

Hunter's Moon Short Guide

Hunter's Moon by Poul Anderson

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Overview

In "Hunter's Moon," Anderson creates a background for how colonies in other solar systems might develop within the bounds of our current scientific understanding of the laws of physics. Nothing can travel faster than the speed of light; there are no "warp drives" and "hyperspace" which permit space travelers to circumvent or exceed the limits imposed by the nature of things. Messages sent by laser beams between Earth and Medea take fifty years to reach their destinations, meaning that Medea and the Castor C system are fifty light-years from Earth. Humans travel only from Earth to Medea because of the "time-stranger" consequence of returning to their home planet. The more than fifty year lag in technological development for Medeans would expand to over one hundred years by the time a return journey even made in spaceships approaching the speed of light was completed; such travelers would find themselves lost a century behind the times.

Interstellar colonization is controlled by precise scientific contributions to ensure that no planet or moon is sent more colonists than its ecology can support without lasting damage.

All colonies are attempts to increase human knowledge of the universe, and the Medean one is no exception.

These colonists know that their studies of extra-terrestrial life provide unique knowledge which may lead to medical advances, new perspectives on scientific and social issues, and a more mature understanding of humanity itself.

The story focuses on scientists on Medea who are doing the research that scientists on Earth want them to do.

The main human characters, Jannika Rezek and Hugh Brocket, are studying two sentient species (there may be a third, but no one is sure of this) native to Medea. Part of what they hope to learn is how the species socialize and view the world. An important instrument in their investigation is one that was developed on Earth that allows the humans to experience in a dim way some of the emotions and thoughts of the alien species. The instruments are meant to conduct information only one way with the feelings and notions of the aliens traveling to the humans, but Medea is not Earth and the life there has its own natural laws, and some of the humans' emotions and ideas go to the aliens.

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, Hunter's Moon 4659 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 story is set on a huge moon Medea, nearly the size of Earth, and the events take place in and near Port Kato on the island of Hansonia. Medea is in the system Castor C, also known as Colchis, which has the double suns Phrixus and Helle. The movement of the suns relative to Medea affect the rhythms of Medea's native life; in particular they trigger the mating of flying insectoids called glitterbugs.

The flying glitterbugs create shimmering swarms of light that the ouranids call "Shining Time," and the coming of Shining Time signals to the ouranids that it is time for some of them to fly across the ocean to icy wastelands where they will die and, according to their new religious faith, merge into a paradisiacal afterlife. It is this event that is the source of hostilities between the ouranids and dromids, the two intelligent native species.

Hansonia is far from large human settlements; it is used for research because its remoteness offers opportunities to study Medea's native life little-disturbed by human activity.

Even so, Jannika and Hugh discover that the human scientists who live there have had an effect. They and the other scientists live in Port Kato, a small enclave of buildings set in the middle of the island's forest. These scientists have taken care not to disturb the wildlife around them so there is no clearing for farmland and only minimal lighting; the necessities of life are shipped from faraway towns.

"Thus nature walled and roofed and weighed on the huddle of structures, wherever she [Chrisoula] looked, or listened, smelled, touched, tasted, moved."



Social Sensitivity

Anderson's fiction offers numerous instances of robust, oversexed males leading the way to freedom and enlightenment. Hugh's characterization as it evolves in "Hunter's Moon" reveals a notably different conception of fitting relationships between men and women. Nicholas Van Rijn in *Trader to the Stars* (1964) and Dan Brodersen in *The Avatar* (1978) are much more typical Anderson protagonists; their sexual relationships are expressions of their great energy and their spiritual expansiveness, and the women in their lives are understanding of their need to physically express themselves.

Hugh— like Van Rijn, Brodersen, and others—has sex outside of marriage, regarding extramarital liaisons as spice for his active life. However his pursuit of other women has a destructive effect on Jannika—who herself has not been entirely faithful. She feels hurt by his reaction to the new arrival Chrisoula. That Hugh's neglect of his wife is destructive is played out in the events of the story. The unconscious antagonism created by his behavior affects his and Jannika's research and nearly results in catastrophe for their research subjects. The realization of this has a profound effect on Hugh, who cannot accept the possibility that 4666 Hunter's Moon he and his wife had wanted each other dead, and the story ends with the possibility that, atypically for an Anderson hero, Hugh may focus his sexual energies on his marriage.

