

Escape the Morning Short Guide

Escape the Morning by Poul Anderson

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Overview

In the near future of this story , the moon has become a new frontier where pioneers excited by the prospect of developing an untapped world mostly mine at small and isolated stations. The moon is a dangerous place, and these pioneers unfailingly help whoever is in trouble; giving and getting help when needed is how they survive. When Mark Jordan is told that a diplomat's vehicle has been damaged several miles from 4592 Escape the Morning his station, he unquestioningly sets out to rescue the man. A previously uncharted shower of meteors has ripped through the vehicles's engines; this same shower threatens Mark and the diplomat as they race across the shadowy landscape of the moon in a desperate race for their lives. They will die horribly of radiation poisoning if the sunlight of a lunar dawn catches them!

About the Author

Poul Anderson was born in Bristol, Pennsylvania on November 25, 1926, to Anton and Astrid Anderson. He married Karen Kruse on December 12, 1953. His first story was published in 1947 while he was still in college. After graduating in 1948 with a Bachelor's degree in physics from the University of Minnesota, he devoted himself to writing. Anderson was publishing several stories a year by the early 1950s, and his first book *Vault of the Ages*, a novel for young people, appeared in 1952. Anderson was a well-established author by the end of the decade whose works included mysteries, historical novels, and nonfiction articles, as well as science fiction. He was clearly one of America's most popular science fiction authors, with a following comparable to those of Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and A. E. Van Vogt. He has remained an industrious writer since then, publishing dozens of articles, hundreds of stories, and scores of novels.

Anderson is admired as much by his fellow authors as by his wide readership. The Science Fiction Writers of America have given him annual Nebula awards in 1971 for the best novelette "The Queen of Air and Darkness," in 1972 for the best novelette "Goat Song," and in 1981 for best novella *The Saturn Game*. The Science Fiction Writers of America have also honored Anderson by including his famous 1957 short story, "Call Me Joe" in *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame* (1973), their compilation of best science fiction stories published before 1973. The World Science Fiction Convention Science Fiction Achievement Award, the "Hugo," which is primarily determined by science fiction fans, has been given to Anderson several times: twice for the best novella, in 1972 for *The Queen of Air and Darkness* and in 1982 for *The Saturn Game*; three times for the best novelette, in 1969 for "The Sharing of Flesh," in 1973 for "Goat Song," and in 1979 for "Hunter's Moon"; and twice for the best short story, in 1961 for "The Longest Voyage" and in 1964 for "No Truce for Kings." Anderson was the guest of honor for the 1959 World Science Fiction Convention. He received the 1978 World Science Fiction convention's Gandalf Award as a Grand Master of Fantasy. The April 1972 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* was devoted to Anderson and his work. In addition to his many awards for his science fiction, Anderson received the 1959 Macmillan Cock Robin Mystery Award for the best mystery novel and the 1974 August Derleth Award from the British Fantasy Society for *Hrolf Kraki's Saga*.

He served as president of the Science Fiction Writers of America from 1972 to 1973.

Setting

The moon is inhospitable to human beings in many ways. Even its light gravity is threatening: "With gravity one-sixth as strong as it is on Earth, you must spend at least two hours out of the twenty-four keeping fit, or your very bones will atrophy." For pioneers like Mark, Tom, and Judy, each day may bring new discoveries of unexpected dangers. Their parents "died when a pit collapsed, two years ago"; unpredictably, iron alloy beams become brittle on the moon and break, and in the case of Mark's parents, the discovery that iron alloy was unsuitable for shoring up mines proved fatal.

The pioneers, in order to survive, must pay careful attention to their environment, never allowing panic to make them break the rules that help safeguard their lives. When Mark takes his turtle, a slow vehicle, out to rescue Kamolondo, he follows a prescribed path that has been outlined by glowing markers. When he races towards safety with Kamolondo against the coming of dawn, he coolly keeps control of his judgment, following the lit path even though a direct route home would be shorter: "To strike directly across this shadowland, away from the markers, was to make death certain." Even when following safeguards the unpredictability of danger is a constant menace. In the case of "Escape the Morning," Mark discovers that a "meteorite shower, hitherto uncharted, must be pounding the Moon." The pioneers try to keep track of when meteors may strike but it is an inexact process.



