnants of a military uniform that had disappeared from the face of the Earth years before.

Groping for understanding, Templin turned back to Olcott. Then his mind cleared. There was one question to which he *had* to know the answer.

“Where’s Ellen Bishop?” he demanded.

Olcott raised his heavy brows. “I was about to ask you that,” he said. “Don’t try to deceive me, Templin. Is she hiding?”

Templin shrugged without replying.

Olcott waved. “It doesn’t matter. She can’t get away. My patrols will pick her up—the Loonies are very good at that.”

Templin looked at the dark man’s eyes. It was impossible to read his expression, but Templin decided that he was telling the truth. There was no reason, after all, for him to lie.

Templin said shortly, “I don’t know where she is.” He pointed to the silent, watching figures beyond the lights. “What are they?”

Olcott chuckled richly. “They’re the inhabitants, Templin. The original Lunarians. There aren’t very many of them left—a thousand or so—but they’re all mine.”

Templin shook his head. Hard to believe, that the ancient race had survived for so long underground—yet he could not doubt it, when his eyes provided him with evidence. He said, “What do you mean, they’re all yours?”



“They work for me,” said Olcott easily. He gestured sharply, and the scarecrow-like figures bowed and began to descend into the pit, by a narrow spiral ramp around its sides. “They’re rather useful, in fact. As you should know, considering how much they’ve helped me at Hyginus Cleft.”

“Sabotage—you mean—these things were—”

Olcott nodded, almost purring in satisfaction. “Yes. The—accidents—to your equipment, the damage to your generators and a good many other things, were taken care of for me by the Loonies. For instance, it was one of them who located your plutonium pile for me.”

Templin scowled. “Wearing one of my miners’ pressure-suits, wasn’t he? I begin to see.” He looked at the group of pallid humans who had captured him. “They Loonies too?” he demanded.

Olcott shook his head. “Only by adoption,” he said. “You see, they had the misfortune to be on the wrong side in the Three-Day War. In fact, they were some of the men who were operating the rocket projectors that were so annoying to the United Nations. And when your—*our*—compatriots began atom-blasting the rocket-launching sites, a few of them found their way down here.” Olcott gazed at them benevolently. “They are very useful to me, too. They control the Loonies, you see—I think they must have been rather cruel to the Loonies when they first came, because the Loonies are frightened to death of them now. And I control *them*.”

Templin stiffened. “Rocket projectors,” he repeated. “You mean these are the men who bombed Detroit?”

Olcott waved. “Perhaps,” he said. “I don’t know which targets they chose. This may have been the crew that blasted Paris—or Memphis—or Stalingrad.”

Templin looked at them for a long moment. “I’ll remember,” he said softly. “My family—Never mind. What are you going to do with me?”

“I am very likely to kill you, Templin. Unless I turn you over to the Loonies for sport.”

Templin nodded. “I see,” he said. “Well, I—thought as much.”

Olcott looked at him curiously. Then he issued a quick order to the pale, silent men behind him. It was not in English.

To Templin he said, “You shouldn’t have gotten in my way. I need the uranium that your company owns; I plan to get it.”

“Why?”

Olcott pursed his lips. “I think,” he said, “that we will start the rocket projectors again. Only this time, there will be no slip-ups. As a high-ranking officer in the Security Patrol, I will make sure that we are not interfered with.”

The pale men gripped Templin, carried him to the edge of the pit into which the Loonies had disappeared. Olcott said, “Good-bye, Templin. I’m turning you over to the Loonies. What they will do to you I don’t know, but it will not be pleasant. They hate human beings.” He smirked, and added, “With good reason.”

He nodded to the men; they picked Templin up easily, dropped him into the pit.

It was not very deep. Templin dropped lightly perhaps twenty feet, landed easily and straightened to face whatever was coming.

He was surrounded by the tall, tenuous Lunarians, a dozen of them staring at him with their huge, cryptic eyes. Silently they gestured to him to move down a shaft in the rock. Templin shrugged and complied.

He was in a rabbit-warren of tunnels, branching and forking out every few yards. Inside of a handful of minutes Templin was thoroughly confused.

They came to a vaulted dome in the rock. Still silent, the Lunarians gestured to Templin to enter. He did.

Someone came running toward him, crying: "Temp! Thank Heaven you're safe!"

Pressure-suit off, dark hair flying as she ran to him, was Ellen,

TEMPLIN HELD her to him tightly for a long moment. When finally she stepped back he saw that her eyes were damp. She said: "Oh, Temp, I thought you were gone this time for sure! The Loonies told me that Olcott had captured you—I was so worried!"

Templin stared. "*Told* you? You mean these things can talk?"

"Well, no, not exactly. But they told me, all the same. It's mental telepathy, I suppose, Temp, or something very much like it. Oh, they can't read minds—unless you try to convey a thought—but they can project their own thoughts to another person. It sounds just like someone talking...but you don't hear it with your ears."

Templin nodded. "I begin to understand things," he said. "That miner at Hyginus—I thought I talked to him, and yet my radio was broken, so I couldn't have. And then, he abandoned his suit. Can the Loonies get along on the surface without pressure suits?"

