

# **The Moon Is Down Study Guide**

## **The Moon Is Down by John Steinbeck**

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## Plot Summary

The Moon Is Down is the story of the invasion by foreign soldiers of a small town in Europe. The name of the town and country and the timing of the event is not provided. In a matter of a few minutes, the lives of the townspeople are turned upside down. The town had been a democracy where all the people were free. After the invasion, the people now have to answer to gun-toting, helmeted strangers.

Colonel Lanser, the leader of the invaders, meets with the leader of the town, Mayor Orden. The Colonel asks for the Mayor's cooperation in getting the people to accept the invasion in an orderly manner. The Mayor responds that he cannot agree to the Colonel's proposition since he was elected by the people who can therefore remove him from office. He must adhere to the voices of the town. The Mayor is appalled to learn that Mr. Corell, the town's shopkeeper, had been in collusion with the foreign army prior to the invasion.

The Colonel is an uncharacteristically gentle and understanding man and allows the Mayor to stay in his position while still urging him to listen to reason. He tells the Mayor that the townspeople will be working the coal mine for them, and they will be shipping the resource back to their homeland.

One of the Colonel's officers is murdered by a mine worker who refuses to obey his orders. The man who committed the act is tried and found guilty of murder. The Colonel has him executed at the town square so the people can see what happens to those who resist the occupation. Later, when one of the young Lieutenants is smitten with the widow of the executed man, he meets his end. The widow stabs him to death with her scissors.

The Mayor, although removed from office by Lanser, is working with the underground. He gets a message to England, requesting that they be sent a supply of dynamite in order to defend themselves. Soon there are British bombers circling overhead, sending down tiny parachutes with small tubes of TNT attached, along with instructions on how to use the explosives. Hundreds of these packages are dropped and most are recovered by the town's children. The soldiers find only a few and turn them into Colonel Lanser.

The Colonel and his officers understand the risk they are under and are determined to rout out all the dynamite in the possession of the people. Mr. Corell has discovered that the Mayor was behind the subversive act which forces Lanser to arrest him. Explosions start occurring all around town. Lanser pleads with Orden to make the people cease these actions. The Mayor refuses—he could never ask the people not to fight for their freedom. The soldiers may win the battle but the people will win the war.

As the Mayor is taken away to be executed, he is assured by his friend, Dr. Winter, that the people will continue to fight for their freedom until they are victorious.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Foreign soldiers have invaded a small, unnamed European town. The town had been unprotected. Mr. Corell, the town's popular storekeeper, had lent his fishing boat to the postman and the policeman for an outing. The town's twelve soldiers had been given free ammunition by Mr. Corell for a target practice expedition out of town. When the soldiers heard the approaching aircraft, they hurried back to town. Half of the town's twelve soldiers, all young men, were killed upon their return. The invaders with their automatic rifles slung over their shoulders and their silvery/gray helmets scout out the town and spread fear. A message is delivered to the mayor, Mr. Orden, that the invading forces leader, Colonel Lanser, would like to meet with him at 11 am.

An advance team led by Captain Bentick is sent out by the Colonel. The Mayor and the others at his residence, called the Palace, are checked for guns. Captain Bentick apologizes for the inconvenience. One of the soldiers reviews a document that tells him that the Mayor has two weapons. The Mayor is forced to hand over his two hunting rifles. Madame, the Mayor's wife, is very concerned about protocol—wondering if she should have wine served when the Colonel arrives. Joseph, the Mayor's servant, is concerned about not moving any furniture out of their correct positions.

The Colonel arrives along with several other officers and the storekeeper, Mr. Corell. The Colonel reveals that Mr. Corell was their "inside" man who had helped to set up the town for invasion. The Mayor is outraged at Mr. Corell's actions and demands that he leave the meeting. The Colonel appeals to the Mayor stressing that he wants his troops and the townspeople to get along and not have further bloodshed. The goal of the invaders is to confiscate the coal that is mined in the town and to take advantage of the fishing industry in the town.

The Colonel insists that the townspeople are orderly people and will not put up resistance to their presence. The Mayor is not so sure. They are orderly under their own government—one they have built up over the last four hundred years. The Colonel counters that the government will remain in tact, with Orden as their Mayor. Dr. Winter, the town doctor and historian who is present at the meeting, feels the townspeople will turn bitter over the invasion. The Mayor offers that the people made him—they can unmake him if they think he is in collusion with the invaders.

The Colonel asks that he and his five officers be given accommodations in the Palace. The Mayor feels it will send a bad message to the townspeople. The Colonel tells the Mayor that they must stay there—orders from the leader. Annie, the cook, becomes angry at a group of soldiers who have positioned themselves on the back porch. She claims they are looking at her and subsequently throws boiling water on them. The Colonel decides not to take action against Annie and orders his soldiers to stand away



from the porch. Colonel Lanser asks for the Mayor's cooperation. The Mayor makes no promises indicating that they will have to wait and see how the town feels.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

There is a surreal aura around the invasion of the small European town. Rather than storm the Mayor's residence, a polite advance group apologizes for having to frisk the Mayor and the others at the Palace. The leader of the invaders, Colonel Lanser, presents himself more as a negotiator than an evil occupier. He sends a courier with a message requesting a meeting with the Mayor. Anyone familiar with World War II, which this is ostensibly about, is aware that the Nazis were not such polite visitors.

So as not to present the event as a total tea party, Steinbeck reminds the reader of the reality of the situation. This is war—six of the town's young soldiers are killed by the invaders. The Colonel pleads with the Mayor for his cooperation so there is no more bloodshed—another lapse from reality. The Mayor responds he does not know how the townspeople will react, inferring that he must listen to the voice of the people.

