

# FANTASY

## At Its Best

Imagination is both the spice of life and the stuff from which reality is made. It carries us away from the hum-drum world of worries into fascinating, and sometimes delightfully fearful worlds not visible to our five senses. Yet the stuff from which these dreams are made contributed to the making of the world we all live in. The telephone, the radio, the automobile, were all merely fantasies less than a hundred years ago. No wonder then that such stories as the *AVON FANTASY READER* publishes have a special thrill not to be found in other types of literature. For in these dreams may be hints of things to come, things that may have been, or things that may be even now among us. Consider some of the stories in this number:

***THE MAN FROM THE MOON*** by Otis Adelbert Kline: a story of an interplanetary war, of a struggle to the death between two of Earth's neighbors, and a hint of a celestial people who may walk among us today.

***THE FLOWER-WOMEN*** by Clark Ashton Smith: a colorful fantasia of life on a far-off star, a tale of exotic vampiric flowers with the appearance and wiles of beautiful wanton women.

***THROUGH THE VIBRATIONS*** by P. Schuyler Miller: where is Atlantis, that vanished home of the world's first civilization? In this story, reminiscent of the imagery of A. Merritt, the veil of time is pierced to unravel the most intriguing of ancient mysteries.

There's also Fritz Leiber, Jr.'s strangest story, ***THE MAN WHO NEVER GREW YOUNG***; that classic tale of midnight doom, ***THE NIGHT WIRE***, by H. F. Arnold; and many more specially selected stories of weird-fiction and science-fiction by the best writers of the field. The ninth *AVON FANTASY READER* is a particularly outstanding number of this highly acclaimed series.

—D.A.W.

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# *The Man from the Moon*

by *Otis Adelbert Kline*

*The famous "Princess of Mars" novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs have achieved worldwide standing among readers of adventure stories and have inspired many authors to similar efforts. In our opinion, one of the most successful examples has been the "Planct of Peril" set of novels by the late Otis Adelbert Kline. There were six or seven titles in that series, taking place on our celestial neighbors, Venus, Luna, and Mars. In response to readers' requests, we are now reprinting for the first time that novelette of Kline's which may be said to be the keystone of these novels—the cosmic history of the interplanetary war that laid waste three worlds and set the stage for the adventures that were to thrill Kline's magazine and book audience.*

W

E STOOD on the eastern rim of Crater Mound—my friend Professor Thompson, the noted selenographer, and I. Dusky shadows lengthened and grew more intense in the great, deep basin before us, as the Sun, his face reddened as if from his day's exertions, sank slowly beyond the western rim.

Behind us, Alamo Edwards, the dude wrangler who had brought us out from Canyon Diabolo two weeks before, was dividing his time between the chuck wagon and our outdoor cookstove in the preparation of our evening meal, while our hobbled horses wandered about near-by, searching out clumps of edible vegetation.

"How is the story progressing, Jim?" asked the professor, referring to a half finished novel I had brought out with me to occupy my time with, while my friend pattered among the stones and rubble in the vicinity.

"I've reached an impasse—" I began.

"And so have I," rejoined my friend dejectedly, "but of the two, mine is far the worst, for yours is in an imaginary situation, while mine is real. You will eventually solve your problem by using your imagination, which has no fixed limitations. I can only solve mine by using my reason, which is limited to deductions from facts. If I do not find sufficient facts either to prove or disprove my theory, what have I? A hypothesis, ludicrously wob-

bling on one puny leg, neither able to stand erect among established scientific truths nor to fall to dissolution among the mistaken ideas of the past."

"What single, if weak, leg supports your theory that the craters of the moon were caused by meteorites?" I asked.

"You are standing on it," replied the professor. Then, seeing me look around in perplexity, he added: "Crater Mound is the only known Terrestrial formation that exactly resembles in shape the great ring mountains of the moon. If Crater Mound was caused by the impact of a gigantic meteorite with the earth, there is a strong probability that the numerous ringed craters of the moon were created in a like manner."

"But was it?" I asked.

"That is something I can neither prove nor disprove," he replied. "The evidence I have thus far discovered leads me to believe that many relatively small meteoric fragments have fallen here. But they could not have fallen singly, or by twos and threes to make this dent three-quarters of a mile in diameter and more than four hundred feet below the surrounding earth level, to say nothing of throwing up the ring on which we now stand to a mean height of a hundred and fifty feet above the plain."

"Then how could they have fallen?"

"If this great earthen bowl was caused by them, they must have struck this plain in an immense cluster at least a third of a mile in diameter, probably more."

"In that case, what has become of the cluster?"

"Part of it is probably buried beneath the soil. Part of it, exposed to the air, would have been burned to a fine ash, having generated a terrific heat in its passage through the atmosphere and still having, before it cooled, an opportunity to unite with oxygen. There should, however, be an intermediary residue which I have been unable to find."

"Maybe it was carted off by prehistoric Americans for the metals it contained," I feebly ventured to suggest.

"Impossible as that statement may seem," said the professor, "there is a small amount of evidence in favor of it, for I have found a number of meteoric fragments miles from the rim of the crater. By Jove! We appear to have a visitor!"

He clapped his powerful binoculars to his eyes, and looking in the direction in which they pointed, I saw a tall, bent figure, apparently attired in a robe or gown, leaning on a long staff and carrying a bundle of poles under one arm, slowly descending the slope opposite us.

"Seems to be a Chinaman," he said, passing the glasses to me. "What is your opinion?"

I looked and saw an undeniably Mongolian face, with slanting eyes, prominent cheek bones, and a long, thin moustache, the ends of which drooped at least four inches below the chin. The voluminous garments,

though badly tattered, were unquestionably Chinese, as was the cap with a button in the center, which surmounted the broad head.

"A Chinaman or an excellent makeup," I replied. "Wonder what he's doing out here in his native costume?"

Our speculations were interrupted by the clarion supper call of Alamo from the camp behind us:

"Come an' get it, or I'll feed it to the coyotes."

"You go down and eat," said the professor. "I'm not hungry, anyway, and I want to stay here and watch this curious newcomer. Bring me a bacon and egg sandwich and a bottle of coffee when you have finished."

