

The Lunar Eclipse

by [Armando Simón](#) (July 2022)



New Moon, New York, George Ault, 1945

"All right, kids, watch!" said their father. Both Roger and his wife were sitting cross legged on the floor of their home, as were their children. "You see how we're sitting, and you're sitting, one foot on top of the leg and the other foot under the other leg? Well, you grab the foot that's under you and you bring it up on top of the leg so both feet are on top of your thighs," he said as the parents demonstrated. "Use your hands for that."

"And now," he tried to get up, went back down, laughing. Then they both got on their knees, straightened their backs, and started walking on their knees, to the children's amusement. It helped that neither parent was fat or very old.

"Now you try it," said Eliza, their mother.

The two youngsters did so, with their parents' assistance. Someone walking in on them would have been surprised at the sight: a family of four walking on their knees while laughing at themselves.

After a while of this merriment, the father announced, "All right, that's enough. Let's get ready for the lunar eclipse." They sat down and carefully each pulled off one of their feet from the knot. The two children needed a bit of assistance doing so. In the end, they were limber and flexible once more.

"Come on," the father said, and the four of them went out to the back porch and sat down on the chairs, and relaxed as they looked up at the sky.

"Oh, look, it already started," their mother said. It was true. A quarter of the full moon was already darkened.

It was a good spring night to be outside. There was a constant, cool breeze. A cool breeze always makes the outdoors more pleasant. So, although usually a talkative family, they

just sat in silence, enjoying being mellow.

After a while, Eliza said, "Honey, does it seem like the eclipse is taking place a little faster than usual?" The moon was half occluded by now.

"Yeah, I was thinking the same thing. Maybe the moon is closer to the earth, so the eclipse is going faster." He shrugged. It was no big deal. The two of them had seen plenty of eclipses before. The children, on the other hand, had seen one but they had been younger, so they had forgotten. They continued enjoying the breeze while looking up at the moon.

Less than half an hour later, the full lunar eclipse was an accomplished event. The full moon was red.

"Look, kids, a dragon's eating the moon. That's why it's red."

"Da-a-a-ad!" the boy protested. "We're not savages from the jungle!"

"Maybe if you guys bang on some pans, it'll scare away the dragon."

"You do it, Dad," the daughter volunteered him.

"Oh, you guys don't believe me, eh? Okay."

They patiently waited for the reverse process to take place.

"Mmmm, look at that," their father said, without pointing. "Look at that spot at the edge of the moon." Yellow or white, it had not turned red like the rest of the moon.

"I think it must be a lunar base built by aliens," he joked, but this time no one rose to the bait. They just ignored him and kept watching.

A half hour later, the reverse process had still not started. "All right, it looks like the moon's taking its sweet time to un-eclipse, so let's go to bed since we're going to the beach

tomorrow." They entered their home, which smelled of garlic and paprika from their previous dinner, and went straight to bed.

Very early the next morning, they arrived at the beach. They went into the water and when they got tired of that the parents sunbathed while keeping an eye on their children, who were each building a sand castle.

After laying down for a while, Eliza asked him, "Did you happen to see at what time was low tide?"

"No, I didn't."

"Must be low tide, 'cause usually when they make sand castles, the tides wash them down."

He raised himself on his elbows. "Mmm. Yeah, must be low tide like you said. There are no waves to speak of. Yeah, it's low tide." He laid back down on the towel.

There is something about the beach air that makes one both hungry and thirsty so that by ten thirty they were famished, eager for lunch. The family left the beach and stopped at a fast-food place and ate and drank to their hearts' content, or rather to their stomachs' content. On the drive back home, it seemed like they were taking turns burping.

At home, they showered and relaxed. Tomorrow the adults would return to work and the children would go back to school.

Eliza sat down to watch a television show her husband did not care for, preferring instead to do some work in the garage.

"Roger! Come here! Quick!" she called out.

He sighed and went inside.

"What? What is it?"

"The moon's gone!"

He let out a breath of exasperation at the silliness of her statement.

“What do you mean, the moon is gone?” he asked in a slow, disdainful tone of voice.

“It’s gone! Vanished! All the networks have the same story! They don’t know where it is!”

Roger frowned in annoyance at the absurdity of what she was saying, but his facial expression changed on seeing an astronomer being interviewed.

“And you have no idea?” was the question being asked.

“I told you already: none!” the astronomer answered the reporter, almost shouting. “There is no debris orbiting the planet if a collision had taken place with another celestial body that somehow, somehow, entered our orbit without hundreds of astronomers being aware of it. And there isn’t another body nearby with a gravitational pull strong enough to have yanked the moon from its orbit.”

“So where is it? Where has the moon gone?” The reporter’s high-pitched voice revealed an underlying panic.

“I told you already! We don’t know! Nobody knows. Maybe you should ask Penn and Teller. We’re scouring the sky with every telescope we have on the planet. Not just the big observatories, but also the general public. There’s no trace. So far, anyway. But we’re going to keep looking. There has to be an answer. Something that big just doesn’t go <poof!> and disappears.”

“Any theories?”

“None. Nothing. Not yet, anyway. We have nothing to work on. This has been so sudden.”

Roger noticed for the first time that the children were

present, watching the news with wide eyes.

"Gimme that," he said, snatching the television remote from his wife's hand and switching to another channel. A reporter was speaking directly to the camera.