Steinbeck inserts allegorical elements into his characters. Joseph represents complacency—not wanting anything changed; while the Madame, concerned with protocol in the face of occupation, wants to hold on to appearances. Annie's action in throwing boiling water on the soldiers is symbolic and a foreshadowing of an impending resistance. When the Mayor tells the Colonel that they will have to wait to see what the people want to do, Steinbeck is reminding the reader that the town is a democracy, contrasting it with the government of the invaders.

Unlike many accounts of World War II, the invaders are presented as human. The Colonel wants cooperation as it will be "good for all." By making the invaders human, Steinbeck takes the focus off the individual allowing for a clearer contrast to be drawn between the larger themes of democracy and fascism.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

Colonel Lanser and his five officers take over several rooms on an upper floor of the Palace. The five officers is a varied group. Major Hunter who is an engineer is dependable and practical to a fault. The Major is not really a military man; rather, he is an arithmetician—a man of numbers. Only in the case of war and a lack of manpower was Major Hunter ever considered for the command of men. Captain Bentick, a family man who lacks ambition, is too old to be a captain. The Captain is a great admirer of the British country gentleman. When off duty, he opts to wear English clothes, keeps English dogs and has a favorite English pipe. He subscribes to English country magazines that focus on gardens and English setters. Captain Bentick's mind is rarely on things military.

The polar opposite of Captain Bentick is the Colonel's other Captain, Captain Loft, who is too young to be a captain. Captain Loft is very ambitious and is a strict adherent to all regulations. He is familiar with all types of military courtesy and applies this knowledge. Even generals are intimidated by Captain Loft who know more about the deportment of a soldier than they do. He sees himself advancing to General at a young age.

The final two officers on General Laser's staff are his two young Lieutenants. In his former life, Lieutenant Prackle was quite the roue. He loved to dance and was given to fits of brooding; some compared his scowling countenance to that of the leader. He hates art that he considers sub-standard and has been known to destroy such works. He has an artistic bent and friends often encourage him to become an artist. Lieutenant Tonder is a poet and a dreamer. He romanticizes war, dreaming of dying valiantly on the battlefield. He often thinks of his own death, visualizing himself dead and surrounded by his men standing in silent respect with Wagner thundering in the background.

Colonel Lanser who has seen real battle thinks of his officers as children playing at war. They have never experienced the suffering of war. Their military careers thus far had been like child's play—fine weaponry and top-level strategy pitted against a defenseless, clueless enemy. They have lost no battles nor lost their men or fellow officers to the assault by the enemy. But the Colonel, serving twenty years before in Belgium and France, knows first-hand the horrors of war: treachery and hatred and torture and killing. Lanser has the wisdom based on experience to understand that once a war is won, nothing much changes. New hatreds and enemies sprout up to take the place of old ones.

Captain Loft is complaining about Captain Bentick who is going around town without his helmet—Loft sights the regulation number about behavior in an occupied territory. Prackle tacks up a pin-up of a glamorous actress. Tonder thinks the woman is a tramp. Loft makes Prackle take it down as it is not regulation.



Lanser has Loft relieve Bentick who is on post outside. Prackle asks if they will be home by Christmas, but Tonder dreams of making a life in the little town. He has seen some nice country people in the town and beautiful farms surrounding the area. Mr. Corell visits Lanser and asks that he be made Mayor of the town. Lanser tells him he is recommending he leave the town because he will never again be trusted by the townspeople. Corell doesn't see it that way as he has made many friends during his time there. The people in town are not fighters and have not been in a war in over one hundred years. Lanser tells him the people will turn on him and he will be a hated man. Loft returns with the news that Captain Bentick has been killed. He was murdered by a man who did not want to mine the coal for the invaders.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

Lanser's revelation that he fought in Belgium and France "twenty years before" confirms that the invaders are Germans—the time frame referencing World War I. The five officers under Lanser's command are anything but true soldiers. Loft thinks wars are fought by a manual. Hunter is a scientist who is disinterested in war. The "old" Captain Bentick is not fit to serve and admires the enemy. Of the two lieutenants one is a dreamer who thinks he can settle in the town after the war; the other is anxious to return to his prior lifestyle.

Steinbeck has created this less-than-stellar group of officers to contrast to Colonel Lanser, leaving him as the only character who has experienced the real suffering of war. While Lanser is a "good" soldier and will ultimately follow orders, he is sympathetic to the townspeople. There is a pathos about him that stems from his knowledge and understanding of the reality of war and his core disagreement with the policies of his government.

Lanser is the only one to understand what is happening in the town. The townspeople will soon turn on Corell for betraying them. The townspeople will fight occupation as evidenced by the murder of his captain by an uncooperative mine worker.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

The people are not rebelling yet; however, there is an obvious sullenness displayed in the dispatch of their duties and in their daily movements. Although real anger has not as yet surfaced, it is brewing just below.

Joseph and Annie have been directed to move a table and chairs into the parlor where the invaders have set up a common room. The furniture is being set up to accommodate the trial of Alexander Morden, the man accused of murdering Captain Bentick. Joseph is most concerned about not scuffing the furniture while the ever-angry Annie has much larger concerns. Annie gained quite a reputation from the incident in which she stood up to the soldiers by throwing boiling water on them.

Moving the furniture for the trial of a fellow citizen has Annie red-faced. She angrily proclaims to Joseph that the invaders cannot sentence Alexander to death. Joseph, the more practical of the two servants, insists that a trial will take place and that they will probably execute him. But he has other news that perks up his friend. Joseph quietly tells Annie that recently two townsmen secretly escaped to England. The invading soldiers are not aware of their departure. He warns Annie to keep a watchful eye as the townspeople are on the verge of an uprising—they do not like being conquered. Annie tells Joseph to remember her words that the townspeople are going to be very angry if Alex is executed. They will not put up with that.

