



Fourth Planet from the Sun

*Gordon Van Gelder, Ray Bradbury, Theodore Sturgeon, Arthur C. Clarke, Leigh Brackett, John Varley,
Robert F. Young, Gregory Benford, Michael Cassutt, Alex Irvine*

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Long before our robots got there, writers were dreaming about going to Mars. From Edgar Rice Burroughs to Kim Stanley Robinson, science fiction authors have been speculating about Mars for decades. *Fourth Planet from the Sun* is a collection of twelve of the very best stories about the Red Planet featuring classics from some of the masters of the genre—including Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, John Varley, and Theodore Sturgeon.

There's Ray Bradbury's 1952 story, "The Wilderness," a mood-piece tracing the last day on Earth of two women who are about to follow their men to the Martian frontier. In "Mars Is Ours" by Alfred Coppel, a war on the cold and lonely Martian sands exacts a terrible price from the people who fight it. Arthur C. Clarke imagines "Crime on Mars," in an irony-laden mystery that reviews crime and punishment Martian-style. Leigh Brackett takes us to Mars where an unwilling visitor is forced to witness the secret rites of the "Purple Priestess of the Mad Moon." Jerry Oltion's "The Great Martian Pyramid Hoax" looks at the Face on Mars with tongue firmly placed in cheek. Moving into the twenty-first century, there is Alex Irvine's "Pictures from an Expedition," which shows the corrosive effects of fame and celebrity on the scientists who need public support for their scientific exploration.

As Mars continually cycles into the news bringing us new scientific understanding of our neighboring planet—just in the last ten years, we've seen breathtaking images from the 2004 Rover expeditions and new data is returning from Curiosity, the Mars Science Laboratory that landed in August of 2012—it is fascinating to read how authors' conceptions of Mars have also changed so dramatically over time.

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Nikki Kirkland:

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