Knowing my friend's disposition—for once he had made up his mind, a fleet of tractors could not drag him from his purpose—I did not argue with him, but descended to the camp.

While Alamo grumbled about dudes that were too interested in rocks to come for their chow while it was hot, I finished my evening meal. Then, taking my binoculars, I carried his light snack to the professor as requested.

The last pink glow of the sun was fading in the west, and the moon was rising when I reached the top of the ridge.

"Sit down here beside me," whispered the professor. "Our visitor seems to be preparing for a religious ceremony of some sort, and I dislike disturbing him."

While my friend munched his sandwich and sipped his coffee, I used my binoculars to watch the Chinaman. He had erected four poles supporting four others which formed a square above a low, flat-topped rock near the center of the crater. Suspended from the horizontal poles by cords were many small objects which were apparently very light in weight, for they stirred like leaves in the breeze. A lighted taper stood in the center of the flat rock, which was surrounded by a ring of thin sticks that had been thrust into the ground. The Oriental was on his knees before the stone, immobile as the rock itself, his face turned in our direction.

"Seems to be keeping his eyes on us," I said.

"I think he is waiting for the moon to rise above the crater rim," replied the professor, once more applying his eyes to his own binoculars.

My friend was right, for as soon as the first shaft of moonlight entered the crater the kneeling figure was galvanized into action.

Bursting into a singsong chant, quite audible, if unintelligible to me, the Celestial applied the flame of the taper to each of the thin sticks he had planted around the stone, all of which were soon glowing like burning punk. Then he stepped beneath one of the objects suspended from a horizontal pole, made a short speech in the direction of the moon, and lighted it with the taper. It burned out in a few seconds, casting a weird, yellow light over the scene. Stepping beneath the next suspended object he made another speech and lighted that object also. This one burned with a blue flame. He continued thus for several minutes until all the dangling objects had been consumed—each with a different colored flame. Then he extin-

guished the taper and knelt once more before the stone, resuming his chant, and prostrating himself from time to time with his forehead touching the stone. The breeze, blowing in our direction, was laden with the sweet, heavy odor of burning sandalwood and musk.

A half hour passed with no change in the ceremony. Then the burning joss sticks winked out, one by one. When the last went dark, the kneeling man made a final obeisance, then rose, took down his framework of poles, tucked them under his arm, and leaning heavily on his long staff departed toward the west.

"Show's over," I said. "Shall we go back to camp?"

"Hardly," replied my friend. "I'm going to follow him. In this bright moonlight it should be easy. By Jove! What has become of him? Why the fellow just now disappeared before my eyes!"

"Maybe he fell into a ditch," I hazarded.

"Ditch, fiddlesticks!" snapped the professor. "I've explored every square foot of this crater and know there is no depression of any kind where he was walking."

"Eastern magic," I ventured. "Now you see it, now you don't."

"Rot! You stay here and watch the western slope with your binoculars. I'm going down to investigate."

I watched, while the professor stumbled hastily across the crater and frantically searched the vicinity of the place where he had declared the Celestial had disappeared. After a twenty minute hunt, he gave it up and came back.

"Queer," he panted as he came up beside me. "Deucedly queer. I couldn't find hide nor hair of the fellow—not even the burnt ends of his joss sticks. Must have taken everything with him."

We returned to camp, squatted beside the fire, and lighted our pipes.

Alamo had stacked the dishes, putting off to the last the one camp job he hated—washing them—and was picketing the horses. Suddenly we heard him sing out:

"Well, look who's here! Hello, Charlie. You wantee come along washee dishee, gettee all same plenty much chow?"

Looking up in surprise, I saw the tall, ragged Oriental who had disappeared so mysteriously a few moments before, coming toward us. He was still leaning on his long staff, but minus the poles he had previously carried.

The professor and I both leaped to our feet from places beside the fire.

The Chinaman paused and looked at Alamo in evident bewilderment.

"I beg a thousand pardons," he said in excellent English, "but your speech is quite unintelligible to me."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Alamo tilted his broad Stetson to one side and scratched his head in amazement.

By this time my excited friend had reached the side of our Celestial visitor.

"He was only inviting you to sup with us, in the patois of the West," explained the professor.

The Chinaman bowed gravely to Alamo.

"Your magnificent hospitality is duly appreciated," he said, "but I beg to be excused, as I may not partake of food in the presence of the mighty Magong." As he uttered the last word he extended his left hand toward the moon, then touched his forehead as if in salute. There was something majestic about his bearing that made one forget the tattered rags in which he was clad.

"We accept your excuse without question," said the professor, quickly. "Permit me to welcome you to our campfire circle."

Our guest bowed low, moved into the circle of firelight, and laying his staff on the ground, squatted before the fire. Then he took a long-stemmed pipe with a small, brass bowl, from one of his capacious sleeves, and the professor and I both proffered our tobacco pouches.

"I'll use my own, with your indulgence," said our visitor, filling his pipe from a small lacquered box he carried. Before closing the box, he threw a pinch of tobacco into the fire, raised his left hand toward the moon, and muttered a few words unintelligible to me. Then, after touching his forehead, he lighted his pipe with the glowing end of a stick from the fire.

After puffing in meditative silence for a few minutes, he said:

"As I have thanksgiving devotions to perform, my time is limited. I will therefore, as briefly as possible, explain the reason for my visit, and convey to you the communication of the great one, whose humble messenger I am.

"Twenty years ago I was a Buddhist priest in T'ainfu. It was expected of every member of our order that at least once during his lifetime he should make a pilgrimage to a certain monastery in Tibet, there to perform mystic rites in a secret sanctuary, where a sacred stone of immemorable antiquity was kept. I made the pilgrimage, fully expecting to return to T'ainfu, as my brother priests had done and take up the duties of my humdrum existence there for the term of my natural life.

"There are things which I may tell you, and things which I may not disclose, so let me explain, briefly, that the whole course of my life was changed when first I viewed the sacred stone. It was graven with mystic characters, similar to, yet unlike Chinese writing. According to tradition, none but a living Buddha could decipher this sacred writing, which might not be transmitted to any of his followers, however great or wise.