Mayor Orden expresses his concerns to Dr. Winter over the difficulties facing the town. The mayor wonders how long he can keep up his balancing act between the invaders and the townspeople. Neither fully trusts the mayor. Dr. Winter reminds the Mayor that he knows his own mind and should trust in himself. The Mayor is upset that a trial will take place and wonders why the soldiers just didn't shoot Alex rather than have a spectacle taking place in his home. Winter responds that the invaders undoubtedly want to use the opportunity to put on a show for the town.

Colonel Lanser elicits the help of Mayor Orden. He asks him to sit in judgment of Alexander and sentence him to public execution. The Colonel warns Orden that order must be kept and that if he wishes to save his people, he must acquiesce to his request. The Mayor agrees to do so only if the twenty invading soldiers who killed the six young hometown soldiers are mowed down at the same time. Of course, the Colonel cannot agree to that and concludes that he must name Mr. Corell the Mayor of the town.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Lanser's warning is coming true—the people are turning on Corell. Although the anger is not fully surfaced among the townspeople, the rage is burning beneath and plots are being devised. The Mayor refuses Lanser's request to sit in judgment against Alex who





killed Captain Bentick. Again, the conversation in which Lanser asks the Mayor to sit in judgment of Alex is surreal. Mayor Orden personifies democracy while Lanser represents, even if somewhat reluctantly, fascism. By the Mayor staying true to his principles, Steinbeck illustrates the strength of a democratic society.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

The townspeople have become very unfriendly towards Mr. Corell. Alex Morden faces the murder charge with a panel consisting of Colonel Lanser, Major Hunter, Captain Loft, and the two lieutenants. The Mayor is there but has refused to pass judgment on Morden. The charge against Morden was read to him by Captain Loft. It indicated that he refused the order to return to work by Captain Loft. Morden charged at Loft with a pick-ax. Captain Bentick stepped between them and was killed. The punishment determined by the military panel for this action is death.

Morden admits to hitting the Captain but does not know that he killed him. Alex proclaims he is a free man and should not have been told by Captain Loft to do his job. But the panel finds the evidence against him and sentences him to be shot immediately. Mayor Orden interjects—he is the elected Mayor of the town he reminds everyone. He points out that the Colonel's forces broke the law by invading their peace. He tells Morden that his was the first personal anger shown which will soon be followed by public anger. His death will unify the town. Alex says he is afraid to die.

The Mayor and Alex say an emotional good-bye and the guard takes Alex away. Soon the shots of the firing squad are heard. Moments later a bloody Lieutenant Prackle returns to the Palace. Lanser comments that it has "started already." He commands his men to find every person with a gun and take them hostage. The Mayor is placed under protective custody. Lanser warns that for every one of their men, 5 or 10 or 100 towns people will die. Orden makes the comment—"A man of certain memories." (56). Lanser corrects him by saying "A man of no memories." (56) He tells his officers to find those who shot the Lieutenant by following the tracks they left in the snow.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Alex Morden is found guilty by the kangaroo court of Lanser and his officers. Morden's defense was that he was a free man and therefore could not be ordered around by the invaders. He is executed and becomes a martyr and symbol of unification for the other townspeople who, while angry up to this point, had not been spurred to overt action.

Morden's death is the start of the town's resistance to occupation. One of the lieutenants is injured by a resident immediately following the execution. Lanser lamenting that "it has started already," signals that he knew from past experience that it is impossible to kill the spirit of freedom or destroy democracy. When the Mayor chides him about his bad memories from the other war, Lanser becomes defensive and denies that he had such recollections. Lanser shows more fire at this moment than any other in the story thus far. He knows that he now has a real fight on his hands and has no choice but to lead his men in the impending battle.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

It's the heart of winter and the days are long and dark. Snow is everywhere. The soldiers feel isolated, are lonely, miss home and talking to people. They encounter the people in town who pass them by with sullen looks and no words. It is a slow process getting the coal from the mines. The workers are slow, purposely, and there are many accidents and equipment failures from obvious or suspected sabotage. Withholding food from mine workers doesn't work—they have to be strong to work in the mines. The conquerors feel surrounded and hated and cannot venture out alone. . . dead bodies of fellow soldiers are found in the frozen snow.

The soldiers read news from home and everything seems to be wonderful there. Their armies have conquered all the other areas and are being met with flowers and smiles. But the soldiers begin to question the veracity of this news. They, too, were told they would be welcomed by those they conquered. Distrust and anger and depression grows among the soldiers. They are on edge and afraid—one night an old lady is shot and another night a little girl. Townspeople are shot and soldiers are killed. Several soldiers go insane and are sent home. More would have tried this method of escape except word got around that a mercy death awaited those soldiers.

Of the officers, Lieutenant Tonder is having the most difficult time and is in his hopes to return home. He wants a girl and people with whom to talk. He shouts, "I would like to get out of this god-forsaken hole!" He shouts at Joseph the servant who just nods to his questions. He screams at him to talk. The electricity goes out often; black paper is on the windows so that they are not spotted from the air. It is dark and depressing inside. When there is no electricity, they light kerosene lamps that make a loud and constant hissing sound, adding an additional source of irritation.

Captain Loft has just instituted another incentive for the miners to produce coal. If a miner does not reach his daily goal, he will eat dinner at the mine, but his family will not be fed that night. Tonder asks the Captain if the British and Russians are defeated and he answers in the affirmative. Then, asks Tonder, why can't we return home? Loft proclaims that they have conquered half the world and now must police it. Tonder wonders about the other half of the world. Tonder descends into hysteria and laughs uncontrollably until Loft slaps him several times. All that Tonder can say is, "I want to go home."