Jannika has more than just her husband's sexual adventures to anger her.

She is nearing the end of her childbearing years, and she would like to have children—an allotment of two in order to maintain a stable human population on Medea. The problem is the matter of who takes care of the children; apparently in the era of exploration of alien worlds, humanity has still not resolved the gender conflict over child care. Hugh expects that Jannika would stay home and raise the children, giving up her field research, while he would continue his wildlife studies at the expense of time with his wife and family. Jannika wishes to continue her scientific research, and she wishes to continue it in the field, where she can study wildlife in its natural habitat. This particular problem is not resolved in "Hunter's Moon," although it fuels Jannika's resentment which has an inadvertent effect on her research subject Erakoum.

The relationship of Jannika and Hugh also represents another interesting social concern involving colonists.

Hugh is a Medean through and through; his perspective is that of a native Medean, and his research is that of someone studying his own world. Jannika, on the other hand, was raised by colonists who were forced out of their Earthly homeland as political refugees. They lived their lives on Medea bemoaning the loss of their Czech homes. Jannika grew up amid images and pictures of her parents' lost lives, which resulted in her thinking of herself as an alien separated from her true home. She is a displaced personality who never truly belongs in the world she finds herself in and thus represents a different aspect of the colonial experience than that of her husband. Where Hugh takes much of Medea for granted, Jannika questions everything.



Another social issue that has much meaning for today's young audience is that of the relationship of human beings to the natural world. Much of "Hunter's Moon" is a morality story about how it is impossible for human beings to study the natural world without changing it; the story implies that such change is not only inevitable, but that it is permanent. The scientists at Port Kato are there in order to have a chance to see Medean wildlife in as near a pristine state as possible. As is the case for Earth, Medea has many climates and a wide variation of species, meaning that Hansonia cannot represent all of Medea's variety of wildlife. Even so, it offers some hope for studies of a small portion of Medea's wildlife without the effects of a large human presence. For Hugh and Jannika the island offers opportunities to study unaffected societies of the world's sentient species, the ouranids and the dromids. Members of those species who live near large human populations have been dramatically affected by their association with human beings and have little notion of what their wild brethren are like. Part of what Hugh and Jannika discover is that even their personal troubles small when compared to the problems created by massive human reshaping of the landscape for urban areas and agriculture—reshape the wildlife that they study.

Literary Qualities

Anderson is a master of description and has made many unusual landscapes come to life in his work. In "Hunter's Moon," he offers a glimpse of how a life form other than human would see its world: Both suns were now down. The western mountains had become a wave of blackness, unstimulating, as though the cold of Beyond had touched and frozen it even as it crested, a first sea barrier on the flightway to the Promise; but heaven stood purple above, bearing the earliest stars and two small moons, ocher edged with silvery crescents, like the Promise itself. Eastward, the sky remained blue. There, just over the ocean, Ruii was almost fully lighted, Its bands turned luminous across Its crimson glow. Beneath the glade that It cast, the waters shivered, wind made visible.

This is not only a beautiful description of an exotic, captivating, and even exhilarating alien landscape, it is a prism through which the reader can view a world beyond our world, a lens made even more potent since it is presented from the vantage point of what the ouranid A'i'ach values in his sensible native realm. Anderson also loads the passage with tantalizing mysteries. What is "Beyond"? What is "the Promise"? What would a "flightway" be? The description is an invitation full of visionary promise to read to the end where alien experiences will be explained and mysteries elucidated.



Themes and Characters

"Hunter's Moon" begins with the quotation "We do not perceive reality, we conceive it," and this is a clue to the complex central theme of the novelette. Anderson has taken advantage of the opportunities for setting and characterization presented by the genre of science fiction to explore the implications of how scientists, even while carefully following the strictures of the scientific method, can shape reality according to their desires and preconceived beliefs. The scientists here not only misperceive their observations by conceiving of what they see in human terms, they alter what they observe because their subconscious minds influence the subjects of their studies.