"Now I had, from the days of my youth, made a study of our ancient writings, and had learned the meanings of many characters since wholly obsolete, as well as the former meanings of those whose significance had been entirely changed. I firmly believed, with my fellow priests, that none but the living Buddha might translate the writings on the stone. You may judge, therefore, of my surprise, when I found myself able to translate several of the ideographs graven on its sacred surface. I instantly believed myself the true possessor of the *ḱarma* of Buddha, and that the living Buddha of my order

was an impostor. On attempting to translate other characters, I found the majority of them unintelligible to me.

"One of the requirements of my pilgrimage was that I was to spend four hours a day for a period of seven days alone on my knees before the sacred stone. A guard, posted outside the door, saw to it that but one pilgrim was admitted at a time. On the day following, I secreted writing materials in my clothing, and spent the time allotted to me on that day, and the five days following, in carefully copying the writing on the stone.

"I carried my prize away without detection, but did not return to T'ainfu. Instead, I wandered from monastery to monastery, from temple to temple, conversing with the learned men and reading the ancient records to which I, as a pilgrim priest, was usually given access without question. The task of translation, which had at first appeared easy, took me ten years to complete.

"When it was finished I knew that it had not been written by God, as was supposed, but by the first earthly ancestor of my race, and I found myself charged with a trust which appeared as difficult of fulfillment as the translation itself. The crater which you have been investigating was described to me—yet its location was unknown to the writer. I was charged to find it and to find you. It took me nine years to find the crater, during which time I visited thousands, none of which exactly fitted the description. It took me a year more to find you and to receive the sign."

"May I ask what sign you refer to?" inquired the professor.

"My illustrious ancestor, who charged me with the task of conveying his message to you, said in the writing that his spirit would be watching me from Magong. He prophesied that you would appear at this place, and when you did, he would flash a brilliant signal to me from his Celestial abode."

"And you have the signal?"

"I have and do, for it is still visible. Look!" He pointed toward the full moon.

The professor looked, then raised his binoculars to his eyes and focused them.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "You have unusually sharp eyes. There is a brilliant, star-like light in the crater, Aristarchus. A rare occurrence, too."

"I have studied Magong for many years," replied our guest, "and have trained my eyes to see things hidden from the sight of ordinary mortals. I could have used a telescope or binoculars, but for my purpose I have no need of them."

"Remarkable!" commented the professor. "And this light fulfills the prophecy?"

"To the letter. Permit me to deliver my message, therefore, and depart, for I have much to do before Magong veils her face once more."

Drawing a large, bulky envelope from his pocket, the Oriental arose and handed it to the professor with a profound bow.

Springing to his feet with alacrity, the professor accepted it with a bow as low and dignified as that of the donor.



"Man of science," said our guest. "Use this message as you will, for that is your privilege, but you will confer a favor on the illustrious sender and bring manifold blessings on yourself and your descendants if you will use it to advance the knowledge of mankind."

"I will endeavor to use it as you ask," replied the professor, "and thank you for it, and for the trust you have placed in me."

"Do not thank me," was the answer, accompanied by a significant gesture skyward. "Thank P'an-ku."

"I will, and do. May we not have the pleasure of your company tomorrow?"

"A thousand thanks, and as many regrets, but my task will have ended when Magong veils her face, and I am weary and would return to T'ainfu. So farewell."

He took up his staff, and without a further word, stalked majestically out into the moonlight. The last we saw of him was when his tall, gaunt figure was silhouetted against the sky for a moment on the crater rim.

With trembling fingers the professor broke the seal of the envelope and drew therefrom a neatly written manuscript. It was in English, and he read it aloud to me, while Alamo snored lustily from the folds of his blanket, several yards away.

With Professor Thompson's permission, I publish it here for the first time, making it clear at the outset, that while it seems to explain many matters which have puzzled our leading scientists for hundreds of years, and is not, in the light of our present knowledge, either susceptible of proof or refutation, we cannot vouch for its veracity.

## THE STORY OF P'AN-KU

Having attained the advanced age of two hundred and ninety-eight earthly years, and feeling the hands of San-miau, the devourer, grim messenger of the Supreme God, T'ien, ever closing tighter on my throat, slowly squeezing out my soul from this old shell of a body, I, P'an-ku, lord of thousands, founder of a new race, and last survivor of an old, have retired from my manifold duties and pleasures—the ordering of the affairs of my subjects, the company of my wives, my children, and my children's children, who will someday be numerous as the stars of heaven—to write this history of my own people for those to come who will have the intelligence and the desire to understand it.

For a million historical years, men of my race inhabited Magong when she was yet a planet among planets, a free, rotating sphere with her own undisturbed orbit, midway between the orbits of this planet and that of the terrible, devastating war-world, Mars. For a half of those million historical years, an ancestor of mine—a P'an-ku—sat on the imperial throne of Magong and held dominion over all her lands and seas.

When I was born, Crown Prince of Magong, my people had reached an advanced state of civilization, for much can be accomplished in a million historical years. For more than ten thousand years, Magong had been in com-

munication with Mars, the only other planet inhabited by intelligent beings. For over five thousand years, our interplanetary ships had visited their planet, and their ships had made friendly calls on Magong, carrying passengers, manufactured merchandise, and raw materials. A colony of their pale, white people, whose faces I wish we had never seen, was founded on one of our continents and treated with every friendly consideration by our rulers: that is, my ancestors. A colony of our stalwart yellow people had also settled on Mars, and had been received with every appearance of good will.

Before I was sixteen years of age I had learned to navigate an ether ship, and when I had demonstrated to my father's satisfaction that I was a thorough master of interplanetary navigation, he permitted me a leave of absence of two years for the purpose of visiting the inner planets—Earth, Venus and Mercury. This trip was mostly for my own education, as all three of the planets had been explored thousands of years before, and had subsequently been visited at regular intervals by our scientific expeditions for the purpose of tabulating the evolutionary changes taking place on them. Mercury had developed nothing but the most lowly vegetable organisms. Venus teemed with life, ranging from the microscopic, unicellular animalcules to gigantic, four-footed reptiles, which roamed through her great forests of fern and fungi, some of them feeding on these and other primordial thallophytic growths, some preying on these herbivora or on the lesser creatures coexisting with them on that planet. Some of them had evolved membranous wings with which they flapped clumsily from place to place, but there were no birds or mammals. Among the plants, none flowered or bore fruit or seeds. All reproduced by spores or spawn or by simple fission.