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Steinbeck paints a dreary picture as the foreign soldiers are growing weary of the town and the people who loathe them. They long for conversation and the company of women. The sullen, silent people of the town send a message to the soldiers that the



townspeople will never change. The townspeople would rather die than give up their freedom. Rather than weakening the townspeople, the soldiers are the ones who are growing weaker—they are becoming depressed and distrustful and afraid. Ironically, it is they who feel surrounded by their enemy. The soldiers have lost their lives, their freedom and fare no better than their captors. On a larger scale, Steinbeck is comparing the lives of oppressed men—the soldiers and the townspeople—with those of people who live in freedom.

While Major Hunt and Lieutenants Prackle and Toland are beginning to show cracks in their veneer, it is Captain Loft who is the most deluded. He believes the propaganda from his country. When one of his fellow officers suggests that perhaps their Leader is mad, he finds it totally ludicrous. When another questions their mission, he calls such expressions of doubt as treasonable. Captain Loft, it seems, may have the farthest to fall.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

The widow Molly Morden is at home, sitting beside the warm fire, unraveling the wool from an old sweater into a neat ball. She is startled when she hears the crunching sound of soldiers marching by outside. Suddenly, there is a knock at the door. Molly, fearing that it is soldiers, calls through the door. It is Annie at her door. As she lets the cook inside, Annie tells her that the Mayor, Dr. Winter and two of the Anders brothers have chosen her house as a meeting place and will be at her door in the next hour. The purpose of the visit was not made clear to Annie. Annie gives Molly a small square of meat which the hungry young woman quickly eats.

Shortly after Annie leaves, there is another knock on Molly's door. Molly is frightened when she opens the door and sees a soldier, Lieutenant Tonder, standing there. The Lieutenant assures Molly right away that he means her no harm. He explains to her that he is very lonely and has often noticed Molly around town and finds her very attractive. Anger overtakes the fear that Molly first felt. She realizes that the Lieutenant does not know who she is. He pleads with her just to talk with him as he is in need of companionship. She accuses him of wanting to seduce her which he denies. She asserts that all he wants is to take her to bed. Tonder refutes that charge; he just wants her to like him. He has given orders to the men to not molest her. Molly begins taunting Tonder, telling him that the cost of bedding her is two sausages since she is very hungry. He is appalled by her words and tries to convince her that he just wants her to like him. He promises that he will take care of her.

Mindful that the Mayor and the others will soon be at her door, Molly tells Tonder he must leave. Tonder then gleans from her words that she is the widow of the man who was executed. He seems stunned by the news but offers no words of sympathy. Nonetheless, Tonder wants to see her again and promises to come back.

Annie is soon back at Molly's door. Annie just saw Lieutenant Tonder leaving Molly's door. She was suspicious about his being there. Molly assures Annie that she is not in collusion with the enemy and that Tonder is not a threat to the Mayor and the others. Annie stands outside as a look-out. Soon the Mayor, Dr. Winter and Tom and Will Anders arrive.

There are only two of the Anders brothers present. The other brother was shot by a soldier. The Anders brothers are leaving for England by boat that night. They plan to take Mr. Corell with them and dump him in the ocean. The Mayor asks the Anders brothers to make a request to the English to send explosives and perhaps even poison so the town can fight the occupation. A knock on the front door sends all four fleeing out the back door. Lieutenant Tonder has returned. Molly picks up her shears like a knife and blows her lantern out.



## Chapter 6 Analysis

The townspeople have gone through a metamorphosis. After the invasion, fear struck first, then depression and then rage. Mayor Orden requesting England send explosives signals that the mood of the town has changed from the defensive to the offensive. The spirit of resistance and hunger for freedom, though dampened, is alive and well. The chapter ends with a cliff-hanger. Will Molly avenge her husband's murder by killing Lieutenant Tonder? Tonder is a kind young man—a dreamer who does not want to be at war but is a victim of circumstance.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Soldiers notice bombers circling and dropping small packages all around town. Hundreds of the little blue packages are sent earthbound via small parachutes. Some of the ten-inch tubes of dynamite land softly in the snow banks, some on roofs, others in trees. In the morning, the townspeople begin to discover the tiny gifts. They unwrap the packages finding that each contains printed words and TNT. The townspeople dispatch their children to find as many of these packages as they can, like they are on an Easter egg hunt. At the same time, the soldiers are scrambling to find as many as they can. The kids did better—they find more TNT than the soldiers.

Hunter and Lanser open one of the packages and find a piece of chocolate, the tube of TNT and written instructions on the use of the explosive. The men determine that the dynamite could do some real damage to their efforts—blow up parts of the rail they are trying to mend, weaken bridges and blow up trucks as well as the soldiers themselves. Loft is adamant that they must figure out a way to put an end to this action. If there is success in this town, use of this tactic could spread to other occupied towns and countries.

Lanser instructs Loft to put Prackle in charge of finding the packages, adding that it was too bad that Tonder was murdered by the woman. He would be a better choice than Prackle who is apparently having serious emotional upheavals.