Social Sensitivity

"Mark, in that hour we became brothers," declares Kamolondo. This assertion summarizes the relationship between the Zairian diplomat and the American teenager. Although somewhat different in outlook, they regard each other as equal men without any racial overtones. Their differences in points of view are what any two men might have when one is a pioneer on a dangerous frontier and the other is a foreigner hoping to find ways to use the frontier's resources to benefit his people. When Kamolondo speaks of exploiting the moon, Mark thinks "But this is our home! You don't exploit your home!" Even at the end, the important division between the two men is their attitude toward frontier life. Kamolondo makes a generous offer, "You can come to Earth, study in the finest schools, make the best careers the planet has to offer. I would be proud if you return home with me." Mark's response might typify the response of a multitude of pioneers, whether on the moon or the North American prairie: "He swept his hand in a gesture that included the neat little kitchen, 4596 Escape the Morning the rooms beyond, the subtle and powerful machines working topside, this whole station that was theirs.

'Whatever for?'"

Literary Qualities

"Escape the Morning" is a lean adventure story that is representative of Anderson's literary skills. One of the key elements of an adventure story is suspense, and Anderson introduces it right away: "Troubles never come singly, or Mark Jordan would not have been racing the sunrise for his life."

This kind of opening sentence is called a teaser—it is supposed to entice an audience's interest. In this case, the opening sentence has three elements to swiftly pull readers in. First is that "troubles never come singly": How many troubles does Mark have? Second is "racing the sunrise": How does one race a sunrise? Where could the action be taking place that it would be possible to race a sunrise? Third is "for his life": What about a sunrise could kill someone? To find the answers to these questions that the first sentence of the story raises one must read the story. Another important aspect of the opening line is the mentioning of Mark Jordan; the specific person's name gives an audience someone personal to worry about. Will he die?

The rest of the story shows the same care in phrasing and offers a bit-by-bit revelation of the answers to the questions raised at the outset. Much care is shown in how the relationship between Kamolondo and Mark develops.

Anderson extrapolates from the events of the mid-1960s to set up some of their relationship. Some African nations in the 1960s were just becoming free of colonial rule; Anderson draws on his knowledge of African history to suggest that a Central African nation of federated states might evolve that he calls "Federated Zaire." From his description of Kamolondo, it is clear that the man is a black African, but his relationship with Mark bears no tones of racial friction or even of racial concerns; Anderson's phrasing implies that, just as Federated Zaire indicates that the events take place in the future, that racism will be of no concern among the future colonists of the moon.



Themes and Characters

The main character of "Escape the Morning" is eighteen-year-old Mark Jordan. He runs a mining station with his brother Tom and sister Judy; they inherited the station from their parents, who died in a pit accident. As the one in charge, Mark bears heavy responsibilities for the safety of his brother and sister, as well as for the success of their mining enterprise. He knows that "Emergencies on the Moon have a way of arriving fast and nasty."

This means that he not only has obligations to his siblings, but that he and they have wider obligations to the community, because "like all pioneers, the Lunar colonists take for granted that anyone in distress is to be helped." This is why he unhesitatingly sets off to pick up Achille Kamolondo, the stranded "Minister of Technology of Federated Zaire," who is a couple of hours away from being irradiated to death by a solar flare. These are demanding adult responsibilities that Mark must bear; his meeting their challenge with courage grounded in good sense show him already a man of mature character.

Through Mark's perceptions and actions, Anderson presents the story's theme of how people would survive on the moon. The story develops ideas about what would most concern colonists, about what a pioneer lunar society would be like, what obstacles would need to be overcome, and about what actions colonists would take to overcome those challenges. From a system for rescuing people in trouble to the marked stones that indicate safe paths for traveling to television screens instead of windows, Anderson illustrates in a smooth and exciting way how problems would be recognized and how they would be dealt with. As we follow Mark on his journey and his race against death, we not only learn about his courage and his dedication to fulfilling his responsibilities—even at the cost of his own life—we see the technology and ideas that Anderson thinks may shape the future of humanity on the moon.