The novelette is structured to emphasize the problem of conceived realities as opposed to perceived realities. It begins with the point of view of A'i'ach, a sentient creature that flies by inflating a sac with hydrogen. A being that spends most of its life in flight is bound to have a different perspective from humans, and some of its notions are mysterious. It thinks of "the Shining Time" that is to come, noting that "Already they rejoiced in the raptures ahead." "They" are "the People"—beings like himself. They are intellectual and very sensitive creatures who respond to songs and beautiful sights. In the case of A'i'ach, there is a problem with the anticipated joys of the Shining Time: "A'i'ach was strangely changed by that which went on inside him." Anderson does not immediately explain this phrase, allowing it to remain mysterious until events reveal its meaning. The early A'i'ach episode is used to foreshadow events with sentences such as "Therefore he had come to a resolve he realized was alien to his race: he would end the menace" and "A'i'ach was hunting." Thus A'i'ach serves to immerse us in the unfamiliar perceptions of a being very unlike ourselves and to establish the foreshadowing as mysteries that we can only solve by reading the rest of the novelette.

Anderson juxtaposes the A'i'ach opening with the human perspectives that follow it. Hugh Brocket and Jannika Rezek are husband and wife scientists who are studying the sentient beings of Hansonia. Their procedures are established, their routines are habituated, and their concerns are at first mundane, even petty when considered in the grand design of things. Chrisoula Gryparis has come to Port Kato to conduct research of her own, and Hugh immediately moves in to try to seduce her, for variety's sake since his wife is far more attractive to him than is Chrisoula. Hugh's behavior appears very coarse after the rarified musings of an airborne being, even if Chrisoula is far too interested in learning about her new home and about her research to give much notice to Hugh's groping. The introduction of the human characters is one that emphasizes their interests in sex, food, shelter, and work.

"Outposts get pretty ingrown socially," remarks Hugh, which reflects his opinion that Port Kato has grown dull and stale over time; to him newcomers add fresh experiences.

Chrisoula has a different view; for her Port Kato is an untried place of wonder and mystery which promises new discoveries. Jannika finds her husband's interest in Chrisoula an annoying distraction from her work. Anderson chooses to describe Hugh from Jannika's point of view: Jannika gave him a hard glance.



She saw a big man who reckoned his age at forty-one Terrestrial years: burly, a trifle awkward in his movements, beginning to show a slight paunch; craggyshaven, but sloppily clad in tunic, trousers, and boots, the style of the miners among whom he had grown up.

It is important to the plot that Hugh be seen from Jannika's perspective rather than from the point of view of a detached observer because her view of Hugh shapes some of the significant events of "Hunter's Moon." It is also important that Jannika is not described until much later in the novelette; this allows her viewpoint to shape the recounting of events and makes the story mostly hers.

Jannika is studying the airborne beings, the ouranids, and Hugh is studying the foxlike dromids, noted for a complicated system of reproduction. Chrisoula' serves primarily as someone for Hugh to talk to so that he may express his view of the state of affairs on Hansonia. He says that "the dromids and ouranids here are at war," to which Chrisoula responds, "They kill each other elsewhere too, do they not?" He acknowledges this but adds that the reasons vary greatly from one region to the next and that in many areas the ouranids and dromids coexist peacefully. Unable to free himself from his human perspective, he draws on a human analogy, "Nations on Earth never were identical. Why should we expect Medea to be the same everywhere." This seems reasonable to a human being, but the ouranids and dromids evolved on a world far from the one where humans evolved. Hugh's explanations are fraught with the human perspective; for instance, "dromids on this island [Hansonia] have been hell-bent to kill ouranids. Wipe them out! The ouranids are pacifistic, but they do defend themselves, sometimes with active measures like ambushes." Ideas such as pacifism and ambush are human concepts alien to the ouranids and dromids, who probably would not understand the meaning of the earthly ideas that Hugh is talking about even if they could hear him. Hugh freely talks about the creatures of Medea as if he were intimately acquainted with every aspect of their lives without acknowledging to himself his human biases. It is in this development of Hugh that the foreshadowing in the opening passage about A'i'ach begins to have meaning—hunting is also a human not ouranid concept.