Mr. Corell comes to see Lanser who notices that his arm is in a sling. Corell explains that he was waylaid by some townspeople but was saved by a sentry. Corell has discovered that Mayor Orden is behind the uprising and must be arrested immediately. Corell has reported his findings to the headquarters. If order is not restored, Orden will be shot. If there is still no order, then Dr. Winter will be executed next. Once the two town leaders are dead, order should then be restored.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

The children of the town gather the majority of the parachuted TNT, no doubt another blow to the already fragile egos of the soldiers—one-upped by children. The townspeople are now armed and able to defend themselves. The playing field has been somewhat leveled. Colonel Lanser and Major Hunter are aware of the risk. Lanser's staff has been drastically reduced. Bentick was killed early on and now Tonder was found murdered by Molly. Prackle is having a nervous breakdown but since Lanser is running out of people, he has no other option and puts him in charge of finding the TNT packages—probably not the best move. Corell has proven he has no loyalties—he went over Laser's head and reported the town's problems to headquarters. The two leaders

of the town—Orden and Winter—are in grave danger. Perhaps the townspeople can save them.





# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Mayor Orden and Dr. Winter who are both under arrest discuss the situation. Winter proclaims that the enemy has underestimated the people. Although they've arrested the town leaders, they don't understand that other leaders will pop up. The enemy can lop off the heads of the leaders, but the townspeople are free people who all have heads, too.

Orden knows the two of them will be killed. His thoughts of running away, pleading for his life has left him ashamed. He has thought of these things but would never do them. Old friends Orden and Winter reminisce about their school days and times together. Orden tries to remember Socrates' last words. He fumbles with the lines and can only remember ". . .you who are my murderers that immediately after my departure punishment far heavier than you have inflicted on me shall surely await you." (108) But Orden could not remember the ending of the quotation.

There has been an explosion and Lanser rushes in to ask Orden to appeal to his people to stop the explosions. He refuses, telling Lanser that even if he asked they would keep up the explosions. They are men fighting to reclaim their freedom. Lanser tells Orden he has orders that if the explosions do not cease, Orden will have to be executed.

Madame wants to know what all the nonsense is. Orden kisses her on the forehead and tells her it's just that—nonsense. She insists that a mayor cannot be arrested. Orden agrees, telling her that a Mayor is the idea of free men and it will escape arrest. He has Annie take his wife away with her. More explosions are heard. The sentry is ordered to take Orden away. Orden addresses Winter and says, "Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius." He asks Winter if the debt will be paid. Winter assures his friend that it will.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Lanser shows his continued compassion for the Mayor when he pleads with him to call off the resistance. The Mayor likewise shows his strength of character in refusing to ask the townspeople to stop fighting to reclaim their freedom. Orden is aware that he will die but knows that while the invaders may win the battle, free men will win the war.

In trying to recall the last words of Socrates, Orden finally remembers that the very ending of the quotation references a final debt. He was assured by Winter that the debt would be paid. By Winter's response, he is affirming to Orden that the townspeople will continue to fight until they are victorious.



# Characters

## Mayor Orden

Mr. Orden is Mayor of the town that is occupied by the invading military forces led by Colonel Lanser. The town and country are never identified, although it is probably a small European town in either Denmark or Norway. The reader first meets Mayor Orden when he receives a request from Colonel Lanser for a meeting. Orden complies with the request and meets the rather gentle leader of the invading forces.

Mayor Orden is a highly-principled person who will not let go of his values and beliefs. He is a staunch proponent of democracy and a die-hard believer in the need for man to be free. Colonel Lanser asks Mayor Orden for his cooperation. Such cooperation will all but insure the safety of his townspeople. Mr. Orden displays immediate resistance to the proposal and in no way would want to lead his townspeople to think he is in collusion with the enemy. He tells the Colonel that he will listen to the voice of the people. They made him by electing him and can break him as well.

When asked to sit in judgment of another citizen, Mayor Orden refuses even at the risk of his position and indeed his very life. He tries to give strength to a condemned man, telling him that his bravery is the symbol of unification for the rest of the townspeople.

## Colonel Lanser

Colonel Lanser is the commander of the invading soldiers. Rather than a cruel, unyielding Nazi, Lanser is presented as a sympathetic, good man who is in a challenging and difficult position. While he must obey his leader, most likely, Hitler, he stretches those limits as widely as possible in accommodating his prisoners of war. He sends a polite message to the Mayor of the town, requesting an audience with him. He does not punish an errant maid who throws boiling water on some of his soldiers. He asks permission to stay in the Mayor's Palace. Only when the Mayor seems to be leaning to a negative response, does Lanser indicate that he must stay there per his leader's orders.

The five officers who are serving in the unit under Lanser, are not true soldiers in the sense that Lanser is. He feels he is "talking to children" sometimes when discussing matters of war with them. None of his officers have really experienced the horrors of war, while Lanser references his time at war "twenty years ago" indicating that he served in World War I in the German army.

There is a pathos that surrounds this character. While he is committed to doing his duty, he pleads with the Mayor to cooperate. Such cooperation will be "good for all." It is clear that he does not enjoy war and the killing and destruction it represents. There is much evidence that Lanser does not concur in the policies of his government; however, he is a soldier and will ultimately follow the orders of his Leader.



## **Mr. Corell**

Mr. Corell is a popular storekeeper in the town. When the soldiers invade the town, it is then revealed that Mr. Corell was on the side of the invaders and was setting the town up for easy invasion.

## **Dr. Winter**

Dr. Winter is a wise old doctor and historian in the town. The Mayor depends on him for his sage advise.

## **Alexander Morden**

Alexander Morden is a mine worker in town. He refuses to obey the orders of the invaders and kills Captain Bentick with a pick ax. As he runs towards the Captain he proclaims that he is a free man. He is executed for the murder.

## **Molly Morden**

Molly Morden is the widow of Alexander. She is lonely and bitter over her husband's execution. Lieutenant Tonder is smitten with her. When he comes to see her, she murders him.

## **Lieutenant Tonder**

Lieutenant Tonder is an officer under Colonel Lanser and is a dreamer and poet. He becomes smitten with Molly, the widow of the executed man, Alexander Morden. When Tonder comes to see her, she stabs him with her scissors and kills him.