In a short space, Anderson gives dimension to Mark's characterization.

We know he has ambitions to attend college "for an engineering degree."

We also know that he takes his command obligations seriously and that he cares for his younger brother and sister. These good aspects of his personality are given depth by his easy irritation at the words of an outsider who does not know better, as well as by his moment of hesitation when Kamolondo urges him to save himself and leave the diplomat behind: "But you don't abandon anyone on the Moon," Mark realizes. His is the rationality of a young man who faces danger everyday and who understands, in spite of his irritation and fear, what the obligations are for someone who chooses to remain in harm's way.

Kamolondo is surprised by how young Mark looks, but "He wasn't so old himself: a large man with a face brown, intelligent, and proud."



Kamolondo has, at first, a superior attitude and is somewhat condescending; he sees a mere boy in Mark instead of the man Mark has already proven to be. The main character of a work of fiction often grows the most because the narrative is usually about events that change him or her, but in "Escape the Morning" the secondary character Kamolondo grows more than the main character Mark.

An intelligent man whose trip to the moon is at least partly motivated by curiosity, he asks Mark about his moon-life. He learns that "We mine copper," as well as some oil. He is somewhat offended by Mark's explanation of why there would be oil on the moon, insisting that he already knew that, even though his remarks suggested that he did not. He seems to have trouble accepting the idea that a boy would be in any way superior to himself. Even so, he understands Mark's explanation of how he took over from his parents. All this character exposition could be boring, but Anderson is too skilled to simply have characters talk about their lives. Instead, the story focuses on a crisis, and it is how they respond to that crisis that the characters reveal themselves.

"They had traveled twelve miles when the catastrophe hit them. It came with the deadly suddenness of most bad luck on the Moon." Meteors rip through the turtle and the vehicle and its radio are disabled. Unable to call for help, which might come too late anyway, Mark and Kamolondo try to outrace the sunrise as they set out for Mark's station. During this journey we learn something important about the arrogant Kamolondo that we might not otherwise have learned when he discovers that he cannot keep up with Mark; as Mark realizes, Kamolondo lacks the reflexes that come with experience from living on the moon. He cannot make the kinds of leaping steps that enable Mark to cross long distances quickly. Kamolondo says, "You are young, however, your whole life before you. I would rather have died alone back there." Underneath Kamolondo's aristocratic demeanor is a man who shares an important quality with Mark, an understanding of his responsibility for the well-being of another.

Mark may hesitate for a moment, but his pioneer courage and sense of duty will not let him abandon his companion.

Even so, Mark realizes that they are "Too slow, too slow. The sun was catching up." Eventually he sees that "A spindle of zodiacal light climbs pearl-colored over the world's rim.

The sun will follow, life-giver, deathgiver." Anderson's vivid poetic imagery captures the situation hauntingly and contrasts the beauty of the moon with its shadowy terror. The shortest route home would take the two men off the marked path; in the shadowy craters the two would lose their way.

Ordinarily, a bit of sunlight would not hurt them, and they could hope to survive in the sunlight long enough to reach home: "But now the sun was in a flare period. Lethal radiation, gamma rays, protons, electrons, seethed out of the storms upon it." Already experienced in making command decisions, Mark chooses to stick to the path and put his life at greater risk, and he tells Kamolondo what they must do. That Kamolondo

obeys displays not only good sense, but a respect for Mark's authority that he did not show before.

Mark has them rest a few minutes to gather strength for the final effort. He shows Kamolondo how to sprint in the low gravity, and then they dash for their lives knowing that the "sun will follow, life-giver, death-giver." Both men push themselves, discovering how much they can endure: "You lose yourself, you are nothing but pain and weariness. Still you run!"