"The moon's disappearance was first noted around 12 hours ago, but no one reported it because all who noticed it had trouble believing it, or, they were afraid of ridicule, or because they could not account for the moon's absence. If an astronomer had reported it and it turned out to have been a mistake, the ridicule would have been such as to have been the end of that astronomer's career. Finally, one scientist by the name of Giuseppe Paoletti, from Bologna, Italy, gathered enough courage to report the news, and he did report it. And, once that happened, hundreds of reports poured in confirming the moon's absence."

In a panic, Roger threw the remote to the sofa and stormed out of the house. *The moon has to be there! It has to!* He frantically looked up at the night sky, then a guttural scream escaped from him.

"NO-0-0-0-0-0!"

But no moon was in sight.

He became aware that some of his neighbors were also outside, a few of them looking up at the sky with binoculars. Some seemed calm, at least on the surface and others were like him, deeply agitated.

The children came out and joined him, their necks craning upwards, searching for the errant satellite. Then Eliza joined them. Seeing them, he forced himself to calm down.

The night seemed darker than usual and they put their arms around each other.

Understandably, everyone around the world remained in a high

level of anxiety for many days, the public clamoring for either an explanation, or a sighting. Predictably, politicians uttered their usual inane comments.

As is usually the case in strange situations, it was the not knowing that made things worse. Demands of scientists for answers yielded nothing. "We simply do not know. We don't know where to even start."

A Ukrainian astronomer by the name of Karpechenko voiced a thought that perhaps a bit of anti-matter had drifted through space until it came into contact with the moon, at which point the matter and anti-matter had cancelled each other out. This was an off the cuff remark uttered for the sake of saying something, since he had been cornered at work by a persistent reporter. Neither Karpechenko nor his colleagues took it seriously since if it had been the case, an enormous explosion would have occurred, one big enough to rip apart Earth's atmosphere. But the hypothesis, if one could call it that, seemed to calm a lot of people. It was something they could seize on.

"Lunar search parties" formed and met every night where groups of regular people with personal telescopes and binoculars would get together at parks, or far outside the cities to avoid light pollution from all of the lamps lit by cities that tended to obscure faint stars or planets. There, they would search different parts of the sky, searching, searching. Those who did not have viewing equipment were given a chance to peer through the lenses by the owners of those optical instruments.

It was often stated in newspapers and television that many amateur astronomers had discovered comets with their personal telescopes, so maybe someone would get lucky and locate the runaway moon.

Roger bought an expensive and powerful binocular—the last in one store for sale, after having gone to a dozen other

establishments that had run out of them as well as telescopes. The family started attending these lunar search parties at a park on the outskirts of the city for several nights in succession.

These lunar search parties, though unsuccessful so far at locating the moon, tended to have a calming effect on participants simply by having groups of people together in camaraderie with the same purpose and talking and reassuring each other. This was certainly true for Roger and his family.

Yet, on the fourth night of their viewing within the group, an odd and disturbing thing occurred. One of the regular attendees was one of the amateur astronomers from the local astronomy club who was there with his impressive looking telescope and he was letting people who did not have instruments as powerful as his line up and use it. He got a call on his cellphone and answered it. The man became increasingly annoyed and his voice began to steadily rise.

“Knock it off, Josef! Don’t you have something better to do? It ain’t funny.”

Then, apparently Josef spoke some more.

“Don’t be stupid, Josef!”

“No, I’m not going to take you seriously! It’s ridiculous! It’s stupid!”

“BECAUSE. . .” he shouted into his cellphone. “It’s impossible! Check your eyesight! Check your lenses! If you’re serious, somebody’s playing a trick on you!”

Roger and Eliza could not help but overhear and they were half curious, half amused at the interchange.

“OK! Fine! I will! Gimme the coordinates,” the amateur astronomer said before ending the call, and strode over to his telescope. “Excuse me,” he told Eliza as she was going to peer

in his telescope. "I have to check something. A friend of mine has a ridiculous sense of humor. Or someone's playing a trick on him." He began to redirect his instrument.

At this point, several cellphones began ringing, first a few, then many. The couple kept their eye on the skywatcher, curious as to what it was all about.

The man's body had a small spasm. He jerked up his head, looked into the lens again, stared, then fell backwards to the ground, sitting and staring off at nothing in particular.

"Are you alright?" Eliza and the kids looked down on him, as he looked up at them with a blank expression. Roger stepped around them and peered into the telescope.

At first, he was confused at what he saw. It made no sense. He quickly looked up above the telescope to check, but he could not see it in the sky since it was obviously far away. He looked again, looked harder, if that is possible, and he was oblivious to the commotion all around him.

"What is it? Roger! What is it? Did you find the moon? Roger!" Her husband turned his head and stared at her for several seconds, then moved to the side so she could see.

Eliza looked and had the same reaction. Confusion. Denial. It made no sense. It could not be. It was impossible. But, apparently, they had all seen the same thing.

Unmistakably, it was a dragon, a gigantic red dragon. And what made it all the more absurd was that it was flapping its wings in the vacuum of space.

And it had the moon in its mouth.

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Armando Simón is originally from Cuba, so he knows firsthand about Communism. Apart from that, he also has degrees in history and psychology and is the author of *When Evolution Stops*, *A Cuban from Kansas* and *The Book of Many Books*.

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