On the Earth, a higher order of evolution was in progress. Many of the plants, having developed specialized sexual organs, flowered and bore fruit. Birds forsook the ways and forms of their reptilian ancestors—evolved a thousand shapes and hues—cultivated glorious plumage and melodious voices. Mammals suckled and reared their young, and man, the greatest mammal of them all, was slowly battling his way to world supremacy with crude weapons and implements of wood and stone.

On my return to Magong, after visiting the inner planets, I importuned my father to permit me to visit Jupiter. This he flatly refused to do. The trip, he said, was too long and dangerous for one of my years. Furthermore, only one, out of a thousand of our most skillful and experienced navigators, who had attempted the trip, had returned to tell of it. I had to be content, therefore, with several trips to Mars, where I, as Crown Prince of Magong, was always received with such pomp and splendor that I wished I might be permitted to go incognito and mingle with the common people—but even this small pleasure was denied me.

At twenty-five, I was made commander-in-chief of Magong's interplanetary navies. Shortly thereafter, trouble developed between my father and Lido Kan, Supreme Ruler of Mars. It seems that a number of Martians, jealous of the economic progress made by our colonists on that planet, had gone to

Lido Kan with tales of woe, insisting that they be deported. So strong was the pressure they brought to bear on him, that he finally took the matter up with my father. The reply of my father was courteous, but firm. He insisted that if his people were to be deported from Mars, the Martian colony must also leave Magong. Lido Kan argued that his people had created no disturbance on Magong, and no dissension among the subjects of my father, which was true enough, and my father naturally retorted that his subjects were too courteous to even think of bringing up such a matter.

One word led to another, and things went from bad to worse, until a group of Martians attacked and massacred the inhabitants of one of our settlements. My father instantly demanded an imperial apology from Lido Kan, complete punishment of the perpetrators of the crime, and indemnity for relatives of all the massacred people. Lido Kan delayed his reply for several days, but was eventually swayed by the jingoists of his realm, and replied that he would neither apologize, pay indemnity, nor punish any of his subjects, as my father had received fair and timely warning. While my father debated what to do in this crisis—for he had always been a man of peace—word came that an army of Martians had completely wiped out our colonies on that planet.

A short time thereafter, the commander of one of our large interplanetary passenger ships ether-waved me that the Martians would not permit him to leave port, and that several hundred of our ships were being held in a similar fashion. I immediately left Magong with a fleet of battleships, intending to demand their release or fight, but was met half way by a fleet of Martian warships.

The contest that ensued was short and disastrous. My fleet used the cold, energy-decreasing green ray of condensation, which we had developed—the enemy fleet, the hot, energy-increasing red ray of dispersion. We had developed our inter-rotating green rays to such a degree that any substance touched by them would contract to less than one-hundredth of its normal size with a corresponding increase in density. The toughest metals, under this ray, would become as brittle as egg shells and more dense than pure lead.

The effect of the red rays of the Martians was the opposite, but fully as devastating, as these rays, rotating in receding spirals, tore the atoms apart on contact, making the heaviest metals less dense than the atmosphere in an instant. When a green ray met a red ray of equal intensity, they neutralized each other.

By superior maneuvering, I managed to wipe out the last Martian battleship when I had lost all but the flagship of my fleet. This had been badly crippled by a red ray, and after making temporary repairs, I limped sadly back to port.

On the face of my father, when I reported to him in the throne room that day, was a look sterner than any I had ever seen him wear.

“My son,” he said. “War is a terrible thing—the worst affliction that can come to humanity—but it is at hand and we must meet it like men. The Mar-

tians have made a start by wiping out our colonies and attacking our fleet. Now they are determined to eliminate us entirely from the solar system. At this very hour they are preparing to use their most terrific weapon of all against us."

"What weapon is that, O my father?" I asked.

"Come with me, my son, and I will show you."

He led me up to the great observatory on top of his palace. We passed through the general observation room, where a hundred enormous telescopes were in constant use—a thousand trained men observing, recording, and manipulating the instruments. Going into his private observation room, my father himself trained his huge telescope on a distant object. Then he called me to look. I saw what appeared to be a huge spiral of nebulous matter forming near Mars.

"They are clearing interplanetary lanes for the passage of a huge fleet," I said. "See, they are collecting all the meteoric bodies for millions of miles in all directions."

"They are doing more than that, my son," my father replied. "That matter-condensing and projecting apparatus which they formerly used to clear the way for peaceful ships is going to be used for a horribly deadly purpose. Have you noticed *where* they are condensing the meteoric mass?"

"It seems to be on a line between Magong and Mars," I replied.

"It is. Have they ever condensed material in that position before? You know full well they have not. They have always concentrated it in a position where it could be projected out into space without harm to anyone."

"Why, Father, what do you mean?"

"I mean that as soon as that synthetic nebula reaches a sufficient degree of cohesion and solidity it will be projected at *us!*"

"What will it do? Will it burst our planet asunder? Will everyone be killed?"

"No. It is not large enough for that, but it can do incalculable damage; and if their aim is good and they are not stopped in some way, they can collect enough of such matter from the meteoric belts of the solar system to depopulate this planet."

"Can't we dodge them? What about the new gravity control plant?"

"The thing is still in the experimental stage. Besides, it is a terrible and a dangerous thing to disturb or attempt to change the orbit of Magong. Every body in the solar system is in perfect balance with every other body, and too great a change, even in the orbit of our own relatively small planet, may cause untold damage—some upset of the scheme of things, which we cannot possibly foresee. True, we have slightly perturbed the motion of Magong, just as an experiment, but it has been done cautiously, and always with a counter-perturbance sufficient to bring it back to the proper place in its orbit."

Once more my father looked through the giant telescope.