## **Madame**

Madame, or Sarah, is the wife of Mayor Orden. She is concerned with protocol and wonders if she should have wine served when the invading colonel meets with the Mayor.

## **Annie**

Annie is the firebrand cook for the Mayor and his wife and is feisty and resistant to the occupation. At one point she throws boiling water on soldiers standing too close to the house.



## Joseph

Joseph is the Mayor's man servant. He is elderly and always concerned with not moving any furniture out of their positions. Ironically, he is forced to move a table and chairs to set up a jury for the trial of a fellow townsman.

## Captain Bentick

Captain Bentick is the oldest of Colonel Lanser's officers. He is killed by Alexander Morden who is later executed for the act.

## Captain Loft

Captain Loft is a young officer under Colonel Lanser. He rigidly follows all the regulations of the field manual. He is duped by the propaganda from their leader.



# Objects/Places

## The Town

A small, unnamed town is invaded and occupied by foreign soldiers during a major conflict.

## Denmark

Denmark is one of the countries that critics surmise could be the country in which the foreign soldiers invade the small town.

## Norway

Norway is one of the countries that critics surmise could be the country in which the foreign soldiers invade the small town.

## The North Sea

The North Sea is located between England and Denmark. Several individuals escape the small town by taking a boat to English shores.

## Norwegian Sea

The Norwegian Sea is located between England and Norway. Several individuals escape the small town by taking a boat to English shores.

## Germany

Although the invading soldiers are not referred to as German, it is only thinly disguised that Germany is the homeland of these occupying forces.

## England

Several townsmen flee the small town and travel by boat to England for asylum. The British bombers drop small packages of TNT around the town for the people to use in their defense against the invading forces.

## **The Palace**

Mayor Orden's residence is called the Palace. Colonel Lanser, leader of the invading forces, meets with the Mayor at the Palace. At the Colonel's request, he and his five officers are given quarters at the Palace during the occupation.

## **The Town Square**

The Town Square is selected by Colonel Lanser as the location for the execution of Alexander Morden for the murder of Captain Bentick. The Colonel chooses the square so that all the townspeople can see what happens if they resist occupation.

## **Molly Morden's House**

Mayor, Annie, Dr. Winter and two of the Anders brothers meet at Molly's house. The Anders brothers are traveling by boat to England that evening. They plan to take Mr. Corell along to drown him. The Mayor asks the Anders brothers to request the English to send them TNT and poison.



# Themes

## Democracy

From the Introduction portion that accompanies the novel, "The Moon Is Down," the reader learns that this work is considered one of the best works of Allied propaganda during World War II. The story begins with the invasion by foreign soldiers of a small, unnamed European town. A conflict between two of the main characters is immediately brought to the forefront. The conflict is much broader than the two men, however, as it represents the clash between democracy and fascism.

When Colonel Lanser, the leader of the invading forces, pleads with Mayor Orden to be cooperative, his Excellency responds that "authority is in the town." He tells the Colonel that when the town sets a direction, he will follow it. Steinbeck is contrasting the brute force of military occupation against a democratically-elected government which must bend to the wishes of the people. He tells Lanser that while some people cope with an appointed leader and obey him, the people in his town have chosen (elected) their leader.

Even though the Colonel entices the Mayor with the promise that he will remain Mayor of the town, Orden will not be part of any arrangement in which he appears to be in collusion with the enemy. He tells Lanser that the people made him and can therefore unmake him.

The resistance to occupation and on a larger scale, fascism, begins to emerge with the actions of minor characters. When a townsman kills one of the Captains, he is shouting that he wants to be free. The Mayor's cook, Annie is upset with the soldiers standing on the porch and throws boiling water on them. The town doctor/historian marvels at how "truth fights free of control."

Just before the Mayor is led away to be executed, he tells Lanser that, "Free men cannot start a war, but once it is started, they can fight on in defeat. Herd men, followers of a leader, cannot do that, and so it is always the herd men who win battles and the free men who win wars." (111)

## Casualties of War

Steinbeck is consistent in his focus on the consequences of war. Chief among them are its casualties. Obvious casualties of war are the oppressed, the invaded, the innocents who are terrorized, wounded and killed—all for some ideology most don't understand or even know. In "The Moon Is Down," a small European town is occupied and, of course, its citizens immediately become casualties of war. The town was a democracy, the citizens, hard working class people, apparently content with their lives prior to the invasion.



However, unknown to them, a trusted storekeeper was working for the enemy and had helped set them up. The townspeople were innocents, sitting ducks. In a matter of minutes, their lives are turned upside down and they are invaded and occupied by foreign soldiers. In those few moments, they see six of their young men gunned down and murdered. The townspeople are stripped of their freedom and must answer to gun-toting, helmeted strangers. Understandably, the townspeople become terrorized, sullen and depressed. Later, anger and rage replace those emotions. They mourn over the loss of the lives they knew, for the loss of that intangible but basic human need—freedom.

The not-so-obvious casualties of war are the soldiers and officers of the invading forces of the small town. They have been lied to and used by their government. "We told them they were brighter and braver than other young men. It was a kind of shock to them to find out that they aren't a bit braver or brighter than other young men." (97) They have been told they will be greeted with flowers and smiles. The soldiers are falsely led to believe that soldiers of other invaded towns have been welcomed. But these townspeople treat them with sullenness and silence. Was it just this town and these people? Were the stories of other towns welcoming the invading forces false? Is the war being won? What will they face when they return to their hometowns?