Ellen looked uncertain. "I—I don't know. But—I think perhaps they can. They said something about Olcott forcing them to do it. Olcott has them under control, Temp. He's using them to get the uranium mines away from us—and the Loonies think he wants the uranium to make bombs!"

"I have heard about that," Templin said. "From Olcott. Which reminds me—how did you get down here without his knowing about it?"

Ellen said, "I was outside that Coliseum-looking place, up on the surface, and suddenly somebody grabbed me from behind. I was frightened half to death; he carried me down and through a bunch of tunnels to here. And then—why, this voice began talking to me, and it was one of the Loonies. He said—he said he wanted me to help him get rid of Olcott!"

Templin asked, "Why can't they get rid of him themselves? There are a couple thousand Loonies—and Olcott can't have more than fifteen or twenty men down here."

Ellen sighed. "That's the horrible thing, Temp. You see, these men haven't a thing to lose. When they came down here, they brought part of the warhead of an atom-rocket along. And they've got it assembled in one of the caverns, not far from here—right in the middle of a terrific big lode of uranium ore! Can you imagine what would happen if it went off, Temp? All that uranium would explode—the whole Moon would become a bomb. And that's what they're threatening to do if the Loonies try to fight them."

Templin whistled. He looked around the room they were in reflectively. It was a high-ceilinged, circular affair, cut out of the mother-rock, sparsely furnished with pallets and benches. Loonie living quarters, he thought.

He looked back at the hovering Lunarians, staring blankly at them from the entrance to the chamber. “How do you work this telepathy affair?” he demanded.

“Walk up to them and start talking. The effort of phrasing words is enough to convey the thought to them—as nearly as I can figure it out.”

Templin nodded, looked at them again and walked slowly over. The bulbous heads with the giant eyes confronted him blankly. He said uncertainly, “Hello?”

A SENSATION of mirth reached him, as though someone had laughed silently beside his ear. A voice spoke, and he recognized its kinship to that of the “miner” he had stopped at Hyginus. It had the same curious strangeness, the thing that was not an accent but something more basic. It said, “Hello, Steve Templin. We have spared your life. Now tell us what we are to do with you.”

“Why, I thought—” Steve stumbled. “That is, you’re having trouble with these Earthmen, aren’t you?”

“For sixteen of your years.” There was anger in the thought. “We have not come to like Earthmen, Templin.”

Templin said uncomfortably, “These Earthmen I don’t like myself. Shall we make an alliance, then?”

The thought was direct and sincere. “It was for that that we spared your lives.”

Templin nodded. “Good.” Abruptly his whole bearing changed. He snapped: “Then help us get out of here! Get us back to Hadley Dome or Hyginus. We’ll get help—and come back here and wipe them out!”

Regretfully, the Lunarian’s thought came, “That, Templin, is impossible. Our people can go out into the vacuum unprotected, for short periods, but you cannot. Have you forgotten that your suit will no longer hold air?”

Templin winced. But he said, “Ellen’s will. Let her go for help.”

Wearily the thought came, “Again, no. For if you brought men here to help you the Earthmen who enslave us could not be taken by surprise. And if only one of them should live for just a few moments after the first attack...it would be the death of us all. They have hollowed out a chamber in the midst of a deposit of the metal of fire. They have said that if we act against them they will set off a chain reaction—and, in this, I know that they do not lie.”

The Lunarian hesitated. Almost apologetically he went on: “It was from the metal of fire that the greatness of our race was destroyed many thousands of years ago, Templin. Once we lived on the surface, and had atomic power; because we used it wrongly we ravished the surface of our planet and destroyed nearly all of our people. Now—there are so few of us left, Templin, and we must not see it happen again.”

Templin spread his hands. “All right,” he said shortly. “What you say is true. But what do you suggest we do?”

The thought was sympathetic. “There is only one chance,” it said, “If someone could enter the chamber of the bomb—My own people cannot approach, for it is not allowed. But you are an Earthman; perhaps you could reach it. And if you could destroy the men who are in there—the others we can account for.”

Templin gave it only a second’s thought. He nodded reflectively. “It’s the only chance,” he agreed. “Well—lead the way. I’ll try it.”

THE LUNARIAN peeped out into a corridor, then turned back to Templin. He said in his soundless speech, "The entrance to the room of power is to your right. What you will find there I do not know, for none of us have ever been inside."

Templin shrugged. "All right," he said. And to Ellen Bishop, "This is it; if I shouldn't see you again—it's been worthwhile, Ellen."

The girl bit her lip. Impulsively she flung her arms around him, hugged him tight for a second. Then she stepped back and let him go.

Templin stepped out into the corridor. No one was in sight. He patted the bulge of Ellen's rocket pistol where it was concealed under his clothing—he had taken off his pressure suit, torn the stout fabric of his tunic to match the ragged uniforms he had seen on the pale men—and turned down the traveled path to his right.

Thirty yards along, he came to a metal door.

A man was standing there, looking dreamily at the rock wall of the corridor. He looked incuriously at Templin but made no move to stop him. As Templin passed, the man said something rapid and casual to him in the language of the nation that had waged the Three-Day War.