"The projectile is formed and on the way," he said gravely. "Where it will strike, no one can tell—not even those who are sending it. It may crush this

palace, destroy this city. It may kill nobody or wipe out a million people. It may miss Magong entirely, but this is not probable. We are too large a target. Let us go below. There is nothing more we can learn here at present. I will show you the only efficient aggressive weapon to which I can turn at present. By this, and by the remaining interplanetary fleets under your command, the question of our very existence will be determined."

We descended to the main floor and entered a compression tube car, in which we were shot to one of the numerous physics laboratory stations of Magong. My father presented Wang Ho, the venerable chief scientist of the institution.

"Wang Ho," he said. "Is the atmosphere disintegration ray ready?"

"It is ready, your majesty," was the reply.

"Then train it on Mars. They insist on war, so we will give it to them in earnest. They are determined to destroy the face of our planet, therefore let us remove the atmosphere from theirs."

"Your majesty is aware, I hope, that a continuous use of this ray will be suicidal. For every ten cubic parsads of their atmosphere we send out into space, we also send out one cubic parsad of our own. If your majesty would wait, and have a number of these ray projectors made in portable size, they could be fastened to ether ships and used without destroying our own atmosphere."

"Unfortunately," replied my father, "we cannot wait. The war is on. It may be decided in a few days. Several weeks would be required to fit out ether ships with these ray projectors. No, we must fight now, or be forever beaten. Turn the ray on them, and keep it going as long as they are in range. Our other projecting stations will take up the duty, one by one, as the planet revolves on its axis."

He turned to me.

"My son," he said. "The entire war fleet of Magong is in your keeping. Save the fleet if you can, yourself with it, but remember—it is only a barrier. It is one of the protections of Magong. If the barrier must be destroyed in the line of duty—then do not attempt to save it at the cost of that which it was set up to protect. Do you understand?"

"Fully father. I will be wary and circumspect, but I will not fail in the line of duty."

Once more we entered the compression tube and were shot back to the imperial palace. After bidding farewell to my mother, I said a last goodbye to my father, and went out to my flagship. There were tears in the eyes of my mother as she called her last farewell to me. My father was too much of a man of iron, however, to betray his emotion at such a time.

My fleet of ten thousand ether ships was ready for action, awaiting only my word of command. I had formed a daring plan which, if successful, might mean the destruction of the fleet and my own death, but would make it possible for Magong to win the war.

Leaving half of my ships to guard the planet against enemy craft, I took the other half and made straight for Mars. Shortly after we started, the first huge missile of the Martians passed us, and a few minutes thereafter it struck Magong with a brilliant flare of light, leaving a great dark pit in the ground where it had fallen. Referring to my charts I found that it had alighted on a small village of about two hundred souls. What a sudden and terrible end for them!

As we pressed onward, I saw another large nebula spiraling into shape, and knew that it would not be long until a second projectile was on the way to Magong.

Presently I saw a huge enemy fleet put out from Mars, evidently with the intention of meeting and giving battle to my fleet. This did not fit in with my plans at all, so I immediately gave secret orders to all of my commanders, then bade them disperse.

There were nearly a thousand magnetic wave stations on Mars, most of which were in continuous use because of the terrific efforts the Martians were putting forth to crush Magong. These stations were sending out powerful, man-directed magnetic lines of force, which drew all relatively small particles of matter, with which they came in contact, toward the stations from which they were projected. This procedure would have been dangerous to the Martians themselves had they not been clever enough to cross the lines of force and form contracting vortices, hundreds of thousands of miles from their planet. Under the direction of the central station, these vortices were combined and recombined at regular intervals, until visible nebulae resulted. The nebulae were condensed by extra and special lines of force from the central station, then projected at Magong, close-knit, spherical clusters of stone and metal. When the central station was turned away from the target by the axial rotation of the planet, a duplicate-control station on the other side carried on the work under the control of the same operators.

During the progress of my ship toward Mars, six of these huge clusters were projected at my world. Five of them struck the target and one missed, to shoot out into space and become an asteroid with an orbit of its own around the sun.

My plan was simple and direct. Each of my ships carried a chart, showing the location of the thousand enemy wave stations. Each station was numbered, and five ships were assigned to the attack of each.

My ship, together with four others of the most powerful of my navy, each carrying a battery of twenty huge ray projectors, was to attack the central magnetic station.

While we neared Mars I watched the movements of the enemy fleet, and saw that it was heading straight for Magong, evidently pleased at the fact that my first fleet had dispersed. This exactly suited my plans, as I knew that Hia Ku, my able lieutenant, would give them a warm reception with the five thousand ships I had left under his command, and I would be free to carry out my attack.

When I drew near the central wave station of the Martians I saw that my other four ships had arrived on schedule, and ordered the attack. We were discovered almost instantly, and a thousand red rays were flashed at us, but we were able to neutralize these by laying down a barrage of green rays. Then a number of Martian ether ships, reserved to guard the central station, arose and attacked us from above. One of their rays pierced our upper barrage and one of our ships, with her controls destroyed, plunged dizzily groundward, but was disintegrated by the red rays before she had fallen half way.

With this ship gone my barrage was weakened, and I knew that it would only be a matter of minutes until we should all meet a like fate. As certain death faced us, I thought quickly, and as quickly gave orders, resolving that in our passing we should at least cripple the central wave station of the enemy. My ships instantly responded to my command, and in a moment all were plunging directly downward, temporarily protected above and below by our green ray barrage—our objective the glass dome of the central wave station. It was my hope that when we crashed through this dome to our death we might destroy, or at least cripple this station, and thus hamper the Martians and give my father the time he needed to fit out other ships with atmosphere destroyers, thus assuring the victory of Magong.

But the Martians were too wise for me. They must have suddenly focused their lines of magnetic force on our ships, forming a contracting vortex a short distance above the dome, for we lost control of all of them simultaneously. They revolved about each other for a moment, and then crashed together. With that crash I lost consciousness. . . .

When I recovered my senses once more I was lying on a metal bench to which my hands and feet had been bound. Standing over me with a sneering smile on his pale face was Lido Kan, Supreme Ruler of Mars.