The soldiers are despised and hated by the townspeople. They become depressed and feel isolated. They are afraid for their lives—the dead bodies of their comrades are being found bloodied in the frozen snow. They are on edge and trigger-happy. Innocents being killed—an old woman and young girl. "Fear crept in on the men in their billets and it made them sad and it crept into their patrols and it made them cruel."

The soldiers are homesick and weary of being hated and threatened. Some soldiers go insane and are sent home to face mercy killings. Most men, both soldiers and officers, are homesick and anxious to get out of the town but can see no way out. Although they fail to fully recognize their plight, they are miserable because they, too, have lost their freedom.

When a young lieutenant is attracted to a young widow in the town, there is angst on both sides. Lieutenant Tonder tells Molly, "Please don't hate me. I'm only a lieutenant. I didn't ask to come here. You didn't ask to be my enemy. I'm only a man, not a conquering man."

## Strength of Character

Mayor Orden is a man of convictions. He is a staunch believer in the freedom of man and strongly adheres to the democratic process. When his town is invaded, Colonel Lanser, the leader of the enemy, asks the Mayor to stay in office but wants his "cooperation." The Mayor tells the Colonel that he cannot take any action that would be contrary to the wishes of the townsmen—he listens to the voice of the people. They elected him into office and can remove him. The Mayor will not accept any proposition that would cause the townspeople to think he is in collusion with the invading forces.





The Mayor is so strong in his values that he would rather face death or imprisonment than violate them.

Colonel Lanser is strong in a different way from the Mayor. While he is the leader of the enemy, he implies that he does not necessarily concur in the ideology of his leader. Discussing orders from headquarters with Major Hunter, Lanser goes off on a tangent. He tells Hunter he knows what the leaders will tell him: "Take the leaders, shoot the leaders, take hostages, shoot the hostages, take more hostages, shoot them. . .and the hatred growing and the hurt between us deeper and deeper." (98) However, Lanser is a soldier and his first duty is to fulfill the orders of his superiors.

There is a pathos that surrounds the Colonel—there is a sense that he anticipates doom and defeat. He is an experienced soldier who knows the horrors of war having served and invaded several countries decades before. The Colonel is a decent fellow but unfortunately landed on the wrong side of history. He is extremely considerate of the Mayor and the townspeople—that is as much as possible. In the end, however, he will not let his emotions or doubts corrupt his duties. He will carry out his duties even though they are contrary to what is in his heart. Lanser tells Lieutenant Prackle that he must carry out his duties, "Meanwhile you must take orders and carry them out. Most of the orders will be unpleasant, but that's not your business." (99) Lanser is talking to himself as much as he is to Prackle.

# Style

## Point of View

John Steinbeck writes *The Moon Is Down* from a third-person omniscient point of view, allowing the reader to know all characters' thoughts and feelings. A critique of the book found in the introduction to the novel, asserts that Steinbeck presented his story with a "sure sense of audience and empathy for the oppressed."

While a few critics called him on presenting the Nazis in an admirable light, Steinbeck's concern was not with a critic's review; rather, his goal was to reach as many suffering people as he could with his message of hope. Steinbeck sensed that individuals in occupied cities and towns might view their captors in a more favorable way than did Americans thousands of miles away. The Germans in fact were human and like anyone else had likable and admirable qualities. By making some of the invaders, like Colonel Lanser for example, sympathetic, Steinbeck felt he could better reach those who were oppressed. By his choice of the third-person omniscient point of view, readers are able to access the heart and mind of the enemy and thereby develop an understanding, even empathy for those characters.

Steinbeck was a very patriotic man and even served in covert positions with the government during the war. He was passionate about helping the oppressed and wrote his story only with those people in mind. His intention was to write helpful propaganda not a masterpiece. Steinbeck succeeded in writing what is considered the most popular work of propaganda of World War II. However, although not his intention, Steinbeck delivered what is also considered a classic work of fiction.

## Setting

The setting of the story told in *The Moon Is Down* is a small, unnamed European town during an on-going war. By not putting a name on the town and not placing the story within a specific time frame, Steinbeck has created a story that is both universal and timeless. Thus, his important work is not limited by space or time and can continue to serve a purpose anywhere.

In the introduction to the story, the reader learns that the setting is presumed to be a town in either Denmark or Norway. The identity of the invaders and the conflict are only thinly veiled. The introduction confirms what the reader would glean from the story that the invaders are soldiers of Nazi Germany and the conflict is World War II.

There are several hints within the story that the town is in Denmark or Norway. The reader knows that the village is located on the shore of a body of water. There are references to ships coming in to export coal, which is mined in the town. Both countries are rich in natural resources so the possibility exists that coal mining was done in both regions during the 1940's. There are several references of townspeople escaping by



boat to England. Both Denmark and Norway are located on large bodies of water. Denmark is located on the North Sea and Norway on the Norwegian Sea. Both these bodies of water lead directly westward to England.

The invasion takes place at least partially in the winter months with many references to the heavy snow that lingers around the town. There is mention of the long, dark days of winter. Both countries are located in the Land of the Midnight Sun and experience very long summer days and very short winter days.

## Language and Meaning

The title of the book *The Moon Is Down* has direct connection to the heart of the story. It is taken from the second act of *Macbeth* when Banquo asks his son Fleance "how the night goes." Fleance replies that the "moon is down" which foreshadows the advancing evil on the kingdom. The title of Steinbeck's work is a reference to the evil that had beset Europe at the hands of the Nazis.

John Steinbeck is one of the most renowned writers in modern literature. His writing style in *The Moon Is Down* is clear and straightforward. There is never confusion about the story he is telling nor the message he is sending. The story is about the occupation of a small European town by foreign soldiers. The message is that fascism cannot defeat democracy.