That was the first hurdle. It didn't sound like a challenge, Templin thought, wishing vainly that he had learned that language at some time in his life. Apparently the fugitives had not considered the possibility of an inimical human being penetrating to this place.

Templin replied with a non-committal grunt and walked on. The skin between his shoulder-blades crawled, expecting the blast of a rocket-shell from the guard. But it did not come; the thing had worked.

Templin found that he was in a room where half a dozen men sat around, a couple of them playing cards with what looked like a homemade deck, others lying on pallets that had obviously been commandeered from the Loonies.

Along one wall was an involved mechanical affair—a metal tube with bulges along its fifteen-foot length, and a man standing by a push-button monitor control at one end of it. That was his target, Templin knew. Built like an atom-bomb, it would have tiny fragments of uranium-235 or plutonium in it, ready to be hurled together to form a giant, self-detonating mass of atomic explosive at the touch of that button. And once the pieces had come together, nothing under the sun could prevent the blast.

The men were looking up at him, Templin saw. It was time to make his play. The thing was too much like shooting sitting ducks, he thought distastefully—yet he dared not warn them, give them a chance to fight back. Too much was at stake.

He gazed stolidly at the men who were looking at him, and his hand crept to where Ellen's rocket pistol was concealed inside his tunic.

"Templin!"

The shout was like a pistol-crack in his ears. Templin spun round frantically. And in the door stood Olcott, surprise and rage stamped on his face.

TEMPLIN whirled into action. The men in the room, abruptly conscious that something was wrong, were reaching for weapons. Templin made his decision and passed them up for the first shot—blasted, instead, the man at the atomic warhead control, most deadly to his plans. He saw the man's body

disappear in incandescent red mist as the rocket shell hit, then fired at a clump of three who had weapons drawn, fired again and again. Surprise was with him, and he got each of them with his potent shells. Yet—the odds were too much against him. As he downed the last pale-skinned underground man, Olcott was on him!

Templin reeled with the fury of his attack, grunted as Olcott landed vicious stabbing blows on his unprotected body. He lost control of the rocket-pistol in his hand, saw it spin away across the room as Olcott thudded against him with his steel-gauntleted hand. Templin dropped to the floor under the pressure-suited body, rolled and brought his knees up in a savage kick. The chunky man grunted but lashed out and a steel fist caught Templin at the base of the jaw. For a second the chamber reeled around him. Another like that, he knew, and he was done.

Olcott came down on him like a metal and fabric colossus. The gauntleted hands reached for Templin's throat and found it, circled it and squeezed. Templin, battered and gasping in the thin air, found even that cut off under the remorseless pressure from the other's hands. He struggled with every trick he knew to break the man's grip...

Blindly his hands reached out, closed on something, heaved back. There was a sudden yielding, and Templin felt air reach his lungs once more. But it came too late.

Darkness overcame him...

SOMEONE WAS bending over him. Templin surged upward as soon as he opened his eyes. The figure leaped away and emitted a slight shriek. "Temp!" it said reprovably.

Templin's eyes swam into focus again; it was Ellen.

He was in bed, in a huge room with filtered sunlight coming in through a giant window. He was on the surface—by the look of it, back at Hadley Dome.

His head throbbed. He touched it inquiringly, and his finger encountered gauze bandage. He stared at the girl.

"We won," she said simply. "The Loonies and I came in as soon as we could—soon as we heard the shooting. You did a terrific job, Temp. The only live ones in the room were you and Olcott. And, just as we came in—Olcott died."

"Died? Died how?"

"You broke his neck, Temp. He was strangling you, and you were fighting back, and you caught him under the chin and pushed. The metal collar of his pressure suit snapped his spine. And then, since you had a skull that's broken in three places, the surgeon says, you went off to sleep yourself."

Templin shook his head incredulously. "And the Loonies?"

"They're free. And very grateful to you, too. They—they massacred all the other Earthmen, down under there. They'd been waiting for the chance for years, you see. And—well, you've been unconscious for two days, and I've been busy. Things are under control now. The mine is back in operation—Culver's outside, waiting to see you—and you're free, too, Temp. You can go back to the Inner Planets whenever you like."

Templin repeated, "The Inner Planets." He looked at her and grinned. "It will be like a vacation," he said. "By the way, how about my bonus?"

"Bonus?" Ellen looked puzzled. Then she laughed—but a little strainedly, Templin decided. "Oh, you

mean the backing I promised you from Terralune? It's yours, Temp. Ships, and money, and everything you need. Only—" She hesitated. "That is, I had an idea—"

He interrupted, "That's not what I mean," he objected. "My bonus was personnel. You promised me I could have help to settle Venus, if I took care of this mining affair for you. In fact, you said I could take my pick of anybody on the Terralune payroll."

Ellen's face clouded. "Yes," she said. "But, Temp—"

"Don't argue," he commanded. "A promise is a promise. And—well, you're on the payroll, Ellen. My advice to you is, start packing. We leave for Venus in the morning!"

**The End.**

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**Notes and proofing history**

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