"What happened?" I asked, bewildered. "Where are my men?"

"All died but you," he replied, "when we brought your ships to the ground. I had thought to bring them down gently, but the rage of my operator got the better of him, and he wrecked all four. I cannot understand how it happened that you lived through that crash. It was a miraculous escape."

"Perhaps I have been saved for a purpose," I replied. "The Supreme Ruler of the Universe is all-knowing."

"I, at least, have kept you for a purpose," replied Lido Kan, savagely. "Lying here on your back, you shall witness the destruction of your world." He pressed a lever and a curved metal plate slid back from the ceiling, disclosing a great dome-like lens which looked out into space. "The empire of P'an-ku is doomed," he continued. "While this side of our planet is turned toward Magong, you shall witness its destruction through this lens. As soon as we turn away the lens will become a mirror which will give you the battle scenes as witnessed from our station on the other side. I pride myself that this is a rather clever invention of mine."

I made no reply, but looked eagerly out toward Magong. Already the once

fair face of my planet was growing pock-marked and ugly from the cruel disease called war.

"You are a clever whelp," continued my captor, watching my features closely, "but not clever enough for Lido Kan. Your ships destroyed two hundred of my magnetic wave stations, but it will not take long to rebuild them, and in the meantime the others are functioning quite successfully, as you will observe. At least half of the population of Magong has already been destroyed by my projectiles."

"Don't be too sure of victory," I replied. "By the time you have destroyed Magong, you may find yourself without an atmosphere."

"Hardly. It will take many days for your father to destroy our atmosphere. One week is all I require to silence all of his ray projectors and exterminate his people. But enough of this idle talk. I must to the grim work before me. I leave you to the pleasant contemplation of the dissolution of your heritage—the empire of Magong."

Left quite alone in the small, bare observatory room, I lay on my back and watched the progress of the battle. High above me the Martians were forming an enormous cluster of meteoric material. Already it was at least ten times as large as any they had projected at Magong, and they continued to add to it. Presently I saw that it was ready to be projected. There was a terrific roar from the machinery in the building around me, and the huge globe shot outward, but not in the direction of Magong. It described a short curve and began to fall directly upon Mars. Once more there was a roar from the projector machinery, and once again the sphere shot outward, only to return, drawn by the terrific pull of Mars' gravity on its great mass.

A feeling of exultation came over me, as I saw that my enemies failed, again and again, in their efforts to project the sphere. It appeared to me that they had brought destruction on their own heads. But Lido Kan was not without resource. Suddenly I heard a more terrific roar from the machinery than had occurred before. A great section was split from the mighty sphere, and simultaneously, the larger and smaller pieces were projected obliquely out into space. This time they did not fall back, but continued to travel in curved paths. The smaller, moving much more swiftly than the larger, soon disappeared from view, but it reappeared again in a few hours. The larger, moving more majestically across the sky, appeared to travel in a direction opposite to that taken by the smaller, because of its slower motion and the axial rotation of the planet. I had witnessed the formation of the moons of Mars.

Foiled in his attempt to hurl so huge a projectile, Lido Kan once more turned his attention to the firing of smaller ones. Hour after hour I watched, my lens presently turning to a mirror as Mars turned her face away from Magong, and each hour added to my sorrow as I saw the surface of my planet turning to enormous ringed pits. Presently an attendant brought me food and drink. Afterward, I slept at fitful intervals.



Days passed, and I detected new tactics on the part of my father. He evidently decided to risk all in an attempt to dodge the projectiles, for I saw that Magong was shifting out of her orbit—moving in closer to the sun in an eccentric fashion that would make it difficult for an operator to properly aim and time a projectile intended to strike her.

Soon I saw that he had moved into the orbit of Earth, then beyond it, between the orbits of Earth and Venus. At first I could not fathom his plans, but gradually they dawned on me, as I saw Earth come along and Magong fall in behind her. It was his intention, I felt sure, to use the larger planet as a shield against the devastating Martian projectiles.

Something must have gone wrong with his control station, however, for Magong presently fell behind the Earth in her race around the sun, then rose, crossing her orbit behind her, and hurried forward to catch her once more—this time outside Earth's orbit, between Earth and Mars. Something, also, had happened to Magong's rotation on her axis. Whereas she had previously revolved once in every twelve hours, she now turned with exceeding slowness. Rushing on past Earth, she continued for some distance, then paused and fell back once more to wait for the larger planet. Magong, I could clearly see, was caught in the gravity net of Earth. Thus she had become a satellite of that planet, even as the huge broken projectile of Lido Kan had become two satellites of Mars.

Lido Kan kept up his pitiless bombardment of Magong, once he had grown accustomed to her new orbit, with deadly accuracy. Once, and once only did I see him miss, the projectile, which was a relatively small one passing Magong and striking somewhere on the planet Earth—I could not tell just where because of the silvery cloud envelope that hid her surface from view.

Although fully four-fifths of her population must have been wiped out by this time, I knew that Magong still kept up the fight, as the atmosphere in my room grew rarer each day until breathing was a painful effort.

One day Lido Kan entered my room. Strapped to his back was an apparatus containing concentrated air, from which he took mouthfuls from time to time.

"I come to take leave of you, young whelp of P'an-ku," he said. "My people are dying by the millions for want of air, thanks to the infernal rays which your father has managed to keep trained on us. Our dissipated atmosphere cannot be brought back, nor could we manufacture a new one, from the elements locked in the soil, in less than a thousand years. I am leaving, therefore, with the five hundred large ether ships I still possess, for the purpose of colonizing the damp, unhealthful and savage planet Earth. My wave projecting stations, I will leave manned, each being provided with a supply of concentrated air, and committed to the task of continuing the bombardment of Magong until death overtakes them.

"I will have one of your hands unfettered, and will leave you plenty of food and water so that when death finally overtakes you, you will be slain

by your own father, as he continues to dissipate our atmosphere. And so, farewell."

He went out, and shortly thereafter, my attendant came in, placed a tank of water and a large basket of food within reach, and unfettered one of my hands. Then he, too, went out, and I was left alone, gasping for breath, as the atmosphere continued to grow more rare.