Hugh is not stupid despite these misapprehensions. He is very intelligent but he has not freed himself from his belief that he conceives is the same as the reality he perceives. He has a good understanding of what the conflict between the ouranids and the dromids may be about; when the ouranids began flying to an overseas place to die, "more and more dromids started failing to reproduce." He may not yet know the cause-and-effect relationship between the events, but he recognizes their importance to the local species. The events leading up to the war began with what he calls the ouranids' "new Way, a new Tao. It involves eventually riding an east wind off across the ocean, to die in the Farside cold. Somewhere, that's transcendental." He even recognizes the potential for human influence, in spite of their efforts to leave the Hansonian beings alone. The "ouranids are compulsive mythmakers, who might seize on any concept," including Earthly mysticism.

"With their high metabolic rate, I should guess they think faster than us," observes Chrisoula, and she appears to be correct. Both the ouranids and the dromids have the



capacity to absorb information quickly, and like the humans they have a tendency to translate the information into their preconceptions. Like Hugh, the dromids have observed that when the ouranids, who they call Flyers, began to travel across the ocean to die, young dromids began dying soon after separation from their mothers. Dromids begin life as six-legged females.

When they mate two of their legs fall off and become new dromids. After having two sets of young (engendered by four legs) they transform slowly into two-legged males, who tend to be violent. They eventually mature into dronelike creatures who serve to protect the young of other dromids. The dromids on the island of Hansonia are very religious, and they read religious significance into the natural world around them. They are thus susceptible to religious interpretations of physical events that occur in the environment. When a dromid prophet declares that the ouranids have committed a sin against nature by not dropping to the ground and rotting in it as nature intends, Hugh's test subject Erakoum and the other dromids believe it to be true. Here again is manifested the disjunction between perceiving and conceiving. The dromids have perceived, correctly as is shown later, that the failure of dead ouranids to rot in the ground is related to the dromid infant mortality, but their conception of their world leads them to misunderstand the reason for the problem. Erakoum realizes that those "females who slew and ate a Flyer shortly before mating always shed healthy segments which brought forth live offspring"; thus, to her, waging a holy war against the ouranids seems entirely reasonable, as it also does to many other dromids. They become determined to exterminate the ouranids, thus making the gods happy and returning good health to the dromids. The danger to the dromids in this misconception is that if they were to succeed in exterminating the ouranids, they would also exterminate themselves.

Jannika, losing her scientific objectivity, has come to like her ouranid subjects and dislike the dromids.

Dromids are beautiful creatures: "Nearest was a young adult, presumably virgin, since she had six legs.

From the slender, long-tailed body rose a two-armed centauroid torso, up to the oddly vulpine head, which would reach to Jannika's chest. Her pelt shimmered blue-black under the suns." Despite their appealing looks, Jannika's view of them is colored by hostility. Her unreasoning dislike 4664 Hunter's Moon prevents her from truly understanding the situation between the ouranids and the dromids, and her objectivity is further eroded by unhappiness with the situation between Hugh and herself. She sees herself as "Mediumsized, with a figure she knew was stunning; dark hair worn shoulder length, with gray streaks that she wished Hugh would insist were premature; high cheekbones, tilted nose, pointed chin, large brown eyes, ivory complexion." She seems fixated on the idea that Hugh should pay her positive attention, such as to "insist" that her graying was premature, but his flirtatiousness with other women and his expectation that she would give up her field research to have and raise children anger her so much that her behavior changes dramatically. Jannika notes that "She lost her temper too often these days, grew outright shrewish, till he stormed from the hut or else grabbed



the whisky and started glugging." It is no wonder that she tries to focus on her work, in "trying to be her ouranid," and that her use of an imperfect mind-reading device appeals to her, "taking her out of herself into a new world agleam with wonder."

It is an example of Anderson's exceptional artistry that the confusions of Jannika, Hugh, A'i'ach, and Erakoum are integrated together to first develop the theme of perceptions colored by preconceptions and then to create the climax of the story, in which the four characters learn that they had misunderstood events and each other.