The climax comes when the two rush into the safety of the station moments ahead of the sun. They have lived through their courage and cool grace under pressure, and in so doing exemplified Anderson's theme of pioneer survival on the moon. He has shown how technology would help people survive a deadly crisis on the moon. His variation on this theme is that technology alone is not enough; to survive, Mark and Kamolondo have to apply their knowledge and wits to use what technology they have as well as possible. The elements of hard work, courage, good sense, and care for each other's welfare are essential to their survival; very human qualities are as important as hardware and science. In addition, Kamolondo has grown significantly as he followed Mark's orders during the crisis. When he says, "Mark, in that hour we became brothers," he acknowledges Mark's merits, and he is able to address Mark as one man to another. He has discovered how another man may be superior to himself in important ways without surrendering his own sense of self-worth. "We became brothers" suggests that "we are of equal worth." Mark has also grown, though to a lesser degree. He learned that his first impression of the diplomat was not entirely correct; and he, like Kamolondo, learned much about his capacity to handle a crisis and to endure hardship.



Topics for Discussion

1. Why does Mark dislike Kamolondo talking about exploiting the moon for his country?
2. Kamolondo is surprised to find teenagers living without adults in a station on the moon. Would this surprise you? Why should teenagers not be allowed to live without older people on the moon? Why should they be allowed to do so?
3. What adult qualities does Mark have? How has he developed these qualities?
4. Why is it important that Tom not complain about Mark's giving him orders? Why is it important that he obey the orders?
5. Why would Anderson include Judy in the story? What purpose does she serve?
6. Why is Mark not eager to accept Kamolondo's offer to go to Earth and study at the best schools? He wants to earn a degree in engineering, does he not?
7. Why would people go to the moon to live when there are many unpredictable ways for experiences on the moon to kill them?
8. "Escape the Morning" was first published in the Boy Scouts magazine Boys' Life. How might considerations for the magazine's audience have shaped how Anderson told his story?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. "Escape the Morning" posits that there will be ice water on the moon that could be mined to supply lunar colonies. In 1997, ice water was actually found on the moon. How was it found? Who found it? Why is it important that there be ice water on the moon?

2. In "Escape the Morning," petroleum has been discovered on the moon and is used to make rocket fuel. Anderson's explanation for the existence of petroleum on the moon is based on a longstanding theory about how petroleum could have been formed out of the dust cloud that coalesced into the planets and their satellites. What is this theory? Where does it suggest petroleum could be found in the solar system?

3. Anderson tells us that "even the best glass is fragile and a poor radiation shield." What materials instead of glass could be used to make windows and still be safe for use on the moon?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of these materials?

4. The matter of exploiting the moon's resources is an important one.

In "Escape the Morning," brave pioneers mine for minerals that will help people survive on the moon, will help them travel beyond the moon, and will feed Earth's industries. Does everyone think that this is a good idea? What different ideas about how the moon should be settled and its resources utilized do scientists and politicians have?

5. What are present-day international laws governing the colonization of the moon? Who do the laws say should benefit from the moon's resources? Who is supposed to enforce the laws?

6. "Escape the Morning" is a story about one of Mark's adventures. Write a story about one of Tom's adventures or one of Judy's adventures. How would their adventures be different from Mark's and each other? What limitations would they have to overcome?

7. Is there a kind of adventure that all three young people could share?

Write the story of this adventure.

8. What technology is likely to be used to exploit the moon's resources?

Would mining be a significant activity for the first people to live on the moon?

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Related Titles

Anderson has written extensively about the moon, from the scientific realism of "Escape the Morning" to the ethereal world of the lunarians in *Harvest of Stars*. He also has a longstanding interest in how people would respond to the stresses of living on worlds other than earth. Eleven of these have been gathered in *Space Folk*, including "Escape the Morning" (which originally appeared in *Boys' Life*). In general, Anderson's view is positive; people usually overcome the dangers they face, as do the characters in "Escape the Morning." Even so, occasionally, as in "Murphy's Hall" (1971), events can go terribly wrong, showing that Anderson's view allows for the realities of disasters and failures as people try to populate alien places.



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