Presently I saw the fleet of Lido Kan set out. Instantly, with the thin point of one of my eating sticks, I set about picking the locks of my fetters. Within an hour I had freed myself. Finding my door unlocked I rushed from the room. Presently I blundered into the great deserted room from which the official Martian ether visiphone messages had formerly been sent to Magong. Opening a switch, I found that the power was still on, and signaled the station of my father. My heart gave a leap of joy when his face suddenly appeared in the disc before me.

"Have you any ether ships left?" I asked him, after we had exchanged greetings.

"Not quite a thousand."

"And does Hia Ku still live?"

"He lives, and commands the fleet during your absence."

"Then dispatch him at once to find and destroy the fleet of Lido Kan, who has just left here with five hundred ships, purposing to colonize Earth."

"Then the atmosphere is nearly dissipated?"

"It is."

"But what about you, my son? Are there any ships left in which you can return?"

"There are none near-by, and I have not the strength left to go out and search for more. My death is only a matter of hours, and I am resigned to my fate."

"Do not despair, for I, your father, will save you. I will shut off the atmosphere-destroying rays at once, and will have a small, swift ship there to bring you back in less than four hours."

I returned to the room where I had been imprisoned, to watch for the ether ship, and true to the word of my father it appeared in less than four hours—a tiny, one-man craft. I hurried to the roof, reaching it just as the ship alighted. A man stepped out—an old and faithful servant of my father.

"The ship from His Majesty, your father, Highness," he said.

"But why a one-man craft?" I asked.

"Hia Ku took all the others when he left to attack the fleet of Lido Kan," he replied. Then, before I could prevent him, he took a small, green ray projector from his belt and pressed the muzzle to his abdomen. With a gasping "Farewell, Highness," the brave and loyal fellow dropped dead at my feet.

Hurrying below once more, I entered the ether visiphone room and sig-

naled my father. His face appeared in the disc. I told him what his messenger had done, and tears streamed from his eyes.

"Just another sacrifice to the rapacity of Lido Kan," he said. "Get into your craft now, and I'll turn on the rays once more."

I lost no time in getting back to the little craft and away from Mars. I was making swift progress toward Magong, when suddenly I happened on the remnants of the two battle fleets. There were only three of our ships left, and they were beleaguered by four enemy craft. Both flagships were still intact, and at the time, dueling with their enormous ray projectors—green against red. As I approached them, one of our ships was cut in two by a red ray, the halves hurtling out through space.

I had one small ray projector on my forward deck—a puny weapon indeed against those of the huge battleships, but I determined to enter the unequal contest. Selecting the helmsman's turret of the nearest enemy ship, I plunged toward it. My approach in the tiny craft was apparently unperceived, and I did not turn on my green ray until within less than a thousand feet of my target. When the ray struck it, the turret instantly collapsed, and the ship, out of control, swung broadside, scattering her ray barrage and leaving her hull unprotected. I instantly turned the nose of my craft upward and passed over her, noting as I did so that she had been broken up by the huge green rays from our two remaining battleships.

Without pausing to give the enemy a chance to understand just what had happened, I quickly plunged at the helmsman's turret of the next ship. Once again my tiny ray threw a mighty ship out of control, and it was destroyed by the green rays of Hia Ku. This time, however, I did not escape unscathed, for one of the red rays of the second ship, shooting wildly upward as she went out of control, had carried off part of my forward deck.

I tried to close the safety plate beneath my instrument board, to keep my air and warmth from escaping into outer space, but it stuck, and a cold that closely approached absolute zero swept over me. With numbed hands I pulled frantically at the recalcitrant plate, and in a moment more had it in place. In the meantime, however, my small, swift craft had hurtled away uncontrolled to a position nearly a thousand miles from the four remaining combatants.

I swung her to, and steered for the battle scene once more. Then I saw something which wrung a gasp of horror from my lips—a huge meteor cluster from Mars rushing straight at the four ships. I had no time to signal them—to do anything, in fact. A moment later it struck them, and all four combatants disappeared in a blinding flash of light without appearing to have had the slightest effect either on the path or the mass of the projectile.

With a heavy heart, I turned my ship toward Magong. A short time after, I saw the projectile strike. There was a small chart on board, and on referring to it, I found that it had destroyed one of our atmosphere disintegrating ray stations.

A two-hour run took me to Magong, during which time, four more

enormous projectiles hurtled past me on their death-dealing errands. As I steered toward the palace of my father a fifth shot past me, hurling my tiny craft through the thin atmosphere like a leaf caught in a whirlwind. When I succeeded in righting it, and looking downward once more, a chill of horror crept over me, for this last messenger of death had dug a huge pit more than sixty miles in diameter, and the center of the pit marked the spot where my father's palace had stood. My beloved parents were no more. P'an-ku, the mighty monarch, was dead. I was P'an-ku, ruler of a desolate waste that had once been the mighty, flourishing empire of Magong.

I alighted near the rim of the enormous crater and stepped out of my craft. A moment later, gasping for breath, I hastily sprang back inside and closed the door. The atmosphere of Magong was nearly gone. With her huge ray projectors still going, she was committing suicide in order that her hated enemy might be destroyed.

Rising, I made for the nearest ray projector station. Circling close to it, I peered in the windows. Not a living soul greeted my gaze, but there were many dead bodies on the floors. The projectors, however, were still working—pointed by machinery set to keep their rays on Mars until they should fail to function for lack of power.

An occasional meteor cluster struck Magong from time to time, but they grew smaller and fewer in number—a sure sign that their projectors were succumbing, one by one, to the death-dealing rays our people had left trained on their planet. Rising, I made for the nearest world which would support human life—Earth. It was a good two hours' journey, and I noted with alarm that I had only a small supply of concentrated air in my tank—enough to last me about forty-five minutes by using it judiciously.

Pressing my speed control lever to the highest notch, I rushed Earthward with super-meteoroid swiftness. Forty-five minutes passed, and still the Earth, although looming big ahead of me, was many thousands of miles away. Glancing at the indicator on my air tank, I saw that it registered zero. I closed my foul air escape valves, and breathed as lightly as possible. Presently I felt a deadly lethargy creeping over me. By exerting my will power to the utmost I managed to retain control of my senses for a few minutes longer.