Anderson makes his abstract theme concrete by embodying it in his characters. The preconceptions of the humans become ideas in their research subjects, and the tension between Hugh and Jannika becomes motivation in A'i'ach and Erakoum for hunting and killing each other: "The idea that, somewhere in the abysses of his [Hugh's] being, he might have wished her death, was not to be borne." Out of this realization comes growth for the four principal figures. Jannika and Hugh come to a deeper understanding of their relationship and their feelings for each other as events strip away superficial irritants to reveal deep love. A'i'ach and Erakoum also grow; like Jannika and Hugh, they have been excited about learning about their world, and thus they may have been predisposed for the personal maturation that would allow each to survive.

"She [Erakoum] had found the courage to surrender"; Erakoum overcomes her fear of ouranids, allowing A'i'ach to help her. A'i'ach overcomes his hatred of the dromids—whom the ouranids call "Beasts"—to trust Jannika and follow her instructions to save Erakoum; he even gives Erakoum blood. The enlightenment each character experiences also leads to a resolution of the problem of Erakoum infant deaths.

The dromids had seen the problem as a matter of sin, the ouranids had seen it as a matter of dromid bestiality, and Jannika and Hugh had seen it as a matter of primitive religion. All were mistaken; the problem was a matter of biology which Jannika identifies as "Manganese deficiency." Manganese is important to ouranid physiology and is in them in abundance, and it is also important to dromid reproduction, but it is rare in Hansonia's soil. Thus when ouranids dropped to the ground after they died, they returned the element to the environment where dromids could consume it, but when they decided to die elsewhere, the element no longer occurred in sufficient quantity. Hunter's Moon 4665 ties on Hansonia to support dromid reproduction. For all concerned, misconceptions about personal relationships, about the environment, and about the different species had clouded the real issue; they conceived reasons for events and mistook their conceptions for perceptions of reality.



Topics for Discussion

1. How does Chrisoula Gryparis function in the development of the themes of "Hunter's Moon"?
2. How does "Hunter's Moon" exemplify "We do not perceive reality, we conceive it"?
3. How do Jannika and Hugh influence A'i'ach and Erakoum?
4. What are the stages of reproductive life for the dromids?
5. Why do both the ouranids and dromids call themselves "the People"?
6. How does Anderson foreshadow the resolution of "Hunter's Moon"?

(Hint: Look for passages such as "Therefore he had come to a resolve he realized was alien to his race" and "knowledge came into her, as if through dreams but more real.")

7. How could Hugh and Jannika's marital confusions result in disaster?
8. What are some ways Jannika and Hugh could resolve their differences?

What differences need to be resolved?

9. How much have Jannika and Hugh actually understood about the ouranid and dromid cultures they have studied? Is it possible that their hope that A'i'ach helping Erakoum could begin to end the hostilities between the two species is just another example of their imposing human ideas on creatures who experience life very differently from humans?
10. Could humans be responsible for the conflict between the ouranids and the dromids? How? What does Anderson suggest?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. How important are trace elements in the human diet? Which ones affect human reproduction? Is manganese important to the human diet?
2. What role does religion play in the lives of ouranids and dromids? Is the role of religion different for each group? Why are they dependent on religion to explain events?
3. The scientists of Port Kato have tried to isolate themselves from civilization in order to study wildlife uninfluenced by human beings. Are there any such research stations on Earth in our own time? Why have the scientists isolated themselves? What do they hope to discover? How successful have they been?
4. If you wanted to study wildlife that has been undisturbed by human beings, where on Earth would you go?

What opportunities for research would the place offer? What would you hope to learn? How would you minimize the effect of your presence?
5. How might the influence of Hugh and Jannika change the ouranid and dromid cultures on Hansonia? What future might the two species make for themselves?
6. There are several important characters in "Hunter's Moon." Which ones grow the most during the story? How do they grow? What makes them grow?

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1, *Biography and Resources*, pp. 434-6. Summarizes Anderson's career and critical reception. Elsewhere in the encyclopedia are analyses of individual works by Anderson.

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San Bernardino, CA: Borgo Press, 1978. A critical introduction that analyzes Anderson's techniques and rationality.

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Related Titles

Anderson has a longstanding interest in how people would respond to the stresses of living on worlds other than Earth. Anderson's view is generally positive; people usually overcome the dangers they face, as do the characters in "Hunter's Moon." 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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Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

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