Steinbeck's lyrical style is obvious in some of the dramatic flourishes he employs to depict a setting or a characteristic. For example, to relate the long and dreary cold winter during which the town is under occupation, Steinbeck writes: "The days and the weeks dragged on, and the months dragged on. The snow fell and melted and fell and melted and finally fell and stuck." (57) Steinbeck's imagery takes the reader to that location. Again when speaking of the dreary, snowy winter, he writes, "The dark buildings of the little town wore bells and hats and eyebrows of white and there were trenches through the snow to the doorways." (57) The reader gains understanding of two characters by Steinbeck's handiwork; one is "so simple that only a profound man to know him as profound." (2); the other is "so complicated that only a profound man would know him to be simple;" Steinbeck tells the reader a lot in a few words: "We have some little right to life in all this death."

Many of the characters are presented with allegorical meaning. Annie, the eternally angry cook, stands up to the soldiers and represents the town's spirit and resistance to occupation. The servant Joseph, who watches carefully that no furniture is ever moved from their precise positions, represents fear of change. Madame, the Mayor's well-meaning wife, who muses whether wine should be served to the invading officers, represents a need to keep up appearances. On a grander scale, both in a figurative and literal sense, the brave Mayor Orden represents freedom and democracy while his adversary, Colonel Lanser, represents occupation and fascism.



Steinbeck uses the last words of Socrates in the final chapter. When discussing the quotation with Dr. Winter, the Mayor could not recall its ending. When Mayor Orden is being escorted away to his execution, he recalls the last words, "Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius." He asks Winter if the debt will be paid. Winter affirms that it will. Winter is affirming to Orden that the people will keep fighting for their freedom after his death.

## Structure

The Moon Is High by John Steinbeck is laid out in a straightforward manner in eight chapters. The story is told in a clear, concise and chronological manner. Steinbeck makes use of the cliff hanger in some instances. A choice example is when Lieutenant Tonder comes to call on Molly. The chapter ends with Tonder knocking at the door while Molly is reaching for her shears and blowing the lamp out to create total darkness. The outcome of this episode is not revealed until a subsequent chapter.

Steinbeck is genius in creating suspense when allied bombers drop small packages of TNT for the townspeople to use in their defense against the invading forces. The townspeople wind up with more vials of TNT than the soldiers and are thus in a superior position for the fight that surely lays ahead, one that presumably will be sparked by an offensive launched against the invaders.

In the same episode, Steinbeck uses humor to convey the scene after the packages are dropped. The hundreds of bright blue packages that have been parachuted down to the white snow are hunted down by the town's children. To stimulate enthusiasm, their parents told them to pretend to be on an Easter egg hunt. The invading soldiers are also scrambling to find the packages. Coincidentally, one of the officers likens the actions by the soldiers to that of kids on an Easter egg hunt. Steinbeck lets the reader know that the children are doing a better job at the Easter egg hunt.

There is an introduction at the beginning of the book which provides information about the environment at the time *The Moon Is High* was first published. The book is considered one of the best pieces of propaganda for the Allied cause during World War II. The book was banned in all occupied and Axis countries; however, the underground worked hard at getting the book and its message of the victory of democracy over fascism to thousands of occupied and threatened people.



## Quotes

"Dr. Winter was a man so simple that only a profound man would know him as profound." (2)

"Lanser had been in Belgium and France twenty years before and he tried not to think what he knew—that war is treachery and hatred, the muddling of incompetent generals, the torture and killing and sickness and tiredness, until at last it is over and nothing has changed except for new weariness and new hatreds." (23)

"In all the world yours is the only government and people with a record of defeat and defeat for centuries and every time because you did not understand people." (48)

"Don't you know you will have to kill all of us or we in time will kill all of you? You destroyed the law when you came in, and a new law took its place." (48)

"Alex, go, knowing that these men will have no rest, no rest at all until they are gone, or dead. You will make the people one. It's a sad knowledge and little enough gift to you, but it is so." (55)

"The days and the weeks dragged on, and the months dragged on. The snow fell and melted and fell and melted and finally fell and stuck." (57)

"Fear crept in on the men in their billets and it made them sad and it crept into their patrols and it made them cruel." (59)

"Please don't hate me. I'm only a lieutenant. I didn't ask to come here. You didn't ask to be my enemy. I'm only a man, not a conquering man." (78)

"Major, these are intelligent people. Stupid traps won't catch them twice." (95)

"We told them they were brighter and braver than other young men. It was a kind of



shock to them to find out that they aren't a bit braver or brighter than other young men."  
(97)

"And the girl. . .the girl, Lieutenant, you may rape her, or protect her or marry her—that is of no importance so long as you shoot her when it is ordered." (99)

"Free men cannot start a war, but once it is started, they can fight on in defeat. Herd men, followers of a leader, cannot do that, and so it is always the herd men who win battles and the free men who win wars." (111)

"No. . .they can't arrest the Mayor. The Mayor is an idea conceived by free men. It will escape arrest." (112)

## Topics for Discussion

What position did Mr. Corell hold in the town prior to invasion? How did the townspeople try to seek retribution?

What did the Mayor's cook, Annie, do when she thought the soldiers were standing too close to the house? What happened to her as a result of her actions?

Why did Mayor Orden refuse to "cooperate" with the invading forces?

Of what crime, according to the Colonel Lanser, was Alexander Morden guilty? What was his punishment?

Why did Colonel Lanser feel his officers were like children? Why was he more qualified about matters of war than the other officers?

What was dropped all over the town by bombers circling overhead? What was the reaction of the invading forces? What did the townspeople do with these packages?

What are Orden and Winter really talking about when they are discussing Socrates' last words? What does Orden mean when he asks Winter if the debt will be paid?