Suddenly my waning consciousness registered the fact that my instruments showed I had nearly reached the outer limit of the Earth's atmosphere. To have entered it at the speed at which I was traveling would have meant a sudden, flaming death. Two things I managed to do before my senses fled—set my control lever at low speed, and unfasten the door beside me. Then came oblivion.

When I regained consciousness I was lying on the earthen floor of a large, mud-walled hut. Standing around me was an awe-stricken group of light-skinned, half naked savages. I sat up, and as I did so, the earth shook beneath me and a portion of the mud wall collapsed, crushing

three men and a woman. The remainder of the savages prostrated themselves around me with every indication of superstitious fear.

I signed that I was hungry, and food and drink were instantly brought me—a huge chunk of scorched meat and a white sour beverage which I afterward learned was the fermented milk of some animal. I ate and drank, and feeling stronger, arose and stepped out of the hut, walking as if my body had been weighted with lead because of the planet's tremendous gravitational pull. As I did so, the earth quivered once more, and the hut collapsed completely.

By signs I finally made the terror-stricken savages understand that I wished to know the whereabouts of my ether ship. One of them, who appeared bolder than the rest, led me to a place where an enormous fissure yawned in the hard ground. Far down in this fissure I saw the craft wedged. I was casting about for some means of rescuing it, when the earth trembled, and the crack closed over it.

Thus cut off from interplanetary travel—for I did not know how to construct another ether ship—I found myself earthbound. I immediately set about learning the simple language of the savages, living in a dwelling of skins tied to light poles, because of the frequent earthquake shocks. These, as well as the many volcanic eruptions, terrific electrical storms, meteoric showers and electromagnetic displays from the polar regions, I knew were the results of the recent constant proximity of Magong to Earth, and that things would, in time, reach their proper balance once more. The savages, however, believed that the coming of "The great night light" and the subsequent terrifying phenomena, were due to some magic power which I possessed, and I was consequently worshiped as a god.

Propitiatory offerings of food, flocks, and animal skins poured in to me from neighboring tribes for hundreds of miles in all directions. Gradually the earthquake shocks subsided, the volcanic eruptions ceased to be continuous, the meteoric showers grew less frequent, and the elements less destructive. After a year had passed I married a daughter of the chief of the tribe among which I had fallen. Other chieftains, learning that the god married women, quickly tendered the hands of their daughters.

One of these, I married from time to time, thus making alliances with tribe after tribe which none might wish to break. I grew immensely wealthy, as the wealth of these people was reckoned, and built me an immense palace of hewn stone, personally supervising the work of my horde of unskilled laborers. I also built a temple for the worship of the great god, T'ien, Supreme Ruler of the Universe, and taught my people to worship Him, and to regard me only as His earthly vicar.

Most of my numerous wives bore me children, and I was grateful for the fact that all of them, instead of resembling their mother's people, had the yellow skins, straight black hair, and slanting eyes of my race. My children grew up and married savage women and men, yet there was slight modification in the physiognomy of their offspring. As the years

passed, I learned that these people, my children and descendants included, rarely lived longer than a century, their average life span being about seventy years. When I passed the century mark without showing any signs of senility, it was noised about that I was an immortal. This belief increased my power, and consequently I neither denied nor affirmed its truth, although I knew I should be middle-aged at two hundred and would probably be dead before I had traveled far in my third century of existence, as three centuries was the average life span for my race, and a total of four centuries rarely attained.

Having now reached my two hundred and ninety-eighth year, I am ready to return to my maker, leaving a hundred thousand descendants—a proud race who have long since ceased to intermarry with the white-skinned savages. They are known as the Celestial People, and I have made them lords over the lesser races of my mighty empire.

This record, which I have graven on age-defying stone with my own hands, will be sealed in the cave in which I am cutting it. I have calculated that, not less than five thousand years hence, the door of the cave will be revealed by erosion.

As the end approaches I feel the gift of prevision—the urge to prophesy. When my message is found, my descendants will be numbered by millions. They will not be scientists, but religionists. I see this tendency persisting in them, up to this day, and it will continue. Although I have taught them to read and write the language of my people, and to worship T'ien, I have long since abandoned the attempt to teach them science. My every effort to get them to grasp even the rudiments of astronomy and physics was unavailing. My simplest statements along these lines were interpreted as symbolic religious utterances and wound around superstitious beliefs.

The pure language of my forefathers, together with the characters I have taught them, is undergoing a gradual change. It may be that, five thousand years hence, this writing will be unintelligible to my descendants. Time, however, should raise up a man among them, who will have the intelligence and the persistence necessary to decipher it. I picture him, however, as a studious man of religion, and therefore uninterested in its scientific aspects—and my scientific mind yearns to communicate with others of its kind—minds that will understand.

To my descendant, I therefore give this charge:

Translate this writing into the languages of the leading nations of Earth. Then journey hence, to a place where you will find a pit three-quarters of a mile in width and more than five hundred and fifty feet deep. It will be ringed about by a wall a hundred and fifty feet in height. My figures are approximate because they are only calculations, based on the size and speed of the meteoric mass which Mars projected to Earth.

Because it is unique on Earth, and exactly resembles the pits on my native planet, men of science who are interested in Magong will eventually visit it. When you have found it, you will secrete yourself in the neigh-

borhood and observe these men. Each time you see a true scientific visitor, watch the face of Magong for a sign. When a bright light appears, you will know that my soul has recognized the right person, and signaled you from its celestial abode.

Hand him a translation of this writing in his own language, and go about your own affairs with my blessing, for it is to him and to his kind that I, as a scientist, address this message.

And now, as I bring this, my life story, to a close, I look back over a long, and fairly happy existence spent on Earth, yet each time I view Magong, I cannot help thinking of what might have been, had it not been for that horrible, man-made plague called war. Nor can I repress a feeling of sadness at sight of my once-proud world among worlds, now a lowly satellite, her war-scarred lifeless face forever turned sadly and submissively toward her new